
Lesson Two
THE BOOK OF JAMES
THE TEST OF PERSEVERANCE IN TRIALS
1:2-12

After identifying himself with his brethren, who had been scattered out of Palestine into the Gentile world, James immediately begins his letter by addressing the trials and sufferings which they had encountered in their relocation, and for their new found faith in Christ. Verses 2-12 begin and end with a discussion about trials (see vs 2,12) into which Christians can suddenly be engulfed. In rapid-fire sequence James:

- encourages his readers to respond positively to their trials (1:2-4)
- exhorts them to ask in faith for wisdom (1:5-8)
- comforts the poor and warns the rich (1:9-11)
- pronounces a blessing on Christians who endure trials (1:12)
- warns believers not to blame God for temptations (1:13-15)
- reminds his hearers that all good gifts, including the new birth, come from God (1:16-18)

The two main ideas in this section are One: God wants His people to turn their trials in triumphs by developing endurance and maturity. Two: God wants His people to obey His commands and accept responsibility for their sinful failures.

I. TURNING TRIALS INTO TRIUMPHS vs. 2-8

We have a saying in our country that when “*life hands you a lemon, make lemonade.*” The lemon represents something that is negative and defective, while the lemonade represents that which is positive and helpful. It sets for a sound philosophy of turning defeat into victory and trials into triumphs. Instead of being victims, we become victors. How can one do this? How can we become conquerors through Christ when our trials are slaughtering us like sheep? (Romans 8:36-37).

James gives us four imperatives, or commands which can be used as means to achieving this outlook on life. They are seen in four words in the text: count (1:2); know (1:3); let (1:4, 9-11), and ask (1:5-8). When we expand these words into concepts we find these helpful principles:

- Count - A Joyful Attitude (1:2)
- Know - An Understanding Mind (1:3)
- Let - A Surrendered Will (1:4)
- Ask - A Believing Heart (1:5-8)

A. Count - A Joyful Attitude (1:2)

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.”

The word “count” is a term which means to “carefully consider, to evaluate, to think upon, to esteem.” When we face trials in our lives, we must evaluate them in the light of what God is doing for us. Jesus evaluated the sufferings of the cross in light of ***“the joy that was set before him.”*** (Hebrews 12:2). The end result of His sufferings would accomplish His return to heaven, and the sharing of His glory with His church.

In his commentary on James, Warren Wiersbe writes:

“Our values determine our evaluations. If we value comfort more than character, then trials will upset us. If we value the material and physical more than the spiritual, we will not be able to ‘count it all joy.’ If we live only for the present and forget the future, then trials will make us bitter, not better.”

(Bible Exposition Commentary, Vol. 2, p. 338). Job said ***“But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”*** (Job 23:10).

God tells us to expect trials. It is not “if you fall into various testings”, but when you fall into various testings.” The believer who thinks that life is to be easy and comfortable is in for a shock. As a result of the fall of man, everyone who lives in this world endures some measure of trouble. Job states, ***“Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.”*** (Job 14:1). Thus sickness, accidents, disappointments, loneliness, tragedies, all come simply because we are human beings living in a world in which we share common temptations. Other trials come because we are Christians. Jesus warned His disciples, ***“In the world ye shall have tribulation.”*** (John 16:33). Paul told his converts that ***“we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.”*** (Acts 14:22). Peter informed his brethren, ***“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.”*** (1 Peter 4:12).

The phrase “fall into” does not suggest an accident brought on by a careless oversight. Rather, it means to “encounter, to come across”. It is something that happens to us that is beyond our choice or ability to control. In the story of the Good Samaritan, it is used of the man who ***“fell among thieves”*** (Luke 16:30).

The word “divers” or “various” comes from a word whose literal meaning is “many-colored or diverse, of many kinds.” The point James is making is that the trials which we encounter will come in many shapes, shades, kinds, and degrees. It is not that every Christian will suffer every kind or degree of trouble, but that Christians in general are subject to troubles of every kind from every possible source.

The words, “temptation and trial” come from the same Greek word. The word itself is neutral and can have either a negative or positive meaning depending on how the writer or speaker uses it. In **James 1:3** it is used in a positive sense, “to test or prove” the genuineness of an object or act. In **James 1:13**, it is used in a negative sense which means “to entice or solicit to evil.” In the present text in verse two, James has in mind that the believer’s faith will be tested through troubles of many kinds in hardships, problems, and difficulties.

Since believers will experience trials, James is calling us to consciously develop a joyful or positive attitude toward trials. But how is it possible to rejoice in the midst of trials, we may ask? The second command in verse three explains how.

B. Know - An Understanding Mind (1:3)

“Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.”

Here, God explains the reason behind trials. Trials are meaningless, suffering is senseless, and testing is irrational unless there is some good purpose for them. God tests our faith for a reason, and it is for a good reason. **Romans 8:28** says, ***“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”*** He tests our faith in order that he might produce patience in our lives. The word patience refers not merely to passive resignation, but to active endurance or perseverance. It carries the idea of having the stamina or tenacity to withstand the pressure of a trial.

