

“Maturity, Step by Step”

March 25, 2012

Text: James 1:2-4

A mother eagle builds her nest high in a tree, or in a crag on some inaccessible cliff.

She begins w/ a foundation of thorns/rocks & other sharp objects.

Then she lines the nest w/ a soft padding of wool, feathers,
and fur from small animals she has killed, creating a
soft/comfortable bed for her eggs/hatchlings.

When her young birds reach flying age, they're often reluctant to
leave the safety/comfort of the nest, & its free meals.

So the mother pulls up the soft bedding, leaving her young
ones the discomfort of standing on sharp objects.

Then she also flies near the nest, with food in her beak,
just outside the reach of her hungry nestlings.

Eventually, the nest gets so uncomfortable and the young birds so
hungry, that they become willing to risk flying, & moving
on in life to become mature eagles.

**Maturity is the reaching of one's potential, the consummation
toward which all childhood growth is aimed.**

Those eaglets have the potential to fly, but until they actually
leave the nest, that potential can never be fulfilled.

Once they cross the threshold into flight, they can learn to
soar w/ the wind, swoop down on prey, and cavort
about in the sky, unrestricted by gravity.

But they must take a chance, leave the nest, & risk
failure/falling.

**Spiritual maturity is the aim of all Xn growth—the
fulfillment of a believer's full spiritual potential on
earth.**

It is the spiritual equivalent of flight, for which a believer longs
when his soul is stirred by the Spirit, the way a young
eaglet instinctively spreads its wings, when the wind blows.

Real Xns can sometimes feel that longing when they read
such passages as Isa 40:31=>

*“Those who wait for the LORD Will gain new
strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles,
They will run and not get tired, They will walk and
not become weary.”*

Brothers/sisters-in-X, does that stir your hearts?

Don't you long to soar above your old jealousies,
impulsiveness, lustful-cravings, lack of integrity,
laziness, lovelessness, bitterness, self-pity, and
selfishness?

Don't you hunger/thirst for true righteousness by which
you can fly spiritually into the upper atmospheres of
holiness/truth/purity with spiritual power?

Don't you wish for mature/mellow/confident calmness in
times of turmoil, and for X's own graciousness in
times of irritation/provocation?

Don't you want to get past any fear of life itself, spread
your wings spiritually, and trust the Lord to hold you
up?

Don't you desire that maturity of judgment that will enable
you to become all that X has recreated you to be?

**In today's text, James will entice us w/ a vision of ourselves
as becoming spiritually mature, "*perfect and complete,*
lacking in nothing," drawing us out of our immaturity,
as a mother eagle draws her young from the nest.**

He will show us 4 steps by which such maturity is attained...

*** Step #1—Trials**

Someone=> "Wait a minute! Isn't there some other way?"

Apparently not—because God knows that nothing short of
suffering will soften our hearts, & conquer our sinfulness
and spiritual complacency.

As we learned last week, we are His slaves, and it is not the
business of slaves to second-guess their Master's
methods.

We would like to think we can be educated into maturity by
simply learning the theory behind it in the Bible, just as an
eaglet would prefer to spend all his time in ground school.
And doctrinal truth is indeed important to maturity.
But God knows our human nature is so resistant to change,
that it won't earnestly apply that truth, apart from the
crisis of trials, at some point/points in our lives.

There are no other options for us, but we do have a choice as to how we will respond to our trials.

James says we must embrace them joyfully, so they'll have their maximum maturing-effect on us.

[James 1:2]=> *“Consider it all **joy**, my brethren, when you encounter various **trials**,”*

James doesn't say that it is all joy, but that we are to adopt the opinion that (“consider it”) all joy, when we encounter trials.

We are to deliberately choose to view them as a cause for joy.

We are to make a judgment about them, saying to ourselves

“God works all things together for good in my life, & He'll make this trial turn out for my good too.

“I could wait to rejoice until I actually see the good, but that would be walking by sight.

“I choose to walk by faith, trust Him to be faithful to His promise, & rejoice over it right now.”

We know this might seem strange/naïve to non-believers.

They might accuse us of living in denial of reality.

And we would answer that we are not in denial, but that we are responding to a reality they cannot perceive, but one that is just as real as the one they do see.

