

When life hands you a lemon

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28

All of us have been handed a few lemons in our lives. We should regard these not as abnormalities, but instead as normalities. If you’ve got a few lemons in your life, well, welcome to the human race. It should not be your goal to get rid of the lemons, but instead you need to learn how to use them for your benefit and turn them into lemonade, as the saying goes.

In James 1:2-4, we are told to *“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.”*

You have probably read these scriptures and been given this advice more than once, but do you really believe them in your heart? Take time right now to list on a piece of paper the most distressing lemons in your life. Now let’s be honest. You wouldn’t be putting them on the list if they were making you happy or joyful, right? So, you need to admit that you do not really believe with your heart the Scriptures quoted above. Are you still with me? Your faith will grow with each success. Put your faith to work and give it a chance to grow.

We can benefit from those lemons in two ways. First, we can learn to be joyful in spite of them. Secondly, we can turn them into lemonade. We need to learn both lessons.

IN THE SHORT TERM, we need to learn how to be content in all circumstances and rejoice even in the midst of suffering. What better example of this than the Apostle Paul who was able to rejoice even as he wrote the book of Philippians from a filthy prison cell. Here are two tips on how to accomplish this.

1. When you get the blues and are facing an unhappy circumstance, go to God in prayer and pour out thanksgiving to Him for all the terrible things that happened to you in the past and tell Him how grateful you are that He brought be through them all. When viewing your current distressful situation from the perspective of what God has done for you in the past, you will be able to transfer those feelings of gratitude to your current situation.
2. It also helps to think about people you know, or know about, who are in much more dire circumstances. By comparison, your problems will seem much smaller. You could even take matters a step further and take some sort of action to help alleviate the suffering of one of those unfortunate individuals. You could donate to a special charity, or put a little extra into the offering place at Church, or offer your help to someone who is in greater need than you. The Apostle Paul was so passionate about his ministry and so focused on the wonderful things that were happening to the people he was helping that he was able to rejoice even in prison. The happiness he was bringing into the lives of others turned the negative of his imprisonment into an occasion for joy.

OVER THE LONGER TERM, you need to figure out how to use your negative experience to create something new and good in your life, something you can really be happy about. Here is a list of practical tips that will help you to do just that.

1. Don't blame God. God didn't hand you this lemon, life did. God is the one who is going to help you.
2. Don't complain, take action instead. Negative thoughts create negative results. Positive thoughts create positive results. Try not to harbor and savor negative thoughts, and do not allow them to turn into spoken words.
3. If the situation is temporary, continually visualize in your mind how good it will feel when it is over.
4. If the situation is permanent, or of indeterminate length, pray about it continually. You are not necessarily going to beg for a "miracle," but instead ask for the strength to bear it and the wisdom to learn from it. It needs to be OK with you if God does not miraculously remove the lemon.
5. Ask yourself this. Is there something else in life you would like to have that would make your present difficulty easier to bear? Is there something new and good that you have the resources to accomplish in your life that will make your present difficulty pale in comparison. For example, if you have recently lost your job, what steps could you take to get an even better one? If your marriage is failing, what steps can you take to help your spouse love you even more than when you were first married? If you are seriously ill, how can you use your time in the hospital or at home to enhance your relationship with God or shine a little light into the lives of those around you?
6. Ask yourself this. How can God use this current situation to help you become a better person? What weaknesses in your character has this situation revealed, and what steps can you take to improve yourself. The trials and tribulations of life are like sandpaper that God can use to smooth out your rough edges. They are like the pruning shears that God uses to lop off old tired branches in order to make room for new ones. They are like the chisel the diamond cutter uses to make the dull, rough stone sparkle.
7. Be patient and wait on the Lord. Time is the greatest healer in your life. If your troubles clear up too soon, you won't have time to learn from them, grow from them, or replace them with better things. Meditate daily on Isaiah 40:31, "*but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint.*"