

FINDING
GOD'S
PATH
THROUGH YOUR
TRIALS

Elizabeth George



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS

EUGENE, OREGON

Unless otherwise indicated all Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Verses marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Verses marked NIV are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Verses marked NLT are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189 USA. All rights reserved.

Verses marked KJV are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

Harvest House Publishers has made every effort to trace the ownership of all poems and quotes. In the event of a question arising from the use of a poem or quote, we regret any error made and will be pleased to make the necessary correction in future editions of this book.

Italics in Scripture quotations indicate author's emphasis.

Cover photo © Gary Yeowell / *Photographer's Choice* / Getty Images

Cover by Dugan Design Group, Bloomington, Minnesota

FINDING GOD'S PATH THROUGH YOUR TRIALS

Copyright © 2007 by Elizabeth George

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

George, Elizabeth, 1944-

Finding God's path through your trials / Elizabeth George.

p. cm.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7369-1374-4 (pbk.)

ISBN-10: 0-7369-1374-2 (pbk.)

1. Suffering—Biblical teaching. 2. Consolation—Biblical teaching. 3. Christian women—Religious life. I. Title.

BS680.S854G46 2007

248.8'6—dc22

2007012043

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

07 08 09 10 11 12 13 14 15 / VP-SK / 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

A Word About Trials	7
-------------------------------	---

Section 1—Becoming a Joyful Woman

1. Accepting the Truth	11
2. Using an Easy Sorting System	21
3. Evaluating What’s Happening	31
4. Expecting Bumps, Roadblocks, and Dead Ends	41

Section 2—Becoming a Stable Woman

5. Looking for Blessings	53
6. Changing Your Perspective	63
7. Strengthening Your Staying Power	75
8. Standing with the Giants of Faith	87

Section 3—Becoming a Mature Woman

9. Crossing over to Greatness	101
10. Making Decisions that Develop Greatness	113
11. Dealing with Roadblocks	125
12. Experiencing God’s Power and Perfection	135

Section 4—Becoming a Mighty Woman

13. Finding Strength in God's Grace	149
14. Counting on God's Power	159
15. Drawing on God's Might	169
16. Becoming a Work of Art	179

Section 5—Becoming an Enduring Woman

17. Enduring Difficult Times	193
18. There Is Nothing New Under the Sun	205
19. Trusting in God's Faithfulness	219
20. Triumphant over Temptation	229

A Final Word

21. Gaining Something Grand	241
Notes	251

A Word About Trials



A daughter's health and needed brain scan.

A soldier deploying to a war zone.

A couple with a son going through problems.

A suicidal daughter.

A dying dad.

A lack of self-control and/or addiction.

Whether we like it or not, trials and tribulation are part of our everyday lives. I can still remember reading John 16:33 as a new Christian making my way through the New Testament. In words spoken to His disciples, Jesus boldly stated, "In the world you *will* have tribulation." At that time I believed that everything would get better, that being a Christian would surely one day mean a problem-free life. However, the truth is that you and I—and everyone else—*will* suffer. We live in a sinful, fallen world that involves bodies deteriorating, relationships that require attention, temptation coming from every direction, and relentless persecution of believers because of their testimony for Christ.

As you read through this book, you will encounter some wisdom from the Bible about trials...and about how you can approach them. You will also learn how others have handled trials and how their

examples—along with God's grace—can help you manage your way through your own set of trials. Regardless of what happens to you along life's way, keep these words from Jesus in your mind and heart. On the heels of His statement regarding the universality of trials and tribulation, Jesus said, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

This is God's good news! Christ's victory, accomplished through His death and resurrection, rendered the world's opposition null and void. Yes, we will suffer, fall, fail, and be attacked. We will experience trials of every magnitude and every length of duration, from being locked out of the car until help arrives to a life-altering trial with no end or change in sight. But Christ's triumph has already guaranteed a smashing defeat of the world and its evil, including our trials.

As we talk about finding God's path through your trials, keep these words from the apostle Paul handy in your heart:

✦ "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).

✦ "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

✦ "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).



Section 1

Becoming a Joyful Woman

*Life need not be easy to be joyful. Joy is not the absence
of trouble, but the presence of Christ.¹*

WILLIAM VANDER HOVEN

Becoming a Joyful Woman


1

Accepting the Truth



*My brethren, count it all joy
when you fall into various trials.*

James 1:2

 Have you ever been asked to do something you weren't too excited about? Something that might even cause some pain physically, mentally, or emotionally? Probably fairly often, right? Well, that happened to me one summer morning. One of my phone calls that sunny day was from the woman who chaired the women's ministry at my family's church. She asked me to pray about teaching the women's Bible study group the following spring. And not only was she asking me to pray about leading the group, but she actually gave me the topic of the Bible study—"trials" of all things! Her committee had discussed the needs among women in the church and decided that the topic of successfully handling trials would be important since so many were experiencing difficulties in some form or another.

