

The Epistle of James

Lesson #2

September 26, 2021

James 1:2-8

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

- **In a few words, state the apparent theme of this passage.**
 - Perseverance in trials
- **Words to define:**
 - Count – reckon; consider; evaluate. Implies that one must make a conscious thoughtful effort to respond contrary to what is natural.
 - Trials – tribulation; temptations; difficulties; testing; suffering
 - Steadfastness – patience, endurance, perseverance
 - Patience feels passive. Perseverance and endurance feel more active.
 - Full effect – result; let endurance do its job
 - Perfect – complete; mature; lacking in nothing
 - I think of the fruit of the Spirit at this point – love, joy, peace, patience...
- **How would you define joy, and what do you think it means to respond with joy?**
 - Joy – not the same as happiness
 - Happiness depends on circumstances; joy arises from relationship.
 - Not necessarily celebrating.
 - Linked to peace, confidence, assurance
 - Rick Warren: “Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and the determined choice to praise God in every situation.”
- **Now restate the verse with these definitions in mind.**
 - *MY VERSION: My brothers and sisters, when you find yourself facing trials and temptations, don't be depressed or discouraged. Rather, consider this to be an occasion for joy, i.e. for settled assurance and quiet confidence in the Lord. The reason is this: the testing of your faith will actually produce endurance. And if you will let endurance do its job, you will find yourself growing more and more in spiritual maturity and Christlikeness.*
 - *AMPLIFIED BIBLE: Consider it nothing but joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you fall into various trials. Be assured that the testing of your faith through experience provides steadfastness and endurance and patience leading to spiritual maturity, and inner peace. And let endurance have its perfect result and do a thorough work, so that you may be perfect and completely developed in your faith, lacking in nothing.*
- **This idea of rejoicing in our trials (or suffering) is not unique to James. Here are a few other passages that deal with this issue.**
 - Matthew 5:11-12

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

- 1 Peter 4:12-14

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you

- Romans 5:1-5

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

- 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

- **What kinds of