

How To Face Trials

James 1:1-12

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Our text, James 1:1-12 says, “James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.”

Verse 2, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials...”—or “testings; here’s our topic—“...knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

Verse 6, “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

Verse 9, “Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.”

Now notice the conclusion in verse 12: “Blessed is the man...”—or “woman”—“...who endures temptation...”—or “trials” or “testings”—“...for when he...”—or “she”—“...has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

The book of James has been called “the epistle of applied Christianity.” This is one of my favorite thoughts about this book. The book of James is Christianity in shoe leather.

James is wanting us to have a faith that is real and genuine. It results in two things: being “doers of the Word, and not hearers only” and a faith that produces works or it’s a dead faith. So the theme of James is a faith that works.

James is misunderstood by a lot of people. They think James contradicts Paul’s teachings in Romans, Galatians and Ephesians, where Paul teaches that “by grace you have been saved through faith,” Ephesians 2:8. But these are two different issues. James is teaching us that our real, genuine, authentic faith will produce a change in our lives; it will be producing works. James says that faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone. Paul is saying that we are saved “by grace...through faith” in Christ, but real, genuine salvation will result in a changed life. We used to sing in Sunday school, “If you’re saved and you know it, then your life will truly show it.”

And the degree to which our lives will change will depend on our growth in sanctification. But if there is no evidence of change in your life, then you must question whether you have truly been

born again. Ask yourself, "Is my faith real and genuine?"

The first place where James says that our faith should work is in how we face trials, how we face the hardships of life. In Job 5:7, it says, "Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." And James gives us some commands to follow which will help us face our trials.

But first, who is this "James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ," in verse 1? He is known as the half-brother of Jesus. After Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, Mary and Joseph had other children, other brothers and sisters, which the Scriptures indicate. Yet here James didn't say he was a brother of the Lord; he said he was "a bondservant...of the Lord Jesus Christ." He used the Greek word "doulos," which means "slave by choice." And he used Jesus' full title of "Lord Jesus Christ." How marvelous. So James was humble.

In verse 1, James is writing "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." He was writing to Jewish believers who were scattered. It's the word "diaspora." We get our word "seed" from it. It's like scattering seeds. The Jews were persecuted, so they left the land of Israel and were living in Gentile territories. They are Jews of the diaspora. They are suffering because of their Christianity by being Jewish believers. The Bible says that we are "persecuted for righteousness sake....Rejoice and be exceedingly glad." These were persecuted individuals.

James is writing to these Jewish believers to encourage them in their trials, verses 1-12. James gives them—and us—five things we need in order to face our trials. These are five ways to respond when you face trials. Number one, we need to have a joyful attitude when we face trials. Verse 2 says, "My brethren, count..."—this is a key word—"...it all joy when you fall into various trials."

First, I want you to notice that the King James translation says "diverse temptations." I am using the word "trials," which is in the New King James Bible, because in the context, James is not talking about a solicitation to do evil; he's talking about a trial or testing, allowed by God, for our good and for God's glory. So the same word translated "trials" is in the Bible translated "temptations." They are closely related. God will allow us to suffer for our good and for His glory.

When you get to verse 13, James is rightfully talking about temptation to do evil. When we are going through a trial, Satan will capitalize on that. He'll try to use it to tempt us to sin against God.

So the same word can have two meanings depending on the context in which it is found. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we pray, "Lead us not into temptation." But the actual concept there is "trial" or "testing," which leads to temptation. But God Himself never leads us into temptation; He tempts no man with sin. So the context of the word is the important point.

In verses 1-12, you will find the word "temptation," in the King James. It's found again in verse 12. These are a reference to trials or testings. What's the difference between trials or testings and temptations? God tests us to bring out our worth, but Satan tempts us to bring out our

worst. So God allows trials and testings for our good and for His glory.

Notice verse 2 says “when,” not “if” you are tried or tested. It means you will go through trials. It’s impossible to live in this world in a human body and not be tried and tested. And then notice that the trials are different or “various.” Trials come in different forms. So when you are tried, they are diverse. Sometimes they’re financial trials, marital difficulties, emotional trials or physical difficulties and trials. All you have to do is get old and you’ll have trials. It takes courage to get old.

