

## Dear Refuge of My Weary Soul

Anne Steele (1717–1778)

Dear refuge of my weary soul,  
On thee when sorrows rise;  
On thee, when waves of trouble roll,  
My fainting hope relies.

While hope revives, though pressed with fears,  
And I can say, “My God,”  
Beneath thy feet I spread my cares,  
And pour my woes abroad.

To thee I tell each rising grief,  
For thou alone canst heal;  
Thy word can bring a sweet relief,  
For every pain I feel.

But oh! when gloomy doubts prevail  
I fear to call thee mine;  
The springs of comfort seem to fail  
And all my hopes decline.

Hast thou not bid me seek thy face?  
And shall I seek in vain?  
And can the ear of sovereign grace  
Be deaf when I complain?

No, still the ear of sovereign grace  
Attends the mourner’s prayer;  
O may I ever find access,  
To breathe my sorrows there.

Thy mercy-seat is open still;  
Here let my soul retreat,  
With humble hope attend thy will,  
And wait beneath thy feet.

## ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

### *In the Nick of Time*

#### **Tried with Fire: Consider It All Joy**

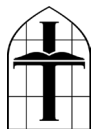
*Kevin T. Bauder*

The temperature hovered in the nineties as the August sun beat down on the practice field. We had been running through a combination of calisthenics and drills in full gear for nearly two hours. This was our first two-a-day of the season. I’d thought I was in decent shape, but I was beyond tired. My field of vision was narrowing and my sight beginning to darken. There were moments when I couldn’t see anything at all. One teammate had already passed out on the field; I was afraid I might be next. While I was determined not to quit, I dreaded the possibility that my body might quit on me. Then, just as I thought that I was at the end of my endurance, the coach called a halt to the practice.

The next day I expected more of the same, but now I knew that I could make it to the end. I had already done it. When I felt the signs of increasing exhaustion—the wobbling legs, the burning lungs, the dimming vision—they did not surprise me. I knew that I could push through them, and I did. In fact, something remarkable happened. Even though we worked out just as hard the second day, the exhaustion wasn’t as bad. As one practice followed another I could do more and more while feeling less pain. Enduring actually produced greater endurance.

Much the same is true of afflictions. James, the half-brother of the Lord Jesus, spoke of afflictions as *trials* or *tests*. He said that we should “consider it all joy...when you encounter various trials” (James 1:2, NASB). He did not say *if* we encounter various trials, but *when* or *whenever*. James assumed that trials would be part of a believer’s life—and he was right. God has not exempted Christians from any of the sufferings that are the common lot of human beings. In fact, believers may actually suffer more than unbelievers, because Christians can also be persecuted for the sake of their Christian testimony.

Words like *afflictions*, *trials*, and *sufferings* all imply pain. Contrary to those who preach a pretend gospel of health and wealth, God places His children in circumstances where they must encounter and endure pain. We obviously don’t enjoy pain, whether physical or emotional. We avoid it when we legitimately can, and that’s not wrong. But we won’t always be able to avoid it, so we need to learn how to face it.



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What are we supposed to do with our pain? James answered that question directly: “consider it all joy.” He did not state that the pain itself is joyous. Rather, we are to consider the trial (the painful event) as a joyous occasion. Pain is never good as an end in itself, but it can be used by God to accomplish good purposes.

James mentions one of those purposes: “the testing of your faith produces endurance” (James 1:3, NASB). God wants us to live by faith. In fact, as Hebrews 11 makes clear, the life that God wishes us to live with Him is fundamentally a life of trust. It is a life in which we believe God, whatever our circumstances may be.

The implication is that our faith is going to be tested. How could it be otherwise? Exercising faith—believing God—means trusting Him *for something*. If we must trust Him, then by definition we either need something or are in danger of losing something that we already have. In other words, we face either lack or loss. We experience the discomfort of either a deficiency or a danger. We encounter a trial.

When that trial comes, it gives us the opportunity to persist in believing God, often in spite of our circumstances. The trial is a chance to endure, and our endurance matters to God. We are most truly God’s people when we exhibit trust either by relying on Him through situations that appear to be impossible or by obeying Him when the cost of faithfulness is very high. Abraham and Sarah trusted God for a son when she was too old to conceive a child. Later, Abraham trusted God for the life of Isaac, even on the mountain of sacrifice. Moses obeyed God and chose to identify with Him rather than to identify with the royal house of Egypt and to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin. Joshua trusted God while the walls of Jericho still stood strong against the army of Israel. God has constantly placed His people in impossible situations, asking them to believe Him. He does the same with us.

Every affliction is an opportunity to persevere in trusting God. We will often find ourselves pushed to the limits of our endurance. When we do, something marvelous happens. We find that faith, like muscle, grows stronger when it has been stressed. The more we endure, the greater our endurance grows. So James exhorts us to “let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:4, NASB). By enduring present trials, we will grow able to endure the challenges of the future. Eventually we will be able to endure whatever God, in His sovereign purpose, has for us.

Two-a-day practices were not an end in themselves. Their purpose was not simply to equip the team to endure more practices. Instead, they prepared us for real play. Because of what we endured on the practice field, we were strong enough to play at full intensity for the entire game.

In the same way, every little trial that we endure becomes God’s way of strengthening us to face bigger trials in the future. Ultimately, He uses these trials, afflictions, pain, and suffering to make us strong enough to accomplish His will in our lives.

Daniel was not thrown into the lion’s den on his first day in Babylon. By the time that test came, he had already endured many trials and had grown through each one of them. He was equipped to endure this last and greatest test by persevering through many trials that had gone before. The result was an astonishing confession on the part of Darius the king, and a lesson that continues to be taught some 2,500 years later.

We do not know what God eventually intends to do with us. If we did, we might well blanch. What we do know, however, is that the next trial that comes our way, however painful it may be, is designed to prepare us to be faithful under whatever circumstances may follow. We will not enjoy the trial, but we can rejoice in the increasing endurance that it accomplishes in us.



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This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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