

Some people love Classical music; others may not. To be honest with you it wasn't my favorite type of music. But when my sons began to play a violin, I became a fan of classical music. One of things I like about classical music is that I don't get tired of it even if I listen to it over and over. It actually brings more tranquility to my mind. Particularly I love to listen to the classical music played by an orchestra. It is amazing to see the harmony and excellency of orchestra. Sometimes, I wonder how nice it would be to conduct an orchestra. Let's imagine that you are conducting an orchestra, but it is very unorganized and untrained. It is not an easy job for you, but you trust that you can turn it around. You spend a lot time with the orchestra members. You patiently teach them with a lot of encouragement and sometimes with challenges. After a couple months of hard working, you hear the sound isn't too bad. You can tell they actually play music. So, you invite some of your friends and neighbors to hear the music your orchestra can play. It is a good start, but soon they become bad. I mean real bad. It is not a music at all. You become so disappointed. Now, are you willing to train them again, or are you going to give up?

Am I talking about just an imaginary orchestra? I think I am talking about life. We are looking for a beautiful performance in our life. We work hard. We try our best to make a beautiful sound, but we may hear just noise. We will be disappointed. Then, what do we do? We try again. This is life, isn't it? Life is full of trials. Sometimes we succeed; other times we don't; at the end, we will get tired. We may get so disappointed that we don't want to try it anymore. If life is full of trials, how can we not give up but keep trying? How to overcome such trials? This is what James wants to teach us.

It begins with the right understanding of trials. James says we will face trials of many kinds. It implies that everyone will face trails. This is what Jesus said too, "*In this world you will have trouble*" (John 16:33b). We can't avoid trails. And, they can come in any form. It doesn't matter how strong our faith is. It doesn't matter how good our circumstances are. Trials still come. Then, why do we have to face trials? Why does God test us? If God is love and we are His children, can't He just lead us to green pastures? I am sure He can, but James says God tests his chosen people to teach them perseverance. It is because we learn perseverance only through trails. Perseverance doesn't come from our hard work or even our dedication. Let me give you an example. You came to worship on Sunday morning. You think you were ready to worship the Lord, but you found out the songs were not your type; you had no idea what the preacher said; the prayer was irrelevant. You didn't feel you had a good worship. You could easily blame the worship planner, the praise team or the preacher. If that was the end of the story, you didn't learn anything. But, if you try to praise God even with an unharmonious music, if you try to catch a God's message even in a bad sermon, there you learn perseverance. See! We are not learning perseverance in worship, offering or praising itself, but in our trying to overcome bad circumstances. God's testing brings perseverance, which transforms our characters. Trials make us a better person.

You may remember Job in the Bible. He was a righteous man. He feared God and shunned evil. When Satan said Job feared God because he was blessed (cf. Job 9-10), God allowed Satan to tempt Job. But, for Job he had no idea why he was tempted. He lost all of his children and flocks.

He became so ill. Even his wife left him, saying, “*Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!*” (Job 2:9) However, Job was faithful. Through all trials, Job learned perseverance as he confessed, “*The LORD knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold*” (Job 23:10). Gold is made through trials. So, whenever we face trials, we can say that we are entering a ‘trial school.’ God wants to bless us through trials.

When we correctly understand trials, we will have the right attitude toward them. We are to “*consider every trial pure joy.*” Really? Can you consider every trial pure joy? No, I can’t. That is why we need to learn. The word “consider” in Greek (ἡγέομαι, *hēgeomai*) has a meaning of “reevaluate.” Paul used this word when he said, “*Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ*” (Philippians 3:7-8). Compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus, Paul considered all other things a loss, and even rubbish. This is how he reevaluated. A trial itself is a pain or toil. No one wants to have trials. But, when we can see all other blessings we will receive, we may consider it pure joy. From trials to pure joy, it is a long way. For Abraham and Sarah, it took 25 years before they could laugh with Isaac. For Moses, it took 40 years of wandering in wilderness. Everyone in the Bible had to go through trials to experience pure joy. I don’t know how long it will take for us – 20 years, 40 years, or maybe all of our life span. But it is God’s command. It is the right attitude we should take. So, we learn one by one.

