

**ARE YOU IN A DIFFICULT SITUATION?
THEN REJOICE!!**

We moan and groan when we encounter difficult situations, and under an onslaught of problems, one right after another, it is hard to stay focused. The enemy is right there with every negative thought he can throw our way, and we start hollering, “WHY ME!!! News flash! The greatest fruit of the Spirit is grown in the most difficult conditions. This statement is not popular to our way of thinking because pain is involved, but it is a truth statement from God that can and will change our lives if we embrace it.

Blackberry picking—we know what that involves—your upper body covered with scratches, trying to keep your balance as you walk up and down a ditch often filled with water, praying the bees buzzing around your head won’t sting you and sometimes we have to push through the thorny brushes in order to get the ripest, the juiciest, and the very best berries. But as your teeth sink into that blackberry cobbler/pie topped with a large scoop of vanilla ice cream and it melts in your mouth; the pain you endured picking the berries and the scratches on your body are worth it!

The greater the trial, the greater the witness. Even the angels will admit that the faithful church, which has endured the greatest of trials and remained faithful, is worthy to be their judges. Therefore, we are given the important exhortation in James 1:2-4 (NKJV) – My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into (or encounter) various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience (endurance). But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect (or mature) and complete, lacking nothing. Verse 12- Blessed is the man who endures temptation (or perseveres under trial); for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Becoming a Christian does not automatically exclude a believer from difficulties. The proper attitude in meeting adversity is to count it all joy, which is not an emotional reaction, but a deliberate intelligent appraisal of the situation from God’s perspective—viewing trials as a means of moral and spiritual growth. We do not rejoice in the trials themselves, but in their possible results. Testing carries the idea of proving character. Trials serve as a discipline to purge our faith of dross (worthless material that should be removed) it’s the stripping away of what is false. Patience is a positive steadfastness that bravely endures.

I have learned that growth occurs when I press past my previous limits. Do you get pushed past your limits? If you are human and honest enough to admit it,—you do! Remember, the story of Paul Bunyan, legendary giant lumberjack of the U.S. frontier. A symbol of strength and vitality, he is accompanied by a giant blue ox, Babe. He was credited with creating Puget Sound, digging the Grand Canyon, and building the Black Hills, and was known for his prodigious appetite, eating hotcakes off a griddle so large it was

greased by men using sides of bacon as skates. Tales of his exploits probably originated in lumber camps, and were first published by James MacGillivray in "The Round River Drive" (1910), which soon led to a national myth. Paul Bunyan was one of my favorite characters when I was a child. Sometimes when I was being stretch by God I'd laughingly ask my husband Joe, "Am I as tall as Paul Bunyan yet?"

But just as a runner's endurance does not increase UNTIL they press past their previous limits, our faith does not grow until we are placed in conditions that require our faith to be tested and stretched. The same is true of our love, patience, our peace, and so on. Therefore, as long as we remain on the path of life, the path laid out for us by God; expect to be going through some trials that will help you grow. When we learn this truth, these trials do not become something to be avoided and feared, but rather, embraced as opportunities from God, and we can count them as joy; the joy that James talks about in the Bible.

Francis Frangipane, one of my favorite writers and speakers, said, "We never fail one of God's tests—we just keep taking them until we pass."

Remember the TV series, Wagon Train? One of my favorite parts—the trail boss takes his position at the head of the wagon train, signals with a forward motion of his arm and hollers, "Forward, Ho" and the pioneers head out—knowing that they will have to endure more hardships along the trail before they reach their final destination. We need to get that same "pioneer" mind set, as we forge ahead in our journeys. Then we shall receive the reward that God gives to all who pass His tests. God did not promise life without struggles—they are unavoidable—but in God—we overcome. Victory only comes through battle, and triumph only follows a trial. I don't like trials, but I don't fear them as I once did, because I know God will help me through them one by one.

Did you know, the bigger the trial, the bigger the opportunity to enter into the Kingdom of God? This truth strengthened saints in the first century, as we are told in Acts 14:22 ...strengthening the believers. They encouraged them to continue in the faith, reminding them that they must enter into the Kingdom of God through many tribulations. Only the weak, immature, or deceived fail to see trials as gateways into the Kingdom of God, and opportunities to grow in the fruit of the Spirit that brings them into a closer walk with the Lord Jesus. Negative situations—God's growth!

A person, whose main goal is to become an escape artist and work hard to avoid trials, will fail to mature. The sad thing is that they will have trials anyway because of the failure to face them, and be increasingly defeated by them instead of strengthened. These people go from defeat to defeat, usually growing in self-pity instead of the nature of the Lord. BUT FOR THE BELIEVER, once we learn how overcoming a trial strengthens us in the Lord, AND how much sweeter victory tastes, AND learning to go

from victory to victory, AND to never leave a situation in defeat, THEN we begin to see greater trials as the opportunity to taste even sweeter victories, leading us deeper into maturity in God.

The believer's "Forward Ho" commands that we can live with from day to day bring us into the presence of the King and the power of His kingdom, and although they will not make us immune to life's struggles, they do bring the promise of victory: provision in need, strength for the day, and healing, comfort and saving grace. Therefore, we can count it all as joy when we encounter various trials along life's trail.

Mother Teresa possessed a special talent for finding sacredness in the tasks and choices of everyday living. She said that joy is very contagious and a joyful heart is the normal result of a heart burning with love. We may not be able to give much, but we can always give the joy that springs from a heart filled with love. Joy is prayer. Joy is strength. Joy is love. Joy has been given to man so that he can REJOICE in God because of the hope of the eternal good and all the benefits he receives from God.

Christians are not immune to weariness, either external or internal. But the difference is that we know to whom to go (Jesus Christ) and where to go (His Word) for much-needed rest and refreshment.

~ Gigi Graham Tchividjian