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INTRODUCTION

SOME OF MY friends may laugh out loud when they see that I have written a book called *Pure Joy*. One friend entered into a covenant with me that if he prayed every day for God to put a smile on my face, I would in turn pray daily along a certain line for him. We have now been doing this for each other for many years. His prayer for me has not been answered, so how dare I write a book on “joy”!

The answer I believe is this. Joy is a fruit of the Holy

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Spirit (Gal. 5:22), but a smile on one's face may have more to do with one's natural temperament and personality. I know people who have a smile on their faces all the time, but it is hardly the joy of the Lord, for these people I am talking about aren't even Christians! I know one Christian lady who always seems to have a smile on her face. One day I asked her about this beautiful smile, and she graciously admitted that it actually camouflaged a very sad heart and that she was not the cheerful, happy person her smile suggested.

A Christian who has a radiant smile—whether in church or out shopping—is indeed a wonderful witness to the Christian faith. There is little doubt about that. And those of us who by nature look sad or depressed all the time are not good testimonies. That's me. I seldom smile. I'm a photographer's nightmare. Any picture you see of me smiling is the result of the hard work of people saying "cheese" and standing on their heads or something like that!

But I learned something when some of us in Westminster Chapel began the Pilot Light ministry (witnessing in the streets of Victoria) in 1982. If I smiled, people were more likely to take a tract, but if I looked nervous (which I was at first) or gloomy (which is all too characteristic of me much of the time!), these people didn't want my literature. So I forced a smile, and it worked. I managed to look pleasant, even if I did not feel like it, and I had far greater results.

When I phoned Louise from Israel in July 2002 to pray for me, because the next day I would be meeting with Yasser Arafat, she urged me to smile! My friends Alan Bell and Lyndon Bowring went into the Ramallah compound and prayed hard, but quietly, for me when I witnessed to Arafat that I would smile. And the power of their prayers,

and the smile itself, worked there as well.

So I need to say right at the start of this book that the joy referred to here is not necessarily reflected in a person's smile, neither is it what people today commonly call "happiness." Happiness, a state that one enjoys because of good things that "happen" to fall one's way, is largely produced by external things: a good job, a house, material things, friends, or financial security. The cause of such happiness is outward, but joy is inward.

Our Lord Jesus was a man of sorrows (Isa. 53:3), but He could speak of His joy (John 15:11; 17:13). I doubt He had a great smile on His face when He was on the cross crying out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46), but He endured it all because of the joy that was set before Him (Heb. 12:2). We, therefore, are not required to look cheerful or buoyant when in a deep trial, but we can still have pure joy the whole time simply because we know what is waiting for us down the road if we don't give up.

There has been a rediscovery in recent years of the so-called "four temperaments" that Hippocrates (600 B.C.) claimed applied to all people in some way. He thought that mankind could be divided into one of four basic temperaments—the phlegmatic, the sanguine, the melancholy, and the choleric—and that every person had one of these as their dominant trait. The phlegmatic person is generally laid-back, soft-spoken, easy-going, not easily ruffled, and usually the same. The sanguine individual is cheerful, the life and soul of the party, talkative, and usually popular. The melancholy is often the thinker (Hippocrates said all philosophers are melancholy), but also prone to being sad and depressive. The choleric is domineering, one who always takes control, is

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pushy, and may have leadership potential. In our Pilot Light course at Westminster Chapel, we referred to these temperaments to show that God can use more than one “type” to be an effective soul winner on the streets.

Obviously you can push these distinctions too far, but my point is this: one’s temperament is irrelevant when it comes to real joy. Those who *appear* to have it may not have it, and those who seem the opposite may in fact possess pure joy. I say this to encourage any reader who may have felt guilty—like myself—for not appearing to be joyful, or who does not always feel joyful, but who may nonetheless have pure joy.

And yet there are those whose countenances have been shaped by the joy of the Lord, and it has become in some ways part of their personality and identity. I have known people like this. Harold Wiles, a former deacon of Westminster Chapel (now in heaven), was such a blessing to have in the congregation because his pleasant appearance and shine on his countenance became an inspiration to preach to. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones used to talk about a man he noticed in a certain congregation when he annually preached in Wales. Every year, this man took the same seat in the balcony. His face shone in such a manner that Dr. Lloyd-Jones told me that if he was ever in difficulty as he preached (which alone encouraged me), he would simply look at this man and immediately start preaching better! One day Dr. Lloyd-Jones inquired about the man, who it turned out was a retired Pentecostal preacher. When I was a boy I was deeply impacted by a book written by Dr. Harry Jessup called *I Met a Man With a Smiling Face*. The author traced the man’s countenance to the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Moses must have had this at times. When he came

down from Mount Sinai, he was “not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD” (Exod. 34:29). This had nothing do with temperament, but his joy must have been tremendous. When Stephen testified before the Sanhedrin, those who witnessed the occasion “saw that his face was like the face of an angel” (Acts 6:15). He had a joy that made him utterly fearless before hostile men.