I was with some friends the other day, we’re all getting old, and we had an “organ recital.” This doesn’t work, that doesn’t work, that body part went out. It just hit me that me and my friends are actually “old”! You get together and just talk about what doesn’t work anymore.

But James is not talking about problems that we bring on ourselves because of our disobedience or sin. He’s talking about hardships or difficulties that come because of life that God allows in order to use them for our good and for His glory.

Now what should our attitude be toward these trials? First, verse 2, we are to “count it all joy.” You’re probably wondering if this is really what this verse means. “Can you give us something else in the Greek that makes it clear it means something else?” No. It means that if you are a Christian, when you are being tried and tested, you’re not joyful because of your trial—you’re not joyful because your car broke—you’re joyful in your trial, because God can use it for your good and for His glory. You see the spiritual value through that trial. So when we are tried and tested, we are to have a joyful attitude. We’re not to complain, gripe or whine or run from our trials—this is what we usually do—we are to rejoice. I like that it says “count it all joy.”

In the Greek, this is called an “imperative” or “command.” James has 108 verses, 58 of which are imperatives or commands. That’s why this is the epistle of “applied Christianity.” So we are commanded, when we are being tried or tested, to have a joyful attitude or rejoice in the Lord.

And the word “fall” in this verse means because it wasn’t as a result of sin or of a mistake you made; it’s just part of life and it happens. But God is the one behind the scenes allowing it for our good and for His glory.

The key word in verse 2 is “count.” In each of these points, there is going to be a key word I want you to notice. “Count it all joy when you fall...” The word “count” is a financial term which means “to evaluate.” It’s all about what we value. Our values determine our evaluation. If you value or count comfort over character, your trials will upset you. But if you value godly character, or Christ-likeness, then you can rejoice that God is using it to make you more like Jesus Christ.

You might be saying, “Well, I don’t want character! I want comfort!” A lot of churches preach that God wants you happy, comfortable, rich and healthy. There’s nothing wrong with wealth, but sometimes prosperity, health and wealth can be a great detriment to your spiritual wellbeing.

So God will allow sorrows, sufferings, trials and difficulties in order for you to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” In Matthew 5:10 and 12, Jesus said, “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad...”—“when you are persecuted for righteousness’ sake”—“...for great is your reward in heaven.” Then in Romans 5:3, Paul says, “We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance” or “steadfast endurance.”

So here in verse 2, the first point is to “count...”—or “value”—“...it all joy when you fall into various trials” or “testings.”

The second point we need to know is that when we face trials, we need to have an understanding mind. This is how we can “count it all joy.” This seems so contrary to nature. How can I be joyful, have a joyful attitude when I am going through suffering, sorrow, hardships or trials? The answer is in verse 3: having an understanding mind. The key word is “knowing.” Knowing what? “Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.” Patience is steadfast endurance.

There are two things we need to know, verse 3, when we are going through trials. Number one, my trials are designed by God, or allowed by God, to test or try my faith. It’s “the testing of your faith,” in verse 3. It’s only a test. And we’re tested by God to prove the value or the worth of our faith. Something that cannot be tested, cannot be trusted. So God tests or tries our faith—not to destroy us, not to prove that we can fail—to show its worth or value; that it’s real and genuine.

In Genesis 22, Abraham was tested or tried by God. God said to Abraham, “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love...and offer him...as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” You talk about a trial or a test!! How could Abraham reconcile this? In Hebrews 11:19, it says that Abraham knew “that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead,” if need be. So Abraham got up the next morning bright and early. If I were Abraham, I would have slept in late. I’d not be eager to do what God was testing me with. He saddled his donkey, got the wood, got the knife, got Isaac and they set off on their journey to the land of Moriah.

When they got to the mountain, God spoke to Abraham and said that was the spot. They were going up the mountain when Isaac said, “My father! Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” And Abraham said to his son, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.” And God would give Himself on the Cross one day, in Christ, reconciling to world to Himself. Or it’s that God would provide—the name is Jehovah Jireh. God would provide His own sacrifice.