James teaches us how to handle trials. First, we need to seek wisdom. Wisdom doesn’t seem to be related to trials. However, wisdom is not just about knowledge, but God’s view of life. The divine wisdom is seeing circumstances through God’s eyes. Why do we get disappointed? It is because we see circumstances through our knowledge and experience, not through God’s eyes. We give in to trials because of the lack of God’s wisdom. Therefore, “*if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him*” (v.5).

Secondly, we need to respond in faith. The Bible is all about God’s promises. From the beginning to the end, God promised how he would save his chosen people. Whatever trials we face, God promises a solution for us. We pray to God based on that promise. “*When he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind*” (v.6). God’s promises for trials will be fulfilled for those who respond in faith. Having faith also means not being double-minded. We cannot hold two things. We must depend on either God’s promises or our knowledge. We must believe in either God’s sovereignty or a luck. What we believe will determine how we react to trials. Do you get upset with trials? Or do you humbly pray to God for his wisdom? Are you busy calling around people? Or do you trust in his providence? If we trust in the almighty God and if we believe that he loves us, we should depend on him. We should patiently wait for his voice because God won’t disappoint those who trust in Him. As Scripture says, “*Anyone who trusts in Him will never be put to shame*” (Romans 10:11). “*Those who hope in the LORD will not be disappointed*” (Isaiah 49:23).

When we trust in God’s providence, we will value things differently. We may be proud of our wealth or success, but they are temporary. “*When the sun rises with scorching heat and withers*

the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business” (v.11). Then, what should we value? We need to seek a heavenly crown, particularly the crown of life. “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him” (v.12). The crown of life is more than the eternal life given to every believer at the time of his/her salvation. The Bible doesn’t say exactly what this crown is, but I am sure it is much more valuable than all the wealth and fame we could get in this world. The crown of life will be given to those who endure sufferings.

I think I talked about this before, but let me use it again since it is a great illustration, the story of the monkey trap¹. Monkeys are fast and agile; it’s nearly impossible to catch them, but there is a very effective method to hunt monkeys. The hunters would use glass jars with an opening slightly bigger than a monkey’s hand. Inside the jar, they will put nuts or sweets, something the monkey craves. Then they wait. Sooner or later monkeys will come by and smell the nuts, and they’ll want them. They’ll put their hand through the hole, grab a fistful of nuts, and then they’ll try to pull their hand back out. But they can’t. The hole is not big enough for the fist full of nuts. They’re stuck. Now at this point, the monkey should realize, “Hey, I’m stuck, drop the nuts.” But they don’t. They want the nuts. They don’t want to surrender the nuts. So, they pull and pull and pull, refusing to drop the nuts, and the hunters come up behind and snatch them.

When trials come to us, there are always some things we need to give up. I said “always” because that is what trials do to us whether we like or not. Pure gold doesn’t come by adding other stuff. Pure gold comes out by extracting unnecessary parts. When we have trials, we will have to let go off unnecessary things. And there will be pain in that process. Through that pain, we learn perseverance. Perseverance doesn’t mean just be patient. We are not just passively waiting, but we are actively letting go off unnecessary things so that we can come out as pure gold.

Are you in trials? What kind of trials are you going through? Everyone may have different trials, but everyone has something going on in his/her life. God wants to bless us. He wants to transform us. So, in His wisdom, we want to examine what we are holding. Where do we have in our minds? Where do we spend most of our time? Trials are not pleasant. We may not consider it pure joy yet, but as we trim out unnecessary things in our life, we may confess just as Paul did, *“I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:8). Until we receive the heavenly crown of life, until we come out as pure gold, let us be faithful to the Lord who is transforming us for His glory and for our joy. Amen.*

¹ <http://www.inspirationalstories.com/2/233.html>