This book is not a justification for those of us who look sad but may in fact have some joy. Although we don’t need to be silly people who pretend they are happy all the time, because our testimony is important, we should not cave in to the way we sometimes feel. It could not have blessed the people at Westminster Chapel in my early days when I appeared melancholy and sober because of the small congregations. Fear showed all over my face when I took the chair and bowed my head to look pious. I later determined to make myself look pleasant, and I could feel that the people were then more inclined to enjoy the worship and the preaching. They needed to know I was OK! But more than that, it pleased the Lord that the way I preached was not going to be influenced by how many were out there, but by His promise to be faithful. I got my joy from knowing that He was with me, knew how I felt, had given me a definite word for the people, and that what I said would change lives. And guess what? I began to feel the joy of the Lord more than ever, and it showed.

The first promise of the gospel was announced by the angels to the shepherds: “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people” (Luke 2:10). When the Magi saw the star that they had temporarily lost sight of, they were “overjoyed” (“rejoiced with exceeding great joy” [Matt. 2:10, κῆν]). The Christian faith and message promise joy—pure joy.

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Not what people call happiness, but joy. Not health or wealth, but joy. Not an easy ride and fun, but joy. We are filled with “an inexpressible and glorious joy” (“joy unspeakable and full of glory” [1 Pet. 1:8, κJV]).

The word *joy* (Greek *chara*) appears fifty-nine times in the New Testament. The seventy that Jesus sent out into the villages “returned with joy” because of the new authority they had been given (Luke 10:17). Great joy came in the city of Samaria because of signs, wonders, and miracles (Acts 8:6–8). There is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7). Despite being persecuted and rejected, the disciples “were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:52). The conversion of the Gentiles made Jewish believers “very glad” (“great joy” [Acts 15:3, κJV]). The kingdom of God is “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17).

The word *rejoicing* is used seventy-four times. If we are insulted and falsely accused because of Jesus, we are told to “rejoice and be glad” because of our reward in heaven (Matt. 5:12). We should rejoice not because of authority over demons (which obviously produces joy), but because our “names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). Love rejoices with the truth (1 Cor. 13:6). We are commanded to rejoice in the Lord always (Phil. 3:1; 4:4) and to rejoice for the privilege of participating in the sufferings of Christ (1 Pet. 4:13).

However, the distinction I have made between joy and happiness is not so acute in the New Testament. The Greek word *makarios* (used fifty-eight times) is sometimes translated as “blessed,” but sometimes “happy” (1 Pet. 4:14, κJV). In fact, the King James Version prefers the word *happy* at least six times. (See John 13:17; Acts 26:2; Romans 14:22.) Its use in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3–12) could most aptly be translated

as “congratulations.” But the “happiness” used in New Testament Greek is not so much from outward circumstances, but tends instead to mean the same as inward joy.

Thomas Jefferson . . . wrote that all people have the right to the “pursuit of happiness.” But Christians have the right to the pursuit of joy instead, and are indeed promised it by virtue of the very gospel of Christ.

The way we use the word *happiness* today is rather different. Its etymology can be traced to a word that nowadays would probably mean “luck.” In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus described the priest who “happened” to be going down the same road (“by chance” [Luke 10:31, κτν]). This later came to be called “happiness” because of what “happens” due to chance. Therefore the word today would mean what people call luck, or simply that you are happy because you have been lucky. Such “happiness” is, therefore, a long way from the joy or blessedness inherent in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Thomas Jefferson, one of the founding fathers of the American Constitution, wrote that all people have the right to the “pursuit of happiness.” But Christians have the right to the pursuit of joy instead, and are indeed promised it by virtue of the very gospel of Christ. It begins with the joy of forgiveness of sins and ends with the promise of heaven, which will never end. It is there that we receive the ultimate bliss—but along the way we are given a promise of . . . pure joy.



DIGNIFYING THE TRIAL

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers,
whenever you face trials of many kinds,
because you know that the testing of
your faith develops perseverance.*

—JAMES 1:2–3

IT IS NOT every day that I can remember where I was when understanding a particular verse in the Bible dawned on me, but I do when it comes to James 1:2. It came not at the end of a forty-day fast or an all-night prayer meeting. The meaning of this verse came to me after losing my temper in a pizzeria in Kissimmee, Florida, in the summer of 1979. I had so looked forward to a pizza from this particular place and regarded such as a reward for returning to Disney World

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a second year in a row. But when the time came, everything went wrong. As a result of pouring rain, my pizzas fell out of a wet paper bag into a puddle of water. Now I had to face the same manager of the pizzeria—to which I returned—after telling him off the first time for taking forty-five minutes in the first place. *How could all this happen?* I asked myself.