This is looking at hardship thru the lens of faith, seeing the greater good it will produce, as taught thru-out the NT:

* Rom 5 (Paul)=> *“We also **exult** in our **tribulations**, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; /*

and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope” (5:3-4).

* I Pet 1 (Peter)=> *“In this you greatly **rejoice**, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been **distressed** by various **trials**, / that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:6-7).*

* Mt 5 (Jesus)=> *“**Blessed** are you when men cast **insults** at you & **persecute** you & say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. / **Rejoice**, & be **glad**, for your reward in heaven is great” (5:11-12).*

The principle here is that trials in the believer’s life produce long-term and eternal benefits that outweigh the pain here/now.

Believing this is true, and focusing on that greater good to come, gives us a confident sense of optimism—joy.

It’s not some masochistic, psychotic disconnect from reality, by which a Xn tries to trick himself into believing he enjoys trials.

Heb 12=> *“All discipline for the moment seems **not to be joyful**, but **sorrowful**; yet to those who have been trained by it, **afterwards** it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (12:11).*

The Xn simply focuses on the “*afterwards*” to come, enjoying beforehand the future blessings a trial will bring.

He follows the example of his Lord, who=> *“for the **joy** set*

before Him endured the cross, despising the shame”
(Heb 12:2).

Nor is “*considering it all joy*” retreating mentally into some sort of Zen-like detachment, or some imaginary “happy place.”
Nor is it a disingenuous expression of what we really feel, trying to uphold some artificial image of what the Xn life is supposed to be like.

A “*trial*” can be any difficult/discouraging adversity that confronts a Xn.

It translates the word *peirasmós*, which can refer either to a test of a person’s faith, or to a “temptation” to abandon his faith and fall into sin.

God intends it one way, the devil intends it the other way.

God tests believers to strengthen/solidify their faith, but

He never tempts anyone to sin/evil or to spiritual-failure/defeat.

1 Cor 10:13=> “No ***temptation*** [*peirasmós*] has overtaken you but such as is common to man; & ***God is faithful***, who will not allow you to be ***tempted*** [*peirazo*] beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to ***endure*** it.”

Satan, by contrast, tempts people, in order to destroy their faith.

The word *temptation* itself lit. means pressure, which Satan applies to a believer’s faith, to destroy it.

So, as in the case of Job, the same *peirasmós* that God uses to test/strengthen a believer's faith, represents Satan's attempt to destroy his faith.

Your faith is pleasing to God, because He is glorified by it.

Therefore, it is most displeasing to Satan, so he rages against it, and he will always attack it with trials.

Because God is omniscient/omnipotent, He takes what Satan intends to use for our destruction and He redirects it, so that it will build up our faith.

So, at the end of Satan's attack on Job, Job prays=>

"I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees Thee; / Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6).

We play a role in this process by accepting our trials, & trusting X to use them for our spiritual benefit & ultimate joy.

Trials are "encountered" (lit. we "fall into them"); we don't see them coming.

This word is also a compound word, & implies being surrounded.

The trials James is talking about surround believers, who have fallen into them.

We never see them coming beforehand, & there's no way for us to escape them but to go through them, until the Lord removes them.

James guarantees that trials will come, using the word "*when*" (not "*if*"), which actually means "*whenever*."

So they can come at any time, & we are to consider them
joy whenever they do come.

They will always come, & they'll always blind-side us.

**James also describes these trials as “*various*” (diverse),
because they come in an infinite variety of different
forms.**

Just as soon as we adapt to 1 variety of trial, and think we can
now handle it, God sends a completely different variety,
although each of them is custom fit to our particular
spiritual need, and hits the target dead center—every time.
We can't adapt fast enough to our various trials to deal w/
them, on our own.

Eventually, we slump back on God's grace, emotionally
worn-down and trusting Him to use them to
accomplish in us, whatever He wishes.

We draw closer to our Lord, we pray more fervently, our
priorities/perspectives change, and we value the
wisdom of God's Word all the more.

**Victory for us in the heat of trials lies only in our considering
them a source of joy in the long run, & embracing them,
knowing that, by God's grace, they'll impact us for
good.**

So we are to view them as God-given opportunities for growth,
that will ultimately lead to joy.