And we know that when Abraham lifted the knife—here’s the point of the test—God stopped him and said, “I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” Genesis 22:2 is the first place in the Bible where love is mentioned. And verse 12, showing Abraham’s obedience in willing to offer his son, is the first place where we see man’s obedience. So God blessed Abraham, multiplied him and used him for His glory. Maybe Abraham couldn’t understand, but he was obedient in that testing. It proved the value and

worth of his faith.

The second thing we need to remember in verse 3 is that my trials will make me strong in working patience, which is the same as “steadfast endurance.” It’s like steel that is strengthened when tried in the fire. Trials are for our good and for God’s glory. My good and God’s glory—remember that. If you value spiritual maturity and character, and you want to glorify God, then that’s all that matters. Not that the pain goes away, the sorrow goes away or God changes the circumstances, but God gives you strength to have steadfast endurance for your good and for His glory. Our trials will prove our faith and produce patience or steadfast endurance.

The “steadfast endurance” was used for someone walking in a strong headwind. You would lean into the wind and keep progressing against the wind. You wouldn’t let it blow you back, but you would lean into the wind in moving forward. So God wants to make you strong through your trials and testings. So we are to “count,” verse 2, and “know,” verse 3.

Then, number three, we must have a surrendered will, verse 4. So we have a joyful attitude, an understanding mind and we have a surrendered will. “But let...”—there’s the key word—“...patience...”—or “steadfast endurance”—“...have its perfect work, that you may be perfect...”—or “mature”—“...and complete, lacking nothing.” The key word “let” speaks of a surrendered will.

The great danger when we face trials is that we resist God and don’t let Him work His purposes and His plans in our lives. I’m convinced that many times we go through the same trial over and over, because we don’t learn our lesson. We don’t pass the test. If we would learn to let God have His way and His will, then we could move on and grow in our Christian life. We’re like clay and God is the potter.

When I was in high school, I had an arts-and-crafts class. One thing in that class I could never pull off was throwing a pot on the potter’s wheel. I’d get the clay just right, put in on the center of the wheel, but the minute the wheel began to turn—the minute I touched the clay—disaster struck. If I didn’t touch it, everything’s cool. The minute I touched the clay, it wobbled, flew off and hit the wall. So I put a couple of grooves in the clay and made an ashtray. My Mom got more ashtrays that year than ever before, and she didn’t smoke.

Aren’t you glad I’m not God? I like that song,

“Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!

Thou art the Potter, I am the clay.

Mold me and make me after Thy will,

While I am waiting, yielded and still.”

There’s nothing more powerful than having a group of believers singing that song as they sing it

to the Lord. "Lord, have Thine own way."

I don't know what you're going through. I don't know what you're facing. I don't know what trial you're in right now, but just pray this prayer:

"Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!

Thou art the Potter, I am the clay.

Mold me and make me after Thy will,

While I am waiting, yielded and still."

If we surrender to God, two things happen. First, verse 4 says we will grow up, "be perfect" or "mature." "Perfect" was used of fruit that is ripe. Secondly, we will be equipped to help others by "lacking nothing." So suffering equips us to serve.

Have you ever prayed that God would use you for His glory and for you to be a blessing to others? I have. Guess what happens? God sends trials. Because trials equip us for service.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the great preacher, said, "God gets His best soldiers from the highlands of affliction." I like that. If you want to bless others, you must bleed yourself. 2 Corinthians 1:4 says that God "comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

Have you ever gone to somebody for counselling when you were going through a trial or testing and they kind of looked at you like, "What's your problem? Why can't you get your act together?" It's as though they never had a problem. You don't want to go for encouragement to people who have never suffered when you're suffering. You don't want to go to them if they've never been through a trial.

I remember when I was a young pastor. It was difficult because I was young, hadn't experienced a lot of life, hadn't had many trials, so I would have difficulty identifying with people in their suffering and sorrow. Now, years later after the school of hard knocks and difficulties, God has prepared me, not only theologically and Biblically, but by my experience of life in humbling me to understand, be compassionate and sympathetic and "weep with those who weep" and understand their pain and sorrows.