But James 1:2 had already been on my mind for weeks since I had planned to start preaching on the little Book of James at Westminster Chapel in the autumn. As I drove back to the pizzeria that evening, I said to myself, *Either James 1:2 is true or it isn't, and if I plan to preach on it shortly I had better begin practicing what I preach.*

This trial of having everything go wrong regarding a long-awaited pizza at a time when people are starving, hurting, living in poverty, or financial insecurity—or are ill with pain—is almost too silly to mention. It was hardly the greatest trial one could suffer. But I have to tell you, this episode was pivotal for me, and I came to my senses for being so upset. At the same time, it was a trial for me—although perhaps I should call it “testing” instead. In any case, minutes before I returned to the pizzeria to apologize with genuine meekness to the manager, I repented before God for my anger and behavior. In that moment I decided to “dignify” this trial, and that is when a new phrase was born to me—“dignifying the trial.”

PASSING GOD'S TEST

Jesus taught us that they who are faithful in that which is least—or in little things—are the ones who will be faithful in much, or bigger things (Luke 16:10). That is why that pizza story is so important to me. I decided then and there to

dignify that situation by accepting the entire matter as something God sent. It was a divine setup. I not only repented to the Lord, but I also thanked Him for the whole thing. I apologized to the manager and cheerfully waited for another pizza (for some reason, he wouldn't let me pay) and returned to my family at the motel a different person.

As I wrote in my book *In Pursuit of His Glory*, that little testing in Kissimmee, Florida, was to prepare me for far, far greater trials that came all too swiftly after that. But had I not “passed” that test, it would require God to send yet another equivalent trial down the road before I could be trusted with greater difficulties. What embarrasses me most is the thought that God had been sending such trials over the years, but I never saw them as blessings or opportunities. I just battled through them somehow and got over the difficulty as soon as I could, but I was not the better for it as a result. Fortunately, God got my attention in Kissimmee, probably because I would be forced to preach on it (I am ashamed to add).

However, to preach on challenging texts over the years has been the way, it seems to me, that God has put a gun to my head to straighten me out. My anointing to preach has always been linked to the Holy Spirit's direct help—sermon by sermon. Some ministers are probably so gifted that they do not need the Spirit's help in the way that I have. They could flow because of their natural ability, intellect, knowledge of the Bible, and commentaries. But I was made, it seems to me, in such a manner that I was not allowed to do that. I have envied fellow ministers with such great learning or oratorical eloquence that it allowed them to preach with ease and without apparently having to plead with God on their knees.

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Preaching just came naturally to them. God has not done that with me. I had to have the Holy Spirit's immediate anointing, or I was helpless. This is not a statement of humility; it is just a fact. I have said this simply to point out that I could not have preached on James 1:2 with the blessing of God had I myself not been forced to dignify that trial. And yet by doing so in my personal life God came through by giving me more insights, as well as an ability to communicate.

TRIALS ARE A GOD-GIVEN PRIVILEGE

Counting it *pure joy* to face the fact of my natural lack of brilliance is what I have had to do for many years. I know also that people often laugh or roll their eyes heavenward when they hear me talk like this, as many think I am far more gifted than I really am. They don't know that it is the Holy Spirit who has managed to break through to me *because* I need unusual help, and that I have received such help *because* God managed to make me more teachable. God chose not to give me the brain of a John Calvin or a Jonathan Edwards; neither did He give me the oratory of a Charles Spurgeon or a Martyn Lloyd-Jones. And yet He chose to give me a respectable platform from which to preach! What was I to do? I chose to count my insufficiency for these things *pure joy* in order that God would use me—not to mention get the glory.

What the King James Version translates as “count” it all joy, the New International Version translates as “consider” it pure joy. The Greek word is *heegeomai*; it means “to value highly, to esteem.” Paul used this when he said to King Agrippa, “I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today” (Acts 26:2). Moses “regarded” disgrace for the sake of

Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt because he was looking ahead to his reward (Heb. 11:26).

We therefore are to consider having to face trials of many kinds as pure joy. *Trials* is thus a word often used in an ironic sense. What would naturally make us feel the opposite—to be upset or feel sorry for ourselves—is to be taken as a wonderful privilege, or opportunity, instead.

Who enjoys the feeling of disgrace? It would, after all, be abnormal to enjoy this. Unless, that is, one had a definite reason for feeling this way. Moses did. He considered disgrace as more valuable than earthly luxury—all because it put him in a good place for the future. Jesus endured the cross because of the joy set before Him (Heb. 12:2). The apostle Paul used *heegeomai* when he referred to the “pluses” of his background—being circumcised the eighth day, being of the stock of Israel and of the tribe of Benjamin, being a Pharisee, and faultless as to legalistic righteousness. He *considered* these things not pluses, but minuses—all because of the dazzling privilege of knowing Jesus. That is simply the way he regarded those things that most people would love (Phil. 3:5–8).

This is what James wants us to do when we face trials of many kinds: consider them pure joy. It doesn't make sense, and yet it does! He tells us to consider trials as pure joy because of what they do for us *if* we believe and apply these words. It will be seen to make very good sense indeed. James wants us to see it now—by faith. Moses did what he did—regarding disgrace for the sake of Jesus of inestimable value—by faith; and he was never sorry he made that choice. Neither will any of us be.