They are times for us to rejoice more, not less; to pray more frequently/ferently, not more haphazardly/thoughtlessly; to love/serve our Lord more sincerely/faithfully, not to rebel against Him.

These are times to put our biblical knowledge to work for us, convinced that trials will mature our faith, so our Lord will someday tell us, “Well done, good/faithful slave.”

*** Step #2—Tests**

**This is God’s whole purpose for sending trials into our lives—
they serve as tests of our faith.**

[Verse 3]=> “*knowing that the **testing** of your faith [dokimion—proving the genuineness of something by testing it] produces endurance.*”

The reason we rejoice in the trials/tests God brings into our lives, is that we know they will produce spiritual endurance.

We know this because God’s Word says they will.

But we also know it by our own past experience.

God’s tests have 2 purposes=> to-reveal/to-strengthen.

1st, they reveal the genuineness of our Xn faith.

Scottish commentator Robert Johnstone wrote this in 1871:
“Affliction lets down a blazing torch for [the Xn] into the depths of his own nature—and he sees many things which he little expected to see.”

E.g. Heb 11:17=> “*By faith Abraham, when he was **tested**, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son.*”

The test revealed to Abraham himself how strong his love-for and his faith-in God actually was.

God had told Abraham to go to the hill of Moriah and offer his beloved Son, Isaac, there as a sacrifice.

When Abraham raised the knife to slit his own son's throat, God stopped him, saying=> *"Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, & do nothing to him; for now I **know** that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me"* (Gen 22:12)

Didn't God already know how this was going to turn out?

Of course He did, He is omniscient.

But now it had become an historical fact, witnessed not only by God, but by the angels and by Abraham himself.

Abraham's faith had passed the test, & it glorified God.

Abraham had discovered by experience how strong/compelling his own faith in God actually was.

His faith was solidified by this new/greater understanding, in a way it never could have been, apart from the test.

He had no way of knowing how he would respond to such a challenge, until he was actually confronted with it.

Tests strip us down to the core of our being, & there we discover that our faith essentially defines who we are.

Either that, or we discover that we aren't really believers at all.

But that too is a fortunate discovery for a person to make while there's still time to do something about it.

Many Xns are unsure that they're really saved, that they truly love the Lord, or that they will go to be w/ Him when they die.

God's tests relieve them of their doubts, by demonstrating to them how genuine and how deeply-rooted their faith in Him actually is.

They discover that any other option but trusting/obeying their Lord, has ultimately become unthinkable to them.

Do you want to increase your own confidence about your salvation?

Then count it all joy, when trials befall you.

After a ship is built, its maiden voyage is called the "shakedown cruise," because it is put through its paces and rigorously tested for sea-worthiness.

Any part of the ship that isn't sea-worthy will shake down and fail under the stress.

Our faith is proven by our clinging to X in the shakedown of trial/testing.

2nd, trials/tests themselves produce a result w/i a Xn's character.

They purify/strengthen our faith, so that after a test, our trust in X is stronger & more enduring than ever.

This brings us to the 3rd step towards spiritual maturity.

*** Step #3—Endurance**

The word “*endurance*” lit. means “to remain under.”

It is staying under the pressure of the test, not trying to escape it by abandoning our faith, but quietly accepting God’s will.

It is patiently trusting God, that I Cor 10:13 is true, and that He won’t allow us to be tempted beyond what we’re able, but will enable us to endure it.

It is voluntarily keeping our own feet to the fire of the trial.

It is spiritual strength that holds up under the pressure, willing to wait for God to bring the testing to an end, when He knows it has accomplished its purpose.

And the strength we gain in such a trial, we bring to the next one, multiplying our potential for further benefit.

This is why we Xns can consider trials all joy=>

they toughen us spiritually, like storms at sea toughen sailors until they are sea-wise, & not easily panicked.

Tests/trials are God’s way of proving to us that we could never give up our faith.

* We don’t stop trusting our Lord, but trust Him more.

* We don’t stop obeying Him, but do so more consistently, no longer blasé/careless/indifferent about our own disobedience.

