



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Joy in Trials

FEBRUARY 21, 2011

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Introduction

We should not think that James is writing for the sole purpose of showing us how to hold up during persecution. His audience was facing many difficult issues, but violent persecution is not the main theme. He is giving us a way to look at life knowing that all of us will face many problems. Pertaining to trials, he is giving us a Christian world view. As you read through James notice all of the “cognitive” words. You will immediately see “consider.” And, other phrases will suggest “ask for wisdom,” “do not be deceived,” “know this,” “do not forget.”

Therefore, as much as he is telling us how to act, he is likewise telling us how to think. As Christ followers, we should have a different perspective about all of life than those who do not know Him.

James 1:2-4

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.

Trials: A Coat of Many Colors

James commands us to consider it pure, or all, joy when confronting many kinds of trouble. When James says, “*trials of many kinds*” the word literally means variegated, like the colors of a rainbow. He is reminding us that trials will have many shades and forms. They can be little things or major issues. They can be physical, financial, emotional, relational, or spiritual. He will address all of these topics.

We are confronted with hundreds of trials per day, but most of us have learned to move beyond common trials quickly. Often, we can even laugh at our foibles and troubles—perhaps we are better than we think at considering trials as opportunities for joy.

“His word about trials, therefore, speaks to more than hospital rooms, flooded farmlands, or unemployment lines. He speaks to all of life...”¹

Mining for Joy

It is true that one cannot command joy, but James is telling us we should understand there is a pathway open to joy even when we are facing all kinds of troubles.

The obvious point could be made that we should view our troubles in the context of the future life to come. James makes this point later, but that is not his opening argument. He is immediately concerned with our character. Trials are a means of perfecting our souls. So, he is not suggesting we should play over our problems, but we should see them as opportunities.

When I was a young Christian, I asked my pastor, “Why doesn’t the Lord make our life easy here before taking us home to be with Him? Certainly He could do this if He so desired.” The answer has stuck with me. “Here, He is building character in our lives.” The idea is this: life is partly designed as a character-building boot camp.

We know that in all of life overcoming obstacles is a major component of personal growth. The trite and rather silly expression, “That which does not kill me will make me stronger” has some merit. Parents deeply desire to make life easy for their children, but life is not easy, and an overly pampered child may never have the fortitude to face and overcome trials. Likewise, our Heavenly Father knows what we need.

Jesus did not pull any punches, and He told us we would have trouble in this world. All of the heroes of the Bible were men and women who overcame serious hardships. Revelation describes the victorious saints of the church in like manner, “*He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels*” (NKJ).

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS: MONDAYS, 5:00 PM, ROOM 1425 OR WEDNESDAYS, 7:30 AM, ROOM 1425

STAFF: MONDAYS, 12:00 NOON, CHAPEL

North Carolina

James

At this point in his message, James is saying maturity is to be highly esteemed, and dealing with troubles in a godly way leads to perseverance which leads to maturity.

...the testing of your faith...

James does not tell us that we will have answers to all of the whys when trials arrive. It is natural for the human soul to cry out, “Why?” when troubles come, but God requires us to walk by faith. The Apostle Paul echoes this thought when he says, *“For we live by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).*

It helps us to appreciate the way James learned this lesson. We know he did not understand his half-brother, Jesus and thought he was likely insane. He must have wondered why Jesus was bringing such danger and turmoil to the family. The incident in Mark 3:20-22 seems like a modern intervention attempt! James learned that God’s ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8). Yes, God may reveal His answers to our questions, but He may not. We are to trust Him as our faith is tested.

A faith that only believes when things are going well is not really faith at all.

...because you know...

Yes, there is one thing we do know—God is always up to something good when it concerns His people, *“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).* However, remember this is a promise to those *“who have been called according to his purpose.”* There is not general biblical promise that “everything works out for good in the end.”

...develops perseverance.

James describes perseverance as a process which works in us and for us. He is describing the progression of character development. Trials test our faith which develops perseverance which works toward the goal of maturity.

Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

A more literal way of translating this section says, *“Let endurance have its perfect work so that you may be perfect and whole, lacking nothing.”* James uses clever language to say God’s work is perfect and leads us to perfection. The word *perfect* is the term *telos* which conveys the idea of complete in the sense of having reached its desired goal. In all of our troubles we are moving toward a perfection of being the person God wants us to be. He is the potter molding the clay (Romans 9:20-21).

When a believer faces trials, joy is found in the act of growing closer to God. We all have experienced times of discomfort and then we turn to God, then we pray more earnestly, then we pay careful attention to what He tells us in His Word. When worldly benefits are stripped away we turn to what is constant—He who will never leave us nor forsake us.

This would be a good place to consider what Paul says in Philippians 4:11-12 regarding the difficulties of life, *“I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.”*

Life is not one big trial, even though trials will come. But, perhaps we can learn during a trial to better appreciate the times of plenty as we move toward a more perfect maturity.

John McArthur identifies eight ways God uses trials in our lives. ²

1. Test our faith.
2. Keep us humble.
3. Wean us from worldly dependence.
4. Call us to our eternal hope.
5. Reveal what we really love.
6. Value spiritual blessings.
7. Build strength for greater usefulness.
8. Help us minister to others.

1. Daniel M. Doriani, *Reformed Expository Commentary, James*, (P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2007), p. 15

2. John MacArthur, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary, James*, (Moody Publishers, Chicago, IL, 2008), p. 17-21