Yet it is not easy to do this. James puts a task before us that is exceedingly difficult. It compares with what Josif Tson

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once said to me when I was in a time of near despair, “RT, you must totally forgive them.”

I said to him, “I can’t.”

He replied, “You can, and you must.” It wasn’t easy, but it was the greatest thing I ever did. So too with dignifying a trial. It is not easy.

GREAT ANOINTING = GREAT SUFFERING

How, then, are we to begin to regard trials as pure joy? Only by sufficient motivation. We must be inspired or stimulated to look at trials in a positive manner. In Moses’ case it was because of the reward he believed would be his later. He was absolutely right. It was even what motivated Jesus. Imagine that! It was the joy that lay ahead that kept him going. He was not enjoying the cross, not for a second. He did not relish the physical pain. He did not enjoy all the taunts of “He saved others . . . but he can’t save himself” (Mark 15:31). It must have added to His suffering to see Mary Magdalene sobbing her heart out at the foot of the cross when He could not give her a single word of comfort. How did He manage? He knew it would be worth it all if He stuck it out without murmuring. It was because of the great joy that was going to be His that He was able to endure the cross. He considered it pure joy because pure joy was coming. And it came!

James tells us, therefore, that trials are a good thing—if we have a positive attitude toward them when they come. He certainly doesn’t say we will enjoy them. Instead, we endure them. But we regard the thought of them as pure joy because of what these trials can do for us. They are, says Peter, more precious than gold (1 Pet. 1:7).

Imagine a congregation of one hundred people. Suppose

we could hear each person's story of hardship. Some of those stories might relate to a deep hurt of a misdeed or injustice done to them; some might have lost a fortune; some have been lied about; some have suffered physically or mentally; some cry out for vindication. Let us say we all vote on the "top ten"—those who, in our estimation, suffered the most out of the one hundred people present. Let us then say we narrow the list down to three. Finally, we pick the person we believe has suffered the most out of the one hundred present. Now imagine that you were in that congregation and not only got short-listed, but were voted to be the person in the congregation who, by all accounts, had suffered more than anyone else in that room.

*The greater the suffering, the greater
the anointing. If it is anointing you
want, then expect suffering.*

How would you feel? What do you suppose you would say? Perhaps you would say, "See, I told you I had suffered more than anybody else." And suppose we all agreed that you have suffered more than anybody we have ever met? What would you expect then? Would you want us to gather around you and say, "We are very sorry for you. We had no idea how much you have suffered. We don't know how you managed"? Is that what you would want? Would you feel somewhat compensated so you could say to us, "I told you how much I have suffered"? What would this do for you? Would you be any better off? You may say, "At least I would feel better that all those people around me realized how much I have

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suffered.” I can appreciate that. But are you *really* better off? The truth is that it does feel good when others are sympathetic, but only to a degree. Suppose someone says “Congratulations”? But the danger is that we could become insatiable in wanting people to know what we have gone through. If all we want is for *people* to know, *that* is all the “reward” we will get. But if we get our joy from knowing *God* knows, we qualify for the honor that only He can bring (John 5:44).

My mother grew up in Springfield, Illinois. She was influenced by a very old woman who lived to be ninety. This woman once said to my mother, “I have served the Lord for so long now that I can hardly tell the difference between a blessing and a trial.” This lady had learned the very lesson that James puts before us, and the reason I am writing this chapter is for all of us to learn this lesson.

The greater the suffering, the greater the anointing. If it is anointing you want, then expect suffering. If it is a great anointing you want, anticipate great suffering at some stage. The anointing is the power of the Holy Spirit to make us do what we do with ease and without fatigue. The main reason for burnout and fatigue is almost certainly because someone has gone beyond his anointing; he went outside it rather than functioning within it. It was because he could not accept the limits of his ability. None of us can do everything, but to the person who is not content with the anointing or gift that he or she has, there will be trouble ahead. It is humbling to accept our limits, but there is considerable joy and peace in doing so, not to mention an increase of anointing. We can pray for a greater anointing—namely, an ability to do what we previously could not do in our own strength—but until that anointing has come, we must accept the limits of our faith and our ability.

I myself would prefer a greater anointing than anything. It is literally what I want most in the entire world. In a word: more of God. This way, I can achieve all He wants of me. He never promotes us to the level of our incompetence. As long as we are content with the calling He has chosen for us, we will live and move at the level He has seen fit to give us. This is partly what is meant when the psalmist said, “He chose our inheritance for us” (Ps. 47:4). It can be a testing in itself when we come to terms with His determination of what talent He has decided to give us. We may envy another’s anointing. It is the way Peter felt when told how he would die, and all he could apparently think of is how John would die. Jesus replied, in so many words, “That’s none of your business—just follow Me and quit looking over your shoulder.” (See John 21:18–23.)

He never promotes us to the level of our incompetence. As long as we are content with the calling He has chosen for us, we will live and move at the level He has seen fit to give us.

