



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

I'd Give My Right Leg... (Part 1 - James 1:2, 3)

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On April 15th, I noticed a small spot on one of my toes. On May 19th, that toe was amputated due to an infection. The infection only worsened, so on June 13th, my right leg was amputated below the knee. I wish I could tell you that I always displayed the right attitude and fully trusted God every moment of this ordeal, but I can't say that. What I can tell you is that God is sovereign, loving, kind, and gives his children the best. Without exception, whatever the circumstance.

I haven't been able to get to Annapolis through the summer and haven't felt up to writing Bible studies, but I wanted to share with you some of the things I have learned over the past few months. Even though James chapter one had been one of the passages we covered this year, I'd like to revisit it because it has a brand new meaning for me now and summarizes why God took my family and me through our struggles this year.

James 3:1-12 - Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

I. THE PERSPECTIVE IS BACKWARDS ("COUNT IT ALL JOY")

The way we're naturally made, we're not wired to be joyful when life gets hard. People who don't desire God will act naturally, you might say fleshly, when they go through difficulty.

When I was in the hospital, Tracy and I constantly came across people who were responding to their circumstances like this. We met some who were in pain who were not joyful. We met hospital workers who told us about hard situations they were dealing with – joylessly. It is normal in our world for joy to be missing from the hearts of just about everyone we meet. They might be coping or surviving, but they are nowhere near experiencing joy. We saw this constantly in ERs and doctor's offices and hospitals – places where life is hard and people are going through trials.

When a follower of Jesus stays joyful as they trust Him through the trials, the world notices. It's abnormal to be joyful in trials, but James is encouraging us to be abnormal, to stand out in our world.

I'm grateful I'm in a family that loves the Lord and (most of the time) lives in joy that He gives. I wish I could tell you that every minute since April 15th has been joyful, but my flesh got the best of me sometimes. But Tracy and I had people asking us about our

attitude through all the physical problems. That gave us a chance to tell them about the Lord and that our trust in Him gives us joy, even when life is difficult.

II. THE PEOPLE ARE BELIEVERS ("MY BROTHERS")

If you signed up for the Christian life to get away from trouble, sorry. This is just one of many places in the Bible that tells us that following Christ doesn't mean an easy, problem-free life. I'm not sure how people get the idea that their problems will be over when they follow Christ, but many have walked away from God because they became disillusioned when it got too hard or they experienced persecution or things went the wrong way physically or financially or a relationship went bad.

I think we can all see this is clear, but James is writing to his brothers: fellow Christians who he wants to prepare for the suffering to come.

III. THE PAIN IS BOUND TO HAPPEN ("WHEN YOU MEET TRIALS OF VARIOUS KINDS")

When – not if. The hard times will come.

Did this illness catch me by surprise? In one way, yes. It came out of the blue and did a lot of damage in a short amount of time.

But it also didn't surprise me, because Scripture makes it clear that we live in a fallen world. Things aren't getting better in this world. The nature of life is to suffer at some point.

Now here's a great thing about following Jesus: you don't have to go through life paranoid, looking over your shoulder wondering if today is the day the wheels are going to come off of your life. You know pain will come (or already has), so the question is: how will we handle it? What will be our response when trials come?

We'll attempt to answer that question in Part 2 of this two-part study. Let me also say that I have missed seeing many of you in the offices, but have continued to pray for you (legislators and staffers) in the important work you are doing for the state. With God's help (and not a small amount of work) I plan to be back to Annapolis for the next session!