* We become even more thoroughly “Xn” than before, no longer hiding our light, keeping quiet about our faith. I’m not saying a Xn’s faith never wavers under a trial.

It may.

But when all is said/done, a true believer’s faith will survive the trial and will ultimately become strengthened by it.

As the believer gains spiritual endurance, God’s tests change his character/personality/lifestyle.

1st, he learns to accept God’s tests/trials without murmuring.

That wasn’t true of him earlier on, when his reaction to being tested by God was to have a spiritual temper tantrum.

But now he has learned to end his quarrel w/ God, and he truly desires that God’s will become his own will.

Years of pain/depression/disappointment are often needed to bring a soul into that kind of quiet submission to God.

2nd, he learns to bear up under ill treatment by others, as his Lord did.

At first, he restrains his tongue from saying what he feels when others revile him.

In time, as his flesh is subdued, he learns to bless in return for cursing, to pray for those who injure/slander him.

3rd, he stops overreacting to problems w/ thoughtless haste.

Whereas he once rushed/blustered about, as if the world would fall apart if he didn't save it, he learns to rely on God's saving power rather than his own strength. He becomes more like Jesus, who never seemed to be in a hurry, who always had time to teach/help others, who never found Himself too busy to pray over His day. He went steadily about His business, never confused or worried or hassled, and when His life was over, He quietly prayed=> *"I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do"* (Jn 17:4).

4th, he learns to wait on the Lord without sinking into unbelief/doubt.

At first, he may have prayed, "Lord, show me what it is that You want me to learn from this, so I can learn it, and You can call off the test, as soon as possible" (i.e., he's still trying to be in-control instead of resting in God's control).

But after a while, he realizes he doesn't know what this test is all about, and that God is fully capable of changing/teaching him, even if he never understands it.

He begins to ask, "What if this test is prolonged? What if it never ends, as it did for Job? What if this test ends in my death?"

He comes to the realization there is nothing he can do to
bring the trial to an end—including bargaining w/
God, or giving Him whatever it is that He wants.
The H.S. slowly bestows on him a quiet/accepting
resignation to his own suffering.
But surprisingly, it's not a joyless resignation, as both
he/you might expect.
He is learning to really accept/rejoice-in his affliction, to
trust in his Master, even when he doesn't understand
His will, His plan, or His purpose.
He is learning to endure, and that makes his trials/tests all
the more beneficial/spiritually-advantageous to him.
He is developing that gentle/quiet spirit that is precious in
the sight of God, as he submits to his Master's will.
He/his-faith are really enduring the test!
He's getting a passing grade.

*** Step #4—Maturity**

James describes spiritual maturity with the term “*perfect*.”

He doesn't mean that a Xn becomes sinlessly perfect in this life.

He means “*perfect*” in the sense that he has reached an
optimal level of growth, as a fully functioning adult
Xn (no longer a child of the faith).

He's like the eaglet who has learned to fly & can now live
its life apart from the provision/care of its parent.

Or like a fruit tree that has begun to bear sweet/delicious
fruit, after several cold winters of difficult growth.

[Verse 4]=> “*And let endurance have its **perfect result** [finished work], that you may be **perfect** [finished] and **complete** [all the spiritual faculties necessary for a fruitful Xn life are present, intact, and fully functional], **lacking** [falling short] in nothing.*

“*And let*” (though small words) are a very instructive command,
but a muted command.

They means (in essence) don’t stop the great work of
enduring.

Don’t preempt the hardship of the tests/trials, letting them
undermine your resolve and your joyous attitude.

You’re almost there, maturity is just over the next hill.

So hang on a little while longer, & don’t break the chain=>
(trials linked to tests, linked to endurance, linked to
maturity).

The promise of I Pet 5:10 is right there for you to grab=>

*“After you have suffered for a little while, the God of
all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in
Christ, will Himself **perfect**, confirm, strengthen and
establish you.”*

You do desire to grow up into Jesus, becoming conformed to His
image, don’t you?

It’s so close, you’ll reach it if you’ll just keep finding joy in
your trial in order to endure it, a little longer.

For heaven’s sake, don’t give up now!

If you want the blessings of spiritual-maturity more than you want to avoid hardship, consider your tests/trials all joy.