A. W. Tozer used to say that we could have as much of God as we want. When I first came across this comment I disagreed. But now I know what he meant. We do not prove how much we want of God merely by the intense desire at the moment. We prove it by how we react to circumstances in life, and the opportunities given to us to do such things dignify the trials He hands to us on our silver platter.

When we are content with the anointing God chose for

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us, we do what we are called to do without fatigue. “I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Phil. 4:13). When I become mentally and emotionally fatigued in what I am doing, it is a fairly strong hint that I have chosen to move outside my anointing and what God specifically asked me to do. As long as I do *what* He called me to do and *no more*, I will not be edging toward burnout.

And yet I would like to have more anointing than I have! This is a legitimate desire because Paul told us to desire earnestly the greater gifts (1 Cor. 12:31). God will answer this request so long as it is sought with His glory in mind; He will answer the request if it is His will (1 John 5:14). God will consequently supply the need for this by granting the necessary anointing required for what I am called to do.

*For the person who dignifies the trial
that will mean indescribable peace,
the highest level of anointing, the soul
uncluttered by greed, and a heart filled
with the very presence of God.
It is pure joy.*

If, then, it is a greater anointing I truly want, and I wake up with one big enormous trial before me, I should grasp it with both hands! I must consider this trial pure joy! This is because the trial is a fairly strong hint from the Lord Jesus that I am going to receive the anointing for which I long. He knows what I want more than anything, so if He sends a trial or testing my way, then I have every reason to believe that the

anointing I long for is coming—if I dignify the trial at hand.

James does not specifically use the word *anointing* when he tries to motivate his readers to consider their trials as pure joy. He uses the equivalent, however, and it comes to the exact same thing. His words are, “Because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance” (James 1:3). You may be disappointed at first that only perseverance seems to be the immediate goal of dignifying the trial. “I wanted more than that out of all I’ve been going through,” you may honestly say or feel. I understand this.

But perseverance is the gateway to what is right and achievable. It is the next step forward—the link to a brilliant future. God does not lead us from A to Z, but from A to B. During the trial, the immediate need is perseverance, or patience. The Greek word is *hupomonee*. It is used thirty-two times in the New Testament and is usually translated as “patience” in the King James Version. It is a word that partly means “bravery,” but also “the ability to endure under imposed sufferings and temptation.”

And yet this perseverance is not the main goal. It is not the ultimate goal. But it *is* what enables you to reach the goal that James envisages: “Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:4). This means a peace and contentment so vast and so profound that you no longer crave what you once thought was so important to you. “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Ps. 23:1, KJV). James sees a time ahead for the person who dignifies the trial that will mean indescribable peace, the highest level of anointing, the soul uncluttered by greed, and a heart filled with the very presence of God. It is pure joy.

In other words, if you consider a trial to be pure joy, it

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will lead to pure joy. Count it pure joy, call it pure joy, regard the trial as pure joy, and one day you will experience pure joy for yourself. I promise it!

This is why I had to deal with James 1:2 in the first chapter of this book. All that follows will, sooner or later, pass through the fiery trial God ordains for us. God *can*, of course, give pure joy directly and immediately by the Holy Spirit's coming on us—without any need to dignify the trial. Sometimes He does! But His normal, predictable, promised, and guaranteed way of leading us to pure joy is by bringing us to *reckon* the trial as pure joy. Impute the trial with pure joy. This is the word Paul uses for justification by faith: faith “counts” or is “credited” as righteousness (Rom. 4:3). We should do this regarding trials: see pure joy in the trial, just as God sees righteousness in us when we believe.

TRIALS VS. TEMPTATIONS

Regarding the trial itself as “pure joy,” then, is what I mean by dignifying that trial. To *dignify* means to “bestow honor upon.” When I dignify a trial I treat it with honor and respect. Indeed, a trial is my “glory.” That is exactly what Paul said, “I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory” (Eph. 3:13). We should actually treat a trial with the same respect as we would the president of the United States or any head of state. After all, the trials God ordains for us come from His Majesty King Jesus:

Every joy or trial falleth from above,
Traced upon our dial by the Sun of Love
We may trust him fully, all for us to do;

They who trust Him wholly find Him wholly true.¹

—FRANCES RIDLEY HAVERGAL

Trials are inevitable. Paul urged that we be not “unsettled” by these trials, for we know “quite well that we were destined for them” (1 Thess. 3:3). Consider this: “It has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him” (Phil. 1:29). The suffering that God ordains need not be persecution only, for if trials sent from God were only persecution, some people would not suffer much at all. Any trial that God sends—death of a loved one or friend, financial reverse, loss, illness, misunderstanding, losing your keys, failure, disappointment, betrayal, abuse, unemployment, losing a job, mental or emotional depression, accident, loneliness, missing a train or plane, rejection, not getting that important invitation, toothache, a headache, or any physical pain—should be seen as having our Lord’s hand-prints all over it.

