

A Greater Purpose
James 1:2-8
: Hollentown Assembly of God
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Main Idea: Despite our trials Jesus is working through them in our lives.

Introduction

No one in our world today wishes to go through suffering or trials. We look for ways around any kind of trial, shortcuts that will keep us from dealing with things we don't want to deal with. Our culture is built upon the principle of the path of least resistance. We don't even like to see the suffering of others in most occurrences.

But the Bible teaches us that we will endure trials and suffering. Jesus promised us in the Gospels that we would go through tribulation. Every single book of the New Testament deals with trials and suffering. Jesus went through a tremendous amount of suffering. So it should be no surprise as we come to the book of James that he would tell us how to deal with suffering as Christians. We react to suffering differently than those in the world. There is an inner strength and fortitude that is built up when Christians suffer or face trials. Let's take a look at how James tells us to deal with trials in our lives.

James 1:2-4

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, **3** for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. **4** And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

I. God can use trials for our good.

A We can have joy in our trials

- 1 James opens up his letter telling the scattered Christians who left Jerusalem that whenever they face hardship they should be joyous. What an almost scandalous way to open up a letter!
- 2 This shocking opening volley would surprise those readers of his day, let alone the Christian readers who read it today. How are we supposed to take a command to count trials as joy?
- 3 Joy means exactly what we think it means. Joy is not happiness that sways with every changing situation. Joy is a deep down never changing anchor that Jesus gives us.
- 4 That is why we can have joy even in our trials. We do not have joy because of the trial but because of what we know Jesus is doing in our hearts and lives.

- 5 James does not tell us that we can have joy because we face a trial but because of what God is going to do in us as we face trial. We can also face the trial because Jesus is walking with us through the trial and understands what we are going through.
- 6 The original language places the emphasis on all joy. We are not just joyous in the good times but we have joy all the time. No matter what we face our joy is complete and constant because our relationship with Jesus is constant.
- 7 The action words in this first verse show the entire situation of the believer. To count or consider is to imagine the real situation instead of what is right before us. It is to realize the bigger picture of what God is doing rather than what we are going through.
- 8 The other action word, to face trials, focuses on the fact that things beset us or that we fall into things. It does not place the blame on God or us. It leaves the agent of trials as a mystery at this time.
- 9 The surprise in the first verse is the word trials and they are further explained as many kinds or various types. The word for trials can refer to temptation or a test or a trial. It is all based on the context which word applies.
- 10 “Trials of many kinds” opens up the rest of the book to the types of trials James wants to talk about. But it also tells us that each trial will be different in our lives. If God’s goal is to make us stronger then each trial will be a different trial to make us stronger in a different area of our lives.
- 11 **Application:** We have an inner joy that is not based on our outward situation but on our inward relationship with Jesus. Because he walks with us we can face any trial and be victorious. Trials that beset us are not always about the blame of who caused them but about what God will do in us through them.

B We can become complete through trials.

- 1 Why can we have joy even in the midst of trials? James will answer this by telling us it’s because God is working out faith and patience in us. We know that he is working these things in us.
- 2 And because we know that God is working these Christian values in us we can have joy despite the trial. We see what God’s endgame is and because we know they are things God will find pleasing in us the trial is worth it.
- 3 The word for testing describes a genuineness of faith, not a fake faith. Your faith is tested like metal is tested in the fire and comes out pure. It is not a combination of alloys but pure and standing on its own.

- 4 During the trial our faith is tested and taken to the limit so that we can see if it is genuine. Trials build our faith in God so that we can trust him no matter how hard the circumstances get.
- 5 This testing process of trials works perseverance in us. This word for perseverance or steadfastness is a powerful word that speaks about our ability to bear up under pressure or stress.
- 6 **Illustration:** Faith is like a muscle. The only way to strengthen muscles is to introduce resistance. By lifting weights and continuing to make them heavier and heavier a person can make their muscle stronger. Trials are like weights for faith. Through the adversity our faith is strengthened in God and we learn to trust him more.
- 7 **Illustration:** The Greek god Atlas was forced to hold the weight of the world on his shoulders. He had to hold up that weight by standing up under it. The word for perseverance means this very same thing. But we don't have to hold the weight of the world on our shoulders. God wants to take that weight off of our shoulders.
- 8 James warns us that perseverance must have its final work in us so that we fully enjoy its effect. It is only when we fully bear up under the pressure and stress of our trials that we will be perfect and complete.
- 9 Perfect and complete here mean to be finalized or mature and whole. This is the result of allowing perseverance to have its full work. James further clarifies that if you allow this to happen you will lack nothing in your faith and character.
- 10 **Application:** In trials we cannot allow ourselves to take on the weight of the world but we were not designed to bear this weight. Trials can teach us to surrender more of ourselves and our lives to God and trust that he will take the weight upon himself. When we surrender more and stop trying to do it all on our own we truly give our faith a work out. God wants to take your trial upon himself but you have to let it go.