So God is equipping you and training you.

Moses was out in the desert after fleeing from Egypt. He was 80 years old. It took 40 years for him to become something in Egypt. Then it was another 40 years to become nothing in the desert of Haran, so God could use him for His glory. Since God called Moses at the age of 80, there is hope for us.

God is preparing us for a greater sphere of service. If you want to be a blessing to others, you must go through sorrow and suffering and trials. It equips us to be lacking in nothing. How important that is.

Number four, we need to have a prayerful heart. We need to have a joyful attitude, verse 2; we need to have a knowing, understanding mind; we need to have a yielded and surrendered will, verse 4; and in verses 5-8, we need to have a prayerful heart. We need to pray properly when we suffer. "If any of you lacks wisdom..."—which is every one of us—"...let him ask of God..."—the key word here is "ask"—"...who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man..."—which means a man looking two ways at the same time—"...unstable in all his ways."

What is the one thing we need most when we're going through a trial? The Biblical answer is "wisdom." We usually want deliverance, healing, money to meet the mortgage, a job, the car to be fixed and the Lord to answer these prayers. But God wants us to have wisdom, so we won't waste the trial that God has allowed, that we'll understand its purpose and that we'll grow, to be used by God through it. So we pray for wisdom. But that's usually not what we want.

When Paul had a thorn in his flesh, in 2 Corinthians 12:7, he said, "Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure." God allowed Paul to be buffeted, because of his abundant revelations. Because of Paul's abundant blessings and revelations, God had to balance it down with trials and suffering. So God knows how to balance our lives.

A lot of people don't like this concept, but I believe that God allowed Paul—and it served God's purpose—to be buffeted physically. We don't know for sure what "the throne in the flesh" was, but it was "a messenger of Satan" to buffet Paul. And Paul tells us why he received it: "lest I should be exalted above measure." It was so Paul wouldn't get so proud that God couldn't use him. God allowed Paul to have pain in order to humble him. So God knows how to balance our lives.

But Paul did say that he prayed "three times." He asked God to take it away, take it away, take it away. He didn't say, "Thank you, Lord. Teach me, Lord." I usually pray like Paul: "Lord, get rid of it! Now! In Jesus' Name. Hallelujah!" I can't tell you how many times God has said "No" to my prayers.

Do you know that God always answers though? Did you know that "No" is an answer? You say, "Yeah, but I don't like that one. I want Him to do what I want Him to do when I want Him to do it! Do it right now; take it away!"

But the Lord told Paul that He would give Paul something else. God wouldn't take it away, but

He would give Paul His grace. God said, "My strength is made perfect in weakness." When Paul heard that he said, "I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me....For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Your weakness can be your greatest asset, if you allow it to draw you to Christ for strength. You need to pray properly. "God, give me wisdom; not to waste the trial, but to enlist the trial that it might work for me." Sometimes we'll say, "I'm praying that you're healed." But pray also for wisdom, in case God doesn't heal. The God who allows you to suffer and get sick can also heal you at any time He wants. But if He chooses not to, Job says, "I will still praise Him." Ask God to teach you what you're supposed to learn in the trial. Ask for wisdom to know how to use the trial you're going through.

Pray for wisdom, but number one, pray that God will teach you. Pray that He will teach you what He wants you to learn. Number two, pray that God will humble you, so you can be used. And number three, pray that God will wean you from the world. When you're suffering say, "God, teach me what You want me to learn. Humble me and wean me from the world." Then you can say,

"Thank God for the bitter things;

They've been a friend to grace.

They're driven me from the path of ease

To storm the secret place."

So you are driven to God in broken humility in prayer.

James gets us four encouragements, in verse 5, in prayer. First, God gives to all. Second, God gives liberally; He doesn't hold back. Third, God doesn't reproach us. Aren't you glad that when you pray, God doesn't say, "I'm sick of you! Quit asking. Leave Me alone. You asked Me to help you just the other day. Why are you calling out to me again?" No; He doesn't reproach us. Fourth, God will answer; "And it will be given to him." God always answers prayer. Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." In the Greek, this verse means to keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking. Be persistent in prayer, and the door shall be opened.