There is a difference between trial and temptation, although both come from the same Greek word—*peirasmos*. They are often used interchangeably, though. After all, temptation is a trial (of faith), and every trial is a temptation (to grumble). When the word appears in the New Testament, the context helps us to see which meaning is intended. There are, therefore, differences and similarities between trials and temptations. Although we must not push the distinctions too far, here are examples of the differences:

1. *In their ultimate origin.* Temptations come from the flesh; trials are sent from God.
“When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is

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tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone” (James 1:13). God “tested” Abraham (Gen. 22:1); God allows temptation. He allowed Satan to test Job (Job 1:6–12). Therefore, when we speak of “trial,” we see God’s fingerprints; when we see temptation, we see our own—or the devil’s.

2. *In their immediate origin.* Temptation comes from within; trials usually come from outside us. “Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed” (James 1:14). Trials are allowed from God, as when Satan was given permission to go only so far with Job. Job suffered physically, but inwardly—at least at first—there was no apparent struggle.
3. *In their moral relevance.* Temptation, when it is sexual in nature, has considerable moral relevance, but a trial may be what I would want to call morally neutral, such as illness or losing one’s keys.
4. *With reference to what is tested.* Temptation will usually attack a weak spot; trials test our strength as well as exposing a weakness we may have been unaware of—as with Job, who turned out to be so self-righteous.

What are the similarities between trial and temptation?

1. *Both are by God's sovereign permission.* Whether it is labeled trial or temptation, you can be absolutely sure that God allowed it.
2. *The devil will try to exploit either.* You can be sure that Satan will take every possible advantage of us. If it is temptation, he will do everything he can to get us to succumb. If it is a trial, he will try to get us to grumble or to accuse God for unfairness in allowing it.
3. *The timing is always "bad."* In other words, they never come at a "good" time when we feel like now would be a good time for the devil to have a go at it (as if that were a wise comment, which it isn't). Satan loves to take us by surprise, and even when we imagine ourselves strong, the devil is clever enough to exploit a weak spot that we had not been aware of. In any case, keep 1 Corinthians 10:12 in mind: "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"
4. *Both are within our ability to cope.* This may be called "God's filtering grace." Every trial or temptation passes through God's faithful filter. God's filtering process is the process by which He determines what passes from His hand to where we are. It is tailor-made for each one of us. "No temptation [or trial—remember that it comes from the same Greek word] has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted [or tried]

beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (1 Cor. 10:13). This is one of the greatest verses in Holy Scripture. It also proves that God allows temptation and implies that He could have stopped it had He chosen to do so. I therefore conclude that all trials or temptations that come our way have already passed through the throne of grace and God “OK’d” it before it reached us. It passed through His filter.

*Any trial that God sends should
be seen as having our Lord’s
handprints all over it.*

5. *Both are accompanied by the devil’s suggestion: “give in.”* The devil will invariably come alongside and say, “Give in, give up, cave in to the temptation, cave in to this trial—it is too much for you.” As for temptation, the devil will also make it seem “providential”—that is, he will make it appear to be in God’s will at the moment for you to succumb since it was timed in such a manner that God Himself willed you to give in on this particular occasion. That is the way the devil’s evil mind works. I think of Paul’s comment regarding Satan, “We are not unaware of his schemes” (2 Cor. 2:11). It works this way whether it is a trial or a temptation; the

devil will always try to make you think that it is beyond your ability to cope.

Every trial sent from God has a built-in time limit, and the trial you are in won't last forever! It may seem as though it will never end, but it will. *It will end.* And once it is over, we must ask ourselves a hard question: did we pass or fail the test? To dignify the trial is to pass the test; to treat the trial with contempt—to dishonor it—is to fail the test. The trial might even end suddenly—this is not uncommon—and find us blushing because we were murmuring and complaining right to the end. Believe me, I know what it is *not* to dignify a trial. I am sorry to say that I lived that way for years. When it was over, it was over; I myself was no better off, only that I stroked my brow and said, like the predestinarian who fell down the stairs, “I'm sure glad that's over.” It is not a good feeling to realize, once it is over, that you did not dignify the trial, but it is a good feeling indeed to know, when it has ended, that you did dignify it.

SO HOW DO WE DIGNIFY A TRIAL?

1. Welcome it.

Welcome the trial as you would welcome the Holy Spirit, for it is the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Godhead, who is with the Father and the Son behind the whole ordeal. I love Chris Bowater's song, “Holy Spirit, We Welcome You.” I do not say you will be as intense in your welcome, for it is not a pleasant moment. But welcome the trial anyway and say to the Lord, “I know You have sent this to me, and I want to get the maximum benefit You had in mind when You

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ordained it.” This is to begin to dignify the trial from the first moment. No, you will not be thrilled to bits. The beginning of the trial can be painful, like an unwelcome guest who unexpectedly knocks on your door. You will treat that guest with respect, especially if it is a person you admire. And if you can be courteous and polite to an unwelcome guest, then surely you would want to be that way with the King of kings when He comes knocking at your door to test you! And in this case, He comes with one purpose: for your own good.