Well, little did these ladies know, but their request quickly became a trial in my life. Why, you ask? Read on!

My first response to this woman, I'm sorry to say, was negative. I don't like to teach by assignment. I much prefer to instruct out of the overflow of my own personal study of the Bible.

My second response, I'm also sorry to say, was fear. Who would want to attend a class that majored on problems? Don't most people want to hear pleasant, happy things? I certainly didn't want to be a teacher of doom and gloom!

But as I talked it over with God, He changed my heart. I accepted the opportunity as coming from Him...that *He* was asking me to address the everyday, every-person exposure to trouble, and that He had some things to teach me. The church committee was indeed wise: Trials are part of life, including mine...and yours.

Looking to Another Teacher

Once I worked through the trial of doing something I wasn't sure I wanted to do and accepted the challenge of diving into the topic of trials, my mind raced to James, the writer of the book of James in the Bible. I thought James might have had a similar experience because he taught about trials.

Imagine yourself in James' position. He was given an assignment to teach a course that could have been entitled "Trials 101." Knowing that all Christians suffer, the president of the college—God Himself—asked James to create curriculum that would give all Christians the basics needed for handling bad times.

Oh, but that's not all! James was essentially told the class would have to be a *correspondence* course. Why? Because he would never meet or talk to the people who needed and "studied" this course designed to help them manage their problems and challenges. Therefore James' assignment was to write instructions that were universal—that would help in *any* and *every* situation for *all* time. He was to put in writing information that would aid *any* and *every*

Christian, from the babe in Christ facing initial growing pains to the seasoned saint on his or her deathbed. He was to communicate guidelines that would instruct God's people in how to handle everything from a small insult to a major catastrophe.

What would you do if you were James? What would you say? Where would you start? My friend, this is exactly the assignment God gave to James. There were some saints "out there" who needed help. Jewish believers living outside Jerusalem and Palestine, outside the hub of Christianity, were confronting a variety of trials. James' job was to give them advice on how to deal with their problems in a godly way.

And what were the results of God's assignment to James? Here are a few facts surrounding James' timeless lessons to all believers on how to find God's path through trials.

Getting Straight to the Point

To begin, the book of James is the first New Testament epistle (letter) written, dated just 15 years after the death of Christ. It is a bold, straight-to-the-point, practical manual on holy living under any and all conditions—including distress. Filled with wisdom, the epistle of James has been likened to the book of Proverbs because of its short, razor-sharp statements regarding godly living.

How did James fulfill his assignment from God? He sat down and, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote lists of advice for his unseen readers—a catalog of principles, of do's and don'ts, of rules to live by. He gave his brothers and sisters in Christ words of wisdom for all circumstances.

And why was James chosen to do this? Possibly because he was the half-brother of Jesus (see Matthew 13:55). You see, James—a younger sibling in the household—would have witnessed firsthand how Jesus, the Son of God and the Perfect Man, handled trials.

Now pretend you're James. What would you say to begin your course billed as "Trials 101"? The greeting card industry would

probably say to the poor, suffering saints: “Thinking of you” or “Get well soon!” or “Hang in there, baby!” Some psychology books would suggest to these problem-ridden people that they could withdraw, seek to win, fight, give in, or compromise. Amazingly, James’ course in *The School of Trials* offered advice differing vastly from these sentiments and counsel. In just nine words, James dove right in, got straight to the point, and issued a command:

Count it all joy...when you fall into various trials

(JAMES 1:2).

Bypassing all triviality, small talk, words of introduction, and sugarcoating, James exhorted his readers to face their trials head-on and take a positive approach—to *rejoice* in their troubles! Sound impossible? It is...unless we understand several truths about trials.

Trials Are a Fact of Life

Life isn’t easy. And being a Christian isn’t easy either. Sure, we have newness of life in Christ and our assurances from God. But as believers we can expect to be jostled by trials all along the way:

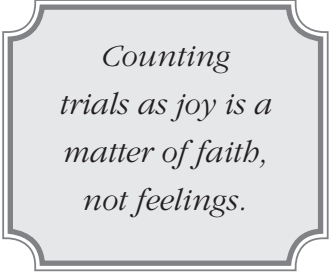
- ✦ Peter told his readers: “Do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you” (1 Peter 4:12).
- ✦ Paul wrote that “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12).
- ✦ Jesus taught that “in the world you will have tribulation” (John 16:33).

We can be sure trials will hit us. All kinds of experiences will come to us, including negative ones. But *when* they arrive, says James, we have choices to make. One of those choices is attitude. God allows us the privilege of choosing our attitude. We can be bitter, angry, disgruntled, or depressed. It's up to us. Or we can choose to be women who sigh...and sigh...and sigh in defeat some more. We can slump, scowl, sulk, and complain.

