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Which are the challenges you naturally handle well?
Which are those that cause the greatest struggles?

What do you imagine it would take to handle hard
challenges without the struggle?

What would God need to do to change your view and
equip you with endurance?

James 1:2-3 – ²My brothers and sisters, whenever
you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy,
³because you know that the testing of your faith
produces endurance

I) Embrace the Challenge...

Life's unexpected, unwanted challenges can be moments of doubt. An all-powerful, all-loving God would not subject us to unnecessary difficulties. In our minds, all undesirable difficulties are unnecessary. So, we doubt, cry out, despair, rage. The devil feeds these emotions with conviction that we are victims of injustice. Is that true? Perhaps we misperceive reality. We do not dislike all life's challenges. Some we seek out because we think they are good for us. We enjoy them. The distinguishing characteristic is our view of whether they are good or bad, fun or miserable. If we want an all-loving, all-powerful God, embrace the challenge. We will discover His goodness within as we pass the wrong idea of our limits.

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♦**Any time**: Some of us prefer our daily personal routines in the morning. Others, the evening. We want good weather on the weekend when we can do something in it. We want, maybe think we need, the time to be prepared for a test. It's not fair to spring a test on students, ask something unreasonable when I'm hungry, start an argument when I'm tired. Our best selves, the Christlike version, responds with character any time. God expects us to prepare so that "whenever you face trials (James 1:2)," you will be victorious. That takes practicing good character intentionally as often as we can under any conditions.

♦**Well-rounded**: Some function well despite physical pain. Others can't face the day. Some thrive in chaos, others disabled. Some seek athletic challenges, others intellectual, artistic, social. God designed each of us to reflect part of His perfection. We should trust Him to send the challenges that build us into His ideal. When "you face trials of any kind (v2)," understand that He is developing you into a well-rounded expression of His goodness.

II) For the Joy...

Many think I'm crazy for the things I choose to do. I feel the same about them. We do for pleasure what others perceive as torture—what we used to think was torture. The relationship between our circumstances and emotions is dynamic. We can relegate control of that relationship to unconscious processes. We can also assert our choice to reform these relationships to align with our understanding of truth. We can embrace challenges for the joy of discovering our unlimited potential in Christ.

♦**Divine liberty**: God made us differently than the wild beasts. They are slaves to their instincts, which He crafted to be good for their wellbeing. We are not. He gave us the plasticity to form and reform our understanding of the relationship between our inner being and the external environment. He tells us when we confront a difficulty to "consider it (v2)." This statement authorizes us to reflect on each difficulty and decide how we feel about it. This is divine liberty over our understanding of the world.

♦**Problem or opportunity**: Understanding is not control. We understand lots of things over which we have no influence. This is crucial. Our faith weakens if we expect to control our environment and are disillusioned by our impotence. We have liberty to perceive trials as good or bad, problem or opportunity. God instructs us to understand the relationship between trials and our wellbeing as "nothing but joy (v2)." The choice to adopt this view pushes us to activate our prayer life and beseech God for His wisdom. It orients us toward a limitless view of ourselves as the incorruptible image of God.

III) Of Discovery...

Satan deceives us into arrogance or self-loathing. Self-discovery is terrifying because we know we will be exposed. Jesus liberates us from a distorted perception, restoring a truthful idea of ourselves. That idea can be disorienting. We have avoided challenges and bound them to negative feelings for so long. It's time we seek moments of discovery, become comfortable with abilities we long disbelieved, and revel in our new identity as divine agents.

♦**Edge of belief**: Liberated from untrue ideas of ourselves and our relationship to the world, we still sense limitations in our faculties. We hold onto lines we won't cross, levels of what we can take, situations in which our freedom is constrained. The Word of God does not agree with these. Liberation from a false self-image requires an unrestrained view of what we can do in Him. We are invited to go up to and beyond the edge of belief "because you know that the testing of your faith (v3)," reveals the illusions of character limitations.

♦**No limits**: We do have limitations. We have not grown into our full size and strength as the people of God. Those limitations are like the height markings on the doorjamb, measures of points in time as we mature. Every time we honestly test our faith it "produces endurance (v3)," the expansion of the borders of our character. Embrace more challenges, discover greater strength, experience more joy. Day after day, the process refines the imprint of Jesus upon our being. Understood this way, every trial is all joy.