2. Don't panic.

Satan's immediate goal when he is given permission to attack is to get you to panic. This is why he is compared to a roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8). The reason for the roar is to intimidate and cause fear and panic—to make you think you are defeated even before anything has had a chance to happen. In the jungle, a lion roars to scare his prey and make the little animal feel defeated before the lion has even attacked. The devil is like that. When your enemy comes in like a violent storm, don't panic! Remember: God “OK'd” it before it came to you. He reckoned you were able to cope, or He would not have allowed it. God never operates outside the verse we looked at above (1 Cor. 10:13). Realize this as soon as you can, and say to yourself, *God allowed this for a purpose. He would not have allowed this if there were no way of coping.* As the psalmist put it, “Do not fret—it leads only to evil” (Ps. 37:8).

3. See the trial as a compliment to you from God Himself.

This is important. The kind of trial He has allowed you to have is very possibly one that could not be granted to

others around you. Whereas your first reaction (understandably) is to feel sorry for yourself, on reflection you should be able to see that God gave this trial to you for one reason: you are up to it. You should hear the word *congratulations* when the trial has come your way. The best translation of the word *makarios* (usually translated “blessed” in the Beatitudes) is “congratulations.” Substitute the word *congratulations* when you come to “blessed,” and you will get the purest meaning of the word. For example, “Congratulations are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Congratulations are those who mourn . . .” For Jesus is saying that this means that the person who experiences those things described in Matthew 5:3–12 is regarded as special. The future is bright—very bright indeed—for that person who is poor in spirit, who mourns, who is meek, who hungers and thirsts for righteousness, and so on. But, like it or not, the process begins with being poor in spirit because this is normally the way that God gets our attention.

4. Never forget that God allowed it.

This point must be stressed again and again because Satan will want us to focus within and feel sorry for ourselves, and then start to point the finger at someone rather than stop and realize: This scenario has passed through God’s filtering process. He allowed it. He could have stopped it, yes, but He didn’t. “Why, Lord? Why me, Lord?” is the most natural question to emerge. Even Jesus asked God why when He was suffering the worst (Matt. 27:46). So it is not sinful to ask why. It is sinful only when you become bitter and shake your fist in God’s face. Don’t ever do that. It will get you nowhere. This is partly what is meant by James’s words later: “The wrath

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of man worketh not the righteousness of God” (James 1:20, KJV). Becoming bitter and angry with God will not coax Him to feel sorry for you; it will only delay your experiencing what God wants for you. Moreover, being bitter is the very opposite to dignifying the trial. Try not to get hung up on the vexing theological issue of whether God caused—or only permitted—this or that to happen. There is a fine line between the two, and nobody in the history of the world has solved this one. So whether it be physical pain or losing your keys, it does not matter whether God caused it or simply let it happen. You know this much: He did let it happen. Let your case rest there. Our task is to dignify that trial, whether it is big or small.

5. Know that there is a purpose in it.

This is vital. Were it not for this, there would be no point in counting trials “pure joy.” The reason you can safely do so is because there is an intelligent, meaningful *reason* God allowed it. James actually gives the immediate reason: to develop perseverance that leads to pure joy that is so wonderful that we lack nothing. Here is the way our passage in James is translated by Eugene H. Peterson in *The Message*: “Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. So don’t try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way.” This further demonstrates that there is purpose in the trial that God brings to our lives. It is to refine us. To teach us a lesson. To make us better equipped. To make us more sensitive. To teach us self-control. To help

us guard our tongues. In other words, to make us more like Jesus. That is worth it all.

6. *Don't try to end it.*

God will do that. As it is put above, “Don’t try to get out of anything prematurely.” This implies that there is a timescale to every trial. It will last as long as it is supposed to last. Try to end it, and you will fail. God will end it. Our assignment is to dignify the trial by letting it run its course, however long God decides that will be. He knows the end from the beginning. Furthermore, when we try to hasten its end prematurely, we forfeit the grace that God intended to bestow on us. A great grace comes to us by *dignifying* the trial, not by trying to abort it. The God who started it will stop it. If we do nothing to bring about its conclusion, but instead let God do that, we will not only have passed the test, but we will enjoy the fruit of righteousness that God purposed for us. Speaking personally, I hate to think of how much grace I forfeited over the years by not letting a trial complete its own time. I was forty-four years old when I came to terms with this teaching and began to apply it. It grieves me to think how much I missed and how many times I failed the test over the years. I repeat: the trial will end. Do not raise a little finger to make it stop. Let God do this so that you derive the *full* benefit of this source of grace.

7. *Don't grumble.*

It is a sobering thought that God puts grumbling alongside idolatry and sexual sin in the lists of evil deeds that brought His wrath down on ancient Israel (1 Cor. 10:1–12). We may look at sexual morality, for example, with a very pious

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horror, but overlook our own constant complaining without any pang of conscience! We can complain constantly and apparently never feel the slightest sense of having grieved the Holy Spirit. I can tell you, were we to see how much God abhors murmuring and complaining, it would get our attention and change our words and attitude. Sexual purity passes the test of temptation; graciousness without grumbling passes the test of the severe trial. It takes no talent or training to be able to criticize and complain. It is part of being a sinner. It takes great grace to endure the hard times and keep quiet about them.