But James recommends a better way, a better outlook to choose—indeed, the best way! He shares with us the right choice. He encourages us to decide to have a joyful attitude. *James' first rule for joyful living in unjoyful circumstances is to "count it all joy."*

Learning to Count

Just as the ABCs are basic to learning how to read, so a knowledge of the 1-2-3s is fundamental to learning how to triumph in trials. James' elementary, bare-bones course on godly endurance in suffering includes learning to count. He says "*count it all joy*" when you encounter every trial. Whenever I read these words, my immediate reaction is to not like them. God's words through James are unexpected and shocking, like ice water thrown in my face. Why? Because I want James (and everyone!) to identify with me, to feel my pain. I want empathy and sympathy. I want someone to cut me some slack. I want someone to woo me into a godly attitude.



Counting trials as joy is a matter of faith, not feelings.

However, because an obedient heart is something I desire (and I'm thinking you do too), I realize that I have to learn to count instead of counting on others. To "count" means to evaluate, to consider, and to account for something. In the case of James 1, verse 2, it is *the trial that is to be evaluated to the point that a*

decision *is made to “count” it as all joy.* To “count” involves careful, deliberate judgment. In the end, we are supposed to look at the trial—whatever it is—and count it as *joy*.

I have learned several things about this “counting.” First, counting a trial as joy is done with the mind...not the emotions. It is a matter of faith, not of feelings. It is a mental discipline. And it is an issue of sheer obedience. God is not asking Christians who are involved in trials to “feel” joy. No, He is asking them to follow His instructions and “count” (to evaluate, consider, determine, and decide) those trials to be joy.

And second, counting trials as joy has nothing to do with the body or how a Christian is feeling physically. Counting eliminates evaluations according to physical experience against the idea that “if it feels good, it is a good thing,” “if it feels bad, it must be a bad thing” notions.

Christians, therefore, are not to “count” or evaluate their trials according to looks or feelings. Counting is done not by sight, but *by faith* (2 Corinthians 5:7). By faith and in obedience we *choose* to count any and every trial as joy. Why? Because that’s what God says we must do to find His path through our trials.

—*Taking a Step Forward*—

Where does today find you? Where do you reside, and do you want to be there or like being there? For a woman, many times the place she resides is not her ideal. For instance, if you are married, you may follow your husband as he leads you halfway around the world...or maybe he desires to make no moves at all while you’re itching for a new start. You leave family—sisters, brothers, parents, married children, grandchildren, and friends—behind as you cleave to your husband. Like Sarah in the Old Testament (Genesis 12:1-5), you may have to leave behind all that is familiar

and friendly to taste that which is different and what may not seem beneficial at the time to you and your family.

And if you're single, you experience loss as your job takes you from place to place, tearing you away from loved ones, a good church, and your support system. It may seem like you're starting over...and over...and over again.

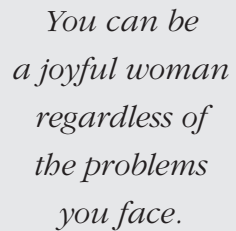
My friend, these are trials.

And in what state of mind or spirit does today find you? Are you suffering from sorrow, discouragement, fear, anxiety, worry, loneliness, or despair? Even the powerful warrior King David had his days of dismay. He had his problems with people. David cried out to God, "Have mercy on me, O LORD! Consider my trouble from those who hate me" (Psalm 9:13). He had times when he thought he would surely die: "I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD" (Psalm 27:13).

Can you relate? Is any issue or problem—a relationship, an illness, a life circumstance—troubling you today? More than likely the answer is yes. You can take a giant, positive step forward by realizing the truth that trials are a fact of life. Don't get blown away by trials. Don't wonder *why* something happened to you. Don't accuse God of evil with thoughts like *How could a loving God let this happen?* Don't doubt God, wondering, *Where is God when I need Him?* or *Where was God when this happened?*

And please don't give in to anger, depression, and discouragement. And don't decide, "Well, I'll just drop out of this race. I give up! I can't go on. In fact, I don't even want to go on."

And don't put off a positive attitude, thinking, *When the pain eases up, I'll be more joyful* or *When this is over, I'll be happy again. Then I'll have joy.*



*You can be
a joyful woman
regardless of
the problems
you face.*

Instead, acknowledge the truth that trials are part of life on this planet. Follow God's advice through James and "count it all joy." Make the right choice of attitude—the one God prescribes. Bow your knee, your heart, and your emotions before God Almighty and express your heart attitude: "God, I don't like this, but You say I am to count this trouble as joy. Therefore, by Your grace, I am choosing to do so."

Will you do this? Accepting the truth about trials makes all the difference in your day, in your hardships, and especially in your life! This is God's path through your trials. You can be a joyful woman in your problems and regardless of your problems.