

There are billboards in my city that ask a question; a question that is perhaps more spiritual than the advertiser of the lakeside subdivision intended. There are a couple variations to the billboard -- one featuring an obviously successful executive playing golf with the horizon filled by a massive lakefront home at the end of the fairway. Another shows a towering home perfectly perched on the lake with a boat just a couple feet short of a yacht. In all versions of the billboard one question is prominent: Why Not Have it All?

It is a simple question that in various forms and different times we all ask ourselves. The question said another way is more of a statement implying we deserve something. The question implies we have a choice in the matter and that deciding to do anything else, anything falling short of this prize, will of course be a failure. This measure of "having it all" becomes a measure of success. Have a giant house? You have it all. Have a sleek and stunning boat? You have it all. So, why not have it all? It is indeed a very spiritual question.

There is a teaching or two in the text of the bible that speaks to such a question. We are told it was a concept tested by an ancient king who had all the knowledge and intelligence ever given to man and came to the conclusion that having things did not lead to having it all. Things, this King discovered, merely confused the matter. Things, are neither good or bad. They hold no moral position. Things are merely possessions to which we infer value, more or less, based on our spiritual perception of them. They do not in and of themselves bring or detract from our completeness. They do however, hold within them a deadly distraction.

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." -- James 1:2-4

There is a completeness we seek that is misplaced on possessions and position. In James we see that a life "not lack anything" is found at the end of a journey that begins, oddly enough, with trials. This spiritual journey steps through the events we call problems and set-backs and ends in a place of completeness. Yet, our popular culture conveys to us that trials should be avoided. We grow disheartened and frustrated when we face trials We do not see them as joy. James advised otherwise.

If trials are to be counted as "pure" joy, then perhaps what we routinely seek is a contaminated joy. This contrived joy of our dreams is a manipulation of emotions -- buy this, feel this. We give up much for these things. If held tightly, these things become a misguided reflection of who we seek to be.

In James' journey map of trials to testing we discover our God connection. Beginning with trials we learn to face them with a new perspective. We see trials, barriers, difficulties as the force that brings our faith into focus. Through these pressures we test our faith. We exercise our faith to make it stronger. A strong faith connects us more deeply to God and his power.

We realize we are powerless to overcome the trial, but He is divinely able. Each trial is a pressing force that will either press us nearer to God or press us toward prideful self-reliance. It is "pure joy" when we let trials further strengthen our God connection.

As the scope and intensity of the trials increase we press closer to God under the force of this new level of pressure. The experience reminds us of our inability to cope and we find new evidence of God's provision of wisdom and assistance for the occasion. We see Him at work, resulting in the pure joy of His presence in our life.

The cycle repeats itself -- trials, pressure, faith tested, and God proved to be faithful. Each cycle develops a perseverance that teaches us to depend on God for a safe passage. Perseverance, James teaches, then leads to maturity -- the means to put all things into perspective. Maturity brings with it completeness -- a contentment of having all that we need and having experienced life to its fullness. At the end of each journey we experience what it means to not lack anything.

It is pure joy to desire only God in the midst of whirling cultural pressures in search of other less fulfilling pursuits. It is at that intersection of trial and testing that the question echoes back: Why not have it all?