John Newton, when speaking of prayer, said,

"Thou art coming to a King,

Large petitions with thee bring.

For His grace and power are such

None could ever ask too much.”

God has a liberal hand, God will not reproach and God will give to those who ask Him.

But verses 6-8 say we are to ask in faith. “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” So when you come to God in prayer, “Believe that he is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” Grow in faith.

When we are tried and tested, we should have a joyful attitude, an understanding mind, a surrendered will, a prayerful heart and, number five, we should have our eyes on the prize. I’ve always liked this section of our text. James is still talking about trials.

Verses 9-10 say, “Let the lowly brother...”—referring to a poor man—“...glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away.” So there is a contrast here. A poor man in life’s trials is exalted, because of his spiritual blessings. But the rich man is humbled and brought into dependence upon spiritual blessings. So the poor is brought up and the rich is brought down.

Verse 11, “For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.”

It doesn’t matter whether you are rich or poor; we will all suffer. You can be the richest person in the world and still get sick and die of an incurable disease. Your money and your riches can’t save you in an hour of need. If you’re trusting in uncertain riches, you’re a fool. Trust in God. Put your faith in God and not in man nor in your riches.

So the rich man is humbled in his trials; the poor man is exalted, because he’s made rich in spiritual things.

I like what Warren Wiersbe said. “It’s not your material resources that take you through the trials of life; it’s your spiritual resources.” So don’t boast in your riches or your wealth; boast in the Lord, who takes care of us.

Now notice the blessings that come to us. Verse 12, “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

Our last key word is “love.” So we have “count,” verse 2; “know,” verse 3; “let,” verse 4; “ask,” verse 5; and “love,” verse 12.

The key to the Christian life is going through bitter experiences, which we will all pass through, and not becoming bitter. Going through the hardships of life and not becoming hard. Not

running but surrendering our will to God. Letting Him mold and make us. To use it for our good and for His glory.

So you need to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind.” No matter what you’re passing through, no matter what your difficulty is, loving the Lord makes life sweet. The same sun that melts wax hardens clay.

Maybe you’ve gone through a bereavement or loss. Maybe you’ve lost a job. Maybe you’ve lost your health or your wealth. But you can become soft, pliable and yielded to God, and He can mold you, make you and shape you after His will. What a marvelous truth that is.

In closing, there are three things I want to say. The “crown of life,” in verse 12, is the stephanos. It’s not the diadem; it’s not the kingly crown. There are two Greek words that are used for “crown” in the New Testament. “Diadem,” which is for a king or for royalty, and “stephanos”—we get our word “Stephen” from it—which is the victor’s crown. So when you run the race, you get a laurel wreath or a victor’s crown. It’s like getting a gold medal in the Olympics. It’s the stephanos, “which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” We get “the crown of life” when we’re tried.

There is a “blessed” beatitude in verse 12. It means “O, how happy...”—or “fortunate”—“...is the man who endures temptation.” Then God will give you “the crown of life.” There are three things I want to say about “the crown of life.” Number one, it’s Christ-like character right now, right here in this life. Number two, it’s the blessing of bringing glory to God right now, right here in this life. And number three, it’s eternal rewards in heaven.

So why should I endure hardships, trials and sufferings? First, because it makes me like Jesus Christ. I experience “the crown of life” or Christ-like character. Second, there are blessings in bringing glory to God. That should be what we all want. “Lord, let my life glorify You.” Third, the eternal rewards we get in heaven.

The Scriptures indicate that there will be some in heaven who will have greater joy than others. We’ll all be in heaven. And don’t freak out—it’ll be awesome. But there will be some people in heaven who will have greater joy, because they brought greater glory to God right now, right here before they died.

I don’t want to get to heaven and be disappointed. I don’t want to say when I get to heaven, “I should have prayed more. I should have served more. I should have loved You more. I should have surrendered more of my life to You.” I want to hear those words, “Well, done, good and faithful servant.”

So keep your values right. Value Christ-like character. Value glorifying God, whether it be through life or death. And value what God wants you to value so that when you get to heaven, you’ll hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”