Afflictions, by God's grace, make us well-rounded, well-developed Xns.

There is a beauty/mellowness/graciousness about believers who have endured hardships, that you won't find in the untried/untested.

Fellow believers witness their calm/quiet/self-contained demeanor, & think, "I wish I were like that."

They seem happy, or they seem content not being happy.

Their judgment is wise, & their conversation is spiritual.

You see love/joy/peace/patience and the other fruits of the Spirit in their lives, & more consistently so as time goes on.

They may have lacked tenderness/sensitivity in the past, but the loss of money/position, or a hospital room, or bouts of depression, or the loss of loved-ones, or some other God-ordained trial has softened and made them thoughtful/meek—like their Lord.

Repeated blows of sanctified trouble have even taught them to sympathize with those who suffer.

Affliction/hardship have achieved a victory in their hearts.

Through God's grace, & their own willingness to see the issue through, by humbly enduring it, they have matured.

As a result, pride is being strangled/silenced, & they are
enjoying an inner peace that comes w/ resting in
God's grace.

A patient Xn sufferer known only to family/friends, afflicted w/
an incurable disease, or a hopeless situation, may not hear
the angels glorifying God because of his/her faithful
attitude, but I think they'll hear about it themselves in
heaven someday.

If he/she is suffering persecution for the name of Jesus, theirs is
also the joy of knowing their faithfulness is glorifying the
Savior.

**For a believer, that's what the last years of life are all about,
w/ all the weaknesses/handicaps/hardships of old age.**

Every elderly Xn suffers daily tests/trials/frustrations from which
it's likely he will never recover.

He can choose to join many of this world's elderly,
becoming more bitter/grumpy/hopeless, day by day.
Or, he can glorify his Lord by leaning on Him more fully
every day, finding joy in drawing ever closer to Him
in the midst of trials.

He can pray, along w/ commentator Lehman Strauss=>

I could not do without Thee,
For years are fleeting fast,
And soon in solemn silence
The river must be passed;
But Thou wilt never leave me;
And, though the waves run high,

I know Thou wilt be near me,
And whisper, "It is I."

“Maturity, Step by Step”

March 25, 2012

Text: James 1:2-4

1. Spiritual maturity is the aim of all Christian growth—the fulfillment of the believer’s [10 full] spiritual potential on earth.

Isa 40:31

In today’s text James will show us four steps by which spiritual maturity is attained...

*** Step #1—Trials**

2. God knows that nothing short of suffering will soften our hearts and [16 conquer] our sinfulness.

[James 1:2]

3. James doesn’t say that it *is* all joy, but that we are to deliberately [14 choose] to view them as a cause for joy.

Rom 5:3-4; I Pet 1:6-7; Mt 5:11-12

4. Trials in the believer’s life produce long-term benefits that [20 outweigh] the pain here and now.

Heb 12:11, 2

5. God tests believers to strengthen and solidify their faith, but He never [14 tempts] anyone to evil or to spiritual failure.

I Cor 10:13

6. Victory for us in the heat of trials lies only in our considering them a source of joy in the long run and embracing them, knowing that by God’s grace they will [14 impact] us for good.

*** Step #2—Tests**

[Verse 3]

7. God’s tests have two purposes; first, they reveal the genuineness of our Christian [12 faith].

Heb 11:17; Gen 22:12

8. Second, trials and tests themselves produce a result; they purify and strengthen our faith so that our trust in Christ is stronger and more [20 enduring] than ever.

* **Step #3—Endurance**

I Cor 10:13

9. As the believer gains spiritual endurance, God's tests change his character, personality, and lifestyle; first, he learns to accept God's tests and trials [16 without] murmuring.

Jn 17:4

* **Step #4—Maturity**

10. James describes spiritual maturity with the term "*perfect*"; he means perfect in the sense that a Christian has reached an optimal level of [14 growth].

[Verse 4]

I Pet 5:10

11. Afflictions, by God's grace, make us [10 well] developed Christians.
12. Every elderly Christian suffers daily tests, trials, and frustrations; he can glorify his Lord by leaning on Him more fully every day, finding [8 joy] in drawing ever closer to Him.