Our trials are intended to help us, not hurt us. It is like when we go to a doctor and he prescribes a certain treatment. We would prefer a pill in which we could swallow with no aftertaste or side effects. Sometimes the treatments are a lot more severe than that. The surgeon must cut the flesh, and that means we must go through the trial of pain. But we know that the intended result will be healing and elimination of pain. We go through the pain knowing what the result will be. It is this understanding that helps us get through it. It is this knowledge that God is working out His purpose for us in the midst of our sufferings and afflictions, which enables us to develop a joyful or positive attitude toward trials. In light of this, James moves to the third imperative or command.

C. Let - A Surrendered Will (1:4, 9-11)

“But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. ... Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.”

Trials not only produce durability, they produce maturity. James uses two expressions here to define maturity in the life of the believer. The word “perfect” (mature) does not refer to sinless perfection, but means “to be fully developed.” The word “entire” (complete) refers to something that has all of its parts and therefore is whole. It is possible for a Christian to be mature or fully grown in most areas of their life, and still be missing this ingredient of understanding and endurance in times of trials. Without durability in trials believers have not yet fully matured. We are to persevere in the trials so that the work God has begun in us may be brought to completion.

What James is saying is that perseverance must finish its work. When it does, we become fully developed and completely rounded in Christian character, and we must continue to hang in there during trials until the job is done. It is not the trials that produce maturity, it is endurance and spiritual toughness that does so. This is why our will must be surrendered to God’s working in our lives as He develops our character. If we are not willing to surrender to God’s work of character building in our life, we will not abide in the place of trial. We will try to get out of it and escape it in whatever way we can. In doing so we will try to solve the trial in an unbiblical or ungodly way. Our flesh seeks ease and comfort and the elimination of pain. But if we desire to be mature and complete in the moral image of our Lord, then we must, like Him, learn obedience by the things which we suffer. (**Hebrews 5:8**).

One of the many illustrations in the Bible in which God developed maturity in people, is seen in the life of Joseph. Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt. Potiphar’s wife betrayed him (**Genesis 39:1-10**), and Pharaoh’s cupbearer forgot him (**Genesis 40:23**). Still, in God’s plan he became the second most powerful leader in Egypt. After their father Jacob died in Egypt, Joseph’s brothers asked for mercy and forgiveness for their past wrongs to him. Joseph’s response was, **“Fear not, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.”**

(Genesis 50:19, 20). Enduring trials of afflictions had produced in Joseph the ability to understand God’s greater purpose in the mistreatment which he experienced. God had used trials to make Joseph mature and complete.

D. Ask - A Believing Heart (1:5-8)

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.”

When our friends and loved ones are going through trials, we may think we see what God is doing in their trials. But when we are the sufferers, it is very difficult for us to understand what is going on. This is why we should ask God for wisdom. Why do we need wisdom when we are going through trials? Why not ask for strength or grace? Why not pray for deliverance so that the trials may go away and things will get better again? The reason we need wisdom is so that we will not

waste the opportunity God is giving us to mature and learn endurance in suffering like that in which our Lord learned in his trials. We need the wisdom to understand how to use these painful circumstances for our good and God's glory.

“Let him ask of God” reminds us that troubles and trials drive us to pray. When things are going well, we may pray a little, but when we are in the midst of trials, we pray quickly, and long and hard. This verse also teaches us several things about God which encourage us to pray.

One: He is a good God. He is the source of all true wisdom. **Proverbs 2:6** states, **“for the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.”** Being good, He will always answer the prayer for wisdom in His own time. James says in **1:17** that **“every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or, neither shadow of turning.”**

Two: He is a giving God. In **Matthew 7:7-11**, Jesus encourages us to pray believing that God delights in giving. In **Matthew 7:7-11** He says, **“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?”**

Three: He is a generous God. He gives liberally. He is not stingy. He delights in giving good things to those who ask Him.

Four: He is a gracious God. The expression “upbraided not” or “reproach” means to severely reprimand. Jesus used the term in **Matthew 11:20** relating to the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida, **“Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not.”** James declares of God that He will never cast even the mildest reproof on a child of His who comes seeking wisdom in time of trouble and testing. He is gracious in that He gives without finding fault. Though He might, He does not remind us how undeserving and unworthy we are nor does He chide us for not asking sooner. These four facts about the character of God encourage us to pray for wisdom in times of trials. Such wisdom helps us to understand how our troubles fit in with God's plan. Instead of serving as a hindrance, trials present a marvelous opportunity to become wise.

In verses **6-8**, James now turns from the willing Father to the waiting child, making it very clear that the Lord requires the right kind of asking, which must be in faith without doubting. Faith has a high view of God's character, His purpose, and promises. Doubt has a low view of God and thus insults God. **Hebrews 11:6** affirms that **“without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”** Faith is a complete commitment to God in trusting obedience.

Two reasons are given in verses 6-7 to encourage faith. First a doubting person is an unstable person. They are like the surf of the sea, blown and tossed about by the wind. Our prayers for wisdom must not alternate between faith and unbelief. Second, doubters must not even begin to think that God will answer their prayers. Doubting God is serious business. Unbelief receives God's rejection slip which reads, "Request denied due to lack of faith."

Verse eight provides a second description of the character of the doubter. He is double-minded and unstable in all ways. Doubters reveal little endurance in their commitment to the Lord. One moment they are inclined to obedience. The next moment they are following their own plans. It was doubt that made Peter sink in the waves as he was walking to Jesus ([Matthew 14:22,23](#)). Jesus asked him **"O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"** When Peter started his walk of faith, he kept his eyes on Christ. But when he was distracted by the wind and the waves, he ceased to walk by faith, and began to sink. He was double-minded and almost drowned.

II. TWO CONTRASTING TRIALS - vs. 9-11

"Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withers the grass, and the flower thereof falls, and the grace of the fashion of it perishes: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways."

These verses give examples of trials for two different groups of believers and call for each group to exhibit wisdom in evaluating the reason for their trial. Poor believers must not bemoan their poverty, but must rejoice in God's spiritual riches in their lives. Rich believers must not delight in their wealth, but must joy in the humility which trials produce in their lives. Among the greatest trials which we face are the trials that relate to our material possessions. Does what we do with our finances show our commitment to Christ, whether it be in poverty or in prosperity?

The prayer of Agur in [Proverbs 30:7-9](#) is descriptive of the lesson James is teaching. It reads, ***"Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain."*** Agur asks God for two things. The first is to keep him from **"vanity and lies."** That is a good prayer request. The second is the one we want to focus on, where he says, ***"give me neither poverty nor riches."***

The issues of poverty and wealth can both be a trial of life. Wealth can cause one to become self-dependent and forget God. Poverty can cause one to become self-dependent and steal from others. Wisdom from God is needed to serve God in whatever circumstance He places us. Yes, it is God who sovereignly places us in these conditions in life. [1 Samuel 2:7](#) says, ***"The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up."***

A. The Test of Poverty

In verse nine, James first addresses the brother of low degree or humble circumstances. This is a believer who lives in poverty. James wanted poor believers to find delight in their exalted position in God's kingdom and avoid the temptation to murmur about their material distress. Depression, resentment, and selfish ambition may easily characterize their lives. Jesus taught **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom."** (Matthew 5:3).

B. The Test of Wealth

Verses 10, 11 address the wealthy believer. Wealth is a trial because it tempts rich people to rejoice in earthly possessions (Matthew 6:19-21). The rich are encouraged to prize the humility which life's trials can bring them. Since the possession of money can give the wealthy a false sense of security, James uses an illustration from nature to demonstrate the shortness and uncertainty of life. Wealth is likened unto the blooming of a beautiful wild flower which quickly fades in the hot sun after its beauty is displayed. Life lived in earthly wealth is brief and uncertain. The loss of material things is meant to drive the rich believer to the Lord and greater spiritual maturity.

At this point, the poor and the rich are exactly alike, as the poor brother forgets all his earthly poverty, so the rich brother forgets all his earthly riches. The two become equals in Christ. Trials are the great equalizers bringing all of God's children to dependence upon Him. Wealth does not bring God closer, nor does poverty keep Him further away. Let us pray daily for God's wisdom and grace to enable us to live faithfully in the situation in which God has placed us.

III. THE REWARD FOR PERSEVERANCE IN TRIALS - v. 12

"Blessed is the man that endures temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him."

A double result is promised those who faithfully endure their trials.

A. A Present Blessing

First, theirs is an inward attitude of joy and satisfaction, which only the Lord can give. **"Blessed"** is the same word used in each of the Beatitudes of **Matthew 5:3-12**. It means more than the mere happiness of a carefree life that has little conflict or trouble, but is a quality of joy which rests in God and is unaffected by external events.

B. A Future Recognition

The second result or blessing is a gift of recognition from God. It is called **"the crown of life."** It is the acknowledgment from God that this person has proved himself to be a true believer by persevering in the trials of life through trusting in God. The crown is not an ornament worn by a

ruler, but a wreath given to the victor in an athletic contest. God's reward to us for faithfully enduring trials is not a position of royalty over others, but a recognition for spiritual victory. The crown is not a physical object but a spiritual privilege which gives a deeper, fuller life on earth and a joyous, unending life in the world to come. The endurance of trials proved that we truly loved God and desired to serve and glorify Him. Jesus spoke these words to a group of suffering believers, ***"be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."*** (Revelation 2:10). Also ***"Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven."*** (Matthew 5:12).

Summary

What trial are you under right now? What is the problem that is troubling you the most? Can you look upon a testing of your faith to increase your strength to endure adversity? Can you see through the trial to its end design to develop in you maturity and balance in wholeness? Would you now ask God to give you this wisdom to understand His ways with you? Can you trust Him to do you good? Can you be content with your financial circumstances in life and humbly depend on God? Do you have that pure inward joy that comes from loving God? Can you look forward in hope of being recognized by God, before the entire moral universe, of being a true proven, genuine trophy of His amazing grace? If you can't, ask Him for wisdom right now. If you can, then ***"count it all joy."***