James 1:5-8

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. **6** But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. **7** For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; **8** he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

II. God gives wisdom in our trials.

A We can ask God for wisdom.

- 1 After saying that perseverance having its full impact in us will cause us to lack nothing James then says that if we lack wisdom we can ask God. The word lack links these two concepts together.
- 2 James suspects that there are some people in his congregation who lack wisdom and so he is giving them the answer to how to find it. The answer is simple – just ask God.
- 3 Unlike conditions for buying health insurance or a car, God does not have conditions for giving wisdom. James describes him as an overly generous God who gives without reproach against the one asking.
- 4 Jesus has already taught in the Gospels that we can ask God for anything in his name. James uses wisdom as an example here because we need wisdom when we are dealing with trials.
- 5 When we are dealing with a trial wisdom is necessary to make the choices that honors God. Without wisdom we make bad choices probably out of a desire to get the trial over with.
- 6 We must also be careful and have wisdom in what we ask from God during a trial. We may want to ask him for things that we don't need or things we think we need when God knows better.
- 7 The two most important gifts God gives us through trials are generosity and wisdom. Without his generosity we would suffer more than we do already. Without his wisdom we would make choices that would prolong our suffering.
- 8 We can go to God at any time in any place and ask him through prayer whatever we need. He is just waiting for us to ask. It does not take very much at all for us to communicate with God because he knows we are talking to him.
- 9 **Application:** We do not have to be afraid to ask God for what we need. He is generous, not wishing for us to suffer. He is not in heaven waiting to beat us over the head for the mistakes we make. He wants to help us and is waiting for us to ask. Boldly ask God for wisdom and whatever you need in the midst of your trial and he will answer your prayers and give you just what you need.

B We must not doubt God.

- 1 James once again brings up the subject of faith and applies it to prayer and asking God for what we need. Faith is strengthened in our trials through perseverance but is weakened by doubt.
- 2 Faith is trust in God that he will do whatever you ask. If you do not have faith then you cannot trust that he will do whatever you ask. What then is the point of asking him for anything?

- 3 This will be James' argument as he unpacks the joy of asking a generous God for whatever we need. Elsewhere he has told us that he knows our needs before we ask him.
- 4 Doubt is the enemy of faith. It works against the very fabric of trust. Even being unsure if God is willing to grant our request goes against the idea of faith.
- 5 A person who doubts God can doubt his ability to accomplish what he said he'll do. They can also doubt His Word when he tells them he can do something. They may even doubt his good intentions and thoughts toward them.
- 6 **Illustration:** Sarah doubted God when she heard him tell Abraham that they would have a son within a year's time. She doubted him because of her age but God came through and Isaac was born. Sarah even laughed whenever she heard God say that she would have a son. Isaac's name means "Laughter." We should never doubt God when he has said in His Word that he will do something or his ability to do it for us.
- 7 James produces a most excellent image of the person who doubts God's abilities and word. He gives the image of the wave that is tossed about and driven about by wind.
- 8 The wave is not able to control itself but is controlled by its surroundings. Many times we allow our circumstances to control our feelings and our thoughts and they become doubt as to God's ability.
- 9 The doubter or double minded person should not expect to get anything from God when he asks. Because they don't think God can do it they won't get anything from it.
- 10 James calls the person who doubts God a double minded person who is unstable in every way. James is the only person to use this word "double-minded" and he uses it once more in James 4:8 where he tells his readers to purify their hearts.
- 11 Double-minded has the idea of having two minds and the word literally comes from two words "Two souls." Its use in James 4:8 suggests that it has the idea of not being pure. It means to be divided in one's choices.
- 12 **Application:** We must become controlled by God's Spirit instead of by our situation and circumstances. Doubt can become an infection that destroys our ability to trust God for all things whether we are in a trial or just living life. If we don't have trust in God we have nothing. We must not split our affections between God and our own abilities or other people's abilities or promises.

Conclusion

Salvation: The hardest thing to do is go through trial alone. Those who don't know the Lord or have never met him face trials without anyone to help them. I know from personal experience that there's nothing like having family and friends with you as you go through trials. Only the Lord has the power not only can guide you through a trial but to end it. You don't know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, he will go through the trial without wisdom and may not be able to persevere. If you want to know Jesus today all you have to do is ask them to come into your life.

For the Saints: We all think that we can take on the world by ourselves and that we can persevere on our own strength. The fact of the matter is that we cannot do anything on our own. Only our vibrant relationship with Jesus will get us through the trial. We are not alone. Jesus is with us and wants to hear from us and help us. All we have to do is ask him for his help and for wisdom and for perseverance, for his strength to endure. If you are going through a trial today and are acting like you are going it alone, now is the perfect time to call him Lord and ask him for help.