8. Know that God wants you to pass the test far more than you do.

There are two reasons for this. First, He loves us *so much* and rejoices to see us experience pure joy. Second, it brings glory to Him when we dignify the trial by cheerfully enduring. The angels are watching. As Josif Tson once said, “When God permitted the devil to bring calamity to Job, the angels were observing to see whether Job would love God without prosperity. For it was a testimony to the glory of God for the angels to see Job not caving in to questioning God in such a time as that. This is why the angels waited with baited breath to see Job’s reaction. God’s honor was at stake in the heavenlies as well as on earth. For it brings great glory to God when He sees one of His children dignifying His trial for them rather than complaining.”

WHAT IF WE FAIL?

And what if we fail the test? Like it or not, the answer is: we will have to undergo another test later on. One problem is that it may be a while before God trusts us with another test like the one we just failed. In fact, there may never be another quite like it, and you will always wish with all your heart you had passed that one. And it may be a while before you even have the equivalent trial. When it comes to failing an exam (like passing a driving test), you may be able to retake it soon. But the trials God gives are not like that, and this is why we should grasp every trial that God sends with both hands and dignify it.

I remember the following incident as though it were yesterday. Scotland Yard phoned me one afternoon to inform us that our American driving licenses were invalid for Great Britain. This meant that it was illegal for us to drive. "Don't even let your car roll one foot," the man said quite firmly. The news came only minutes before Louise was due to drive to our children's school to pick them up. Everything had already gone wrong in our house that day. The phone call from Scotland Yard could not have come at a worse time. I said to Louise, "Either what I preach is true or it isn't. I believe it is true. God has given us a trial at this time, and I intend to dignify it. We may never have another like it." For the next few months we had to be driven everywhere that either of us went. And we had to learn to drive! Never mind that I had been driving since I was sixteen years old, and both of us had been driving all over England for the previous three or four years! But that is the way it was; to have driving licenses we had to take tests and learn from a driving instructor before we could take the tests. My friend

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Dr. Lewis Drummond, a pilot who came over from America to teach at Spurgeon's College, told me that it was easier to get a pilot's license in America than to get a driver's license in England! That episode in our lives made the incident at the pizzeria look like a piece of cake!

For if we pass the test—like going from a GED to a university degree—there will be a greater opportunity down the road. Since we don't always get another test soon, then, we should take each trial as a special opportunity that will not be repeated in the same way.

Dignifying the trial is done by faith. When Paul tells us to rejoice (Phil. 4:4) it is almost certainly because we don't feel like rejoicing. Otherwise, there was no need for him to say it. The Philippians were not rejoicing because at that time there was a split in the church between two powerful women (Phil. 4:2). Paul's initial counsel to them was: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" You don't do it because you feel like it; you do it in faith. Faith is trusting in God without empirical evidence, only His Word. God likes that. If we have the empirical, objective evidence (as we often do have once the trial is over) and *then* rejoice, our response does not qualify as *faith*. Faith is believing without seeing. To the worldly person, seeing is believing. "Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe" (Mark 15:32). That is always the order for the unregenerate person, seeing first, then believing. But it is *not* true faith when that order is followed. Faith is when you believe without the evidence and can say, with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him" (Job 13:15).

To put it another way, once the trial is over and we see for ourselves that this trial worked together for good, little if

any faith is required. For that is seeing. Faith is being certain of “what we do not see” (Heb. 11:1). When we see a purpose in the trial that just ended, our outlook is not graced with the title “faith.” But when we are in the heat of it and it isn’t over yet—and we are dignifying it—that is *faith* at work. It is what pleases God (Heb. 11:6).

There is one more important ingredient for counting a trial pure joy. It is when we “fall” into the trial, as it is put in the King James Version. Whereas the New International Version of the Bible says we “face” trials, the King James Version says to count it all joy when we *fall* into such. The Greek *peripto* can mean that we did nothing to precipitate the trial. It is used in Luke 10:31 where a man going from Jerusalem to Jericho “fell” into the hands of robbers. It is used in Acts 27:21 to show that the ship ran aground. The point is that we must not go looking for trials. This is one reason Jesus told us to pray that we would not enter into temptation (or trial) (Matt. 6:13; 26:41). If pure joy is the ultimate consequence of dignifying the trial, we may logically conclude that we must go looking for fiery trials! Wrong. The qualification for the trial to be dignified is that we “fall” into it—it happened without our doing a thing to precipitate it. But when that does happen—and it came along without our causing it—count it *pure joy*. Do not forget, you may never have another trial that is exactly like the one you are now in. Dignify it. You will be glad you did.

And never forget this principle: the greater the suffering, the greater the anointing.