

## James 1—Consider It All Joy

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The Letter of James in the New Testament was written by the half brother of Jesus between 45 and 49 AD. James was the head elder in the predominately Jewish Church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17,15:13). He was writing to Jewish believers who had fled persecution in Jerusalem, and were scattered in different locations throughout the area. The letter is concerned with the practical aspects of living the spiritual life in Christ. The emphasis is on how our faith should be revealed in everyday life. In chapter one, James discusses three tests of the believer's faith. First, the faithful response to trouble is a joyful response that somehow you will be able to endure the trouble, and something positive will result. Secondly, in 1:13-18, the faithful response to temptations to evil is to take full personal responsibility for any wicked desires, and come to God in humility and contrition seeking a transformation of your heart from God. And thirdly in verse 19-27, by faith we should be doers of the Word of God and not just a hearer.

#### Rejoice in Your Trials and Tribulations?

If you are like me, this is easier said than done. We typically spend a lot of time asking unanswerable questions, like---Why me? What have I done to deserve this? This is someone else's fault! How can anything good come out of this horrible situation? In order to turn trials into triumphs, we must obey four imperatives given in James 1:2-12:

In v.2 James commands us to "consider" or evaluate what God is doing in our life. Everything worldly that had been important should now take a secondary priority to our relationship with Christ. We need to evaluate the situation from a spiritual perspective. Don't forget the grace of God that has saved you from your sins and has given you a guarantee of eternal life with Christ, and don't forget that God loves you and has a plan for you. God will be active working with you to endure the trial.

In v.3, James says to "Know" that this is a test of your faith, because throughout the Bible all faith is tested. Every biblical character had his/her faith tested and proven. The test proves our commitment, and gives assurance that God is with us—not to get us out of trouble, but to help us endure and grow in spite of the trouble.

In v.4, James says to "let endurance have its perfect result" that you will grow and mature so that you lack nothing spiritually. The idea of "let" is to yield your will. God wants to work in us and through us in those tough situations, but God will not work through us without our consent. There must be a surrendered will.

Lastly, in verse 5-8, we must "ask" God for guidance and wisdom, and know that God has promised to give it. Wisdom from God is necessary to apply the Word of God that we already know. James correctly qualifies our prayers to God for help and wisdom in adverse circumstances by saying we must ask in faith without doubting, and truly expect answers. The danger is typical of human nature that our emotions carry us back and forth from belief to doubt like "the surf of the sea" flowing in and out. We are typically "double-minded" or divided in our faith in the sense that we pray to God, but then we try any short cut of our own evil devices to get what we think we need. In the prophet Hosea's message to Israel, he related how they were praying to God to save them from Assyria, but also they sent ambassadors to the evil pagan idolaters in Egypt to help them against Assyria. God is not fooled.

#### The Sovereign God's Purpose in Trials

I believe in the sovereignty of God, and I believe that "God causes all things to work together for good", but what good could possibly come out of these adverse circumstances? Why would God allow this stuff to happen to me? I can think of at least eight reasons, and this is by no means an exhaustive list so please add to it:

1. To test our faith, reveal it, prove it---after God led the children of Israel through the wilderness for 40 years of trials, Moses explained what it was all about in Deuteronomy 8:2, “remember all the way which the Lord has led you in the wilderness these 40 years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart”
2. To humble us---humility is the important attribute we all need in order to come to Christ and to continue to live by faith in Christ. Our problem is that humility can’t be learned academically. It must be learned the hard way by adverse experiences. Even the Apostle Paul, who wrote half of the New Testament, was subjected to terrible pain in order to keep him humble. In 2 Cor. 12:7, we learn that Paul had what he called a “thorn in the flesh” that chronically pained him so he prayed very hard for God to take it away. God’s answer was that Paul needed that pain “to keep me from exalting myself”.
3. To remove our dependence on the world---materialism, the worries of the world, and the pursuit of pleasure can be our greatest threat of alienating us from God. Jesus was constantly teaching His disciples about this, “You cannot serve both God and mammon (money and stuff)” (Matt.6:19-24).
4. To develop eternal hope---what we hope for should be more directed toward heavenly things than temporal. The glory we seek should be God’s glory and not our glory here (Romans 8:24-25). If our hope is based on the here and now, then we will be constantly disappointed, but if we are looking forward in hope to the resurrection and the glory of God we may be always joyful.
5. To reveal our true love---just like Abraham’s true love was revealed to be God when he obeyed by taking his only son Isaac to be sacrificed in Genesis 22. When asked what is the greatest commandment, Jesus correctly answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and soul.” This love is best revealed in hard times when we stay the course and don’t fall away.
6. To teach us to value God’s blessings---our emotions and natural desires teach us to value stuff, pleasures, and ease; but faith values the Word of God, the provision of God, and the promises of God.
7. To develop strength for ministry---none of us would normally think we are tough enough to take the Gospel to the remote parts of the world, or even help people in our church solve the most difficult of issues. Imagine the initial response of Peter, John, James, and Paul when Jesus told them He was leaving and entrusting the Gospel and the Church to them. But after all the imprisonments and beatings, they were even willing to be martyred for Christ.
8. To better help and give comfort to others who are going through trials---it is very important when showing empathy to others to have experienced the same trouble. At the Last Supper in Luke 22:32, Jesus told the disciples that when He was arrested they would all fall away. Peter said that the other guys would but not him. Then Jesus told Peter that after he would blow it, he would be forgiven and restored, and then Peter must “strengthen his brothers.” Before he failed, Peter looked down on the others, but afterward he understood and could minister to them. Even Jesus by experiencing His physical pain, temptations, and suffering was better able, “For since He Himself was tested in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tested (or tempted).” (Hebrews 2:18)

Here’s a tip. A list like this is valuable academically before disaster strikes. We must learn these things and be prepared before disaster strikes. We must develop a spiritual perspective when things are good. Never send a list like this to someone who is in the midst of great pain. When someone has lost a loved one, the last thing they need to hear are 8 reasons why God allowed it. In their emotional state they need support, prayers, and comfort. Therefore study the Word of God now, get your mind straight now, and be prepared for what you know is coming in the future. As Jesus told His disciples when He was leaving them, “These things I have spoken to you that you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

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