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Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:2-4

The Bible doesn't say: "Suffering always comes because of sin."

What goes around, comes _____. You reap what you _____. You can probably finish those sentences without too much thinking because they are so deeply embedded in our American culture and even more embedded in our human nature. We naturally think that if I do bad to someone else, something bad will happen to me. On the flip side, we also naturally think that if I do good to someone—if I pay it forward, good will come back around to me. What goes around, comes around. You reap what you sow.

Then when something painful enters our life we think, "What did we do to deserve this?" Even people in the Bible thought this. When painful things happened to Joseph's brothers they immediately thought, "This is happening to us because of what we did to Joseph" (Genesis 42:21).

Nothing could be further away from the way that God deals with us and rules over our lives.

There is no more punishment for our sins. All our sins have been already punished and paid for in the wounds of Jesus. God is not out to get his pound of flesh from us. When suffering comes, God is not punishing us.

The way that God deals with us in our lives is purely and completely out of his grace. When good things enter our lives, it isn't because we deserved it or because we did good. This isn't some law of "sowing" and "reaping," where one good turn deserves another. No, God pours out grace upon us purely because of his grace and goodness, purely out of his love for us.

That's what happening when we suffer too. James tells us to consider it pure joy when we suffer and face trials. He wants us to find joy in our suffering, because God is graciously at work in our trials too. He is at work drawing us closer. He is at work purifying us. He is at work chiseling us to make us mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Suffering doesn't come because of sin, as though God were out to get us. No, even in suffering, God is acting as our dear Father who loves us most and desires us to live and walk with him eternally.

Prayer: Dear Father, help me to see my suffering as it really is. It isn't punishment for sin—you already forgave all of mine and the world's. Rather, help me to see that in my suffering you are making me mature and complete in faith and for life. Help me to see it and rejoice in it, dear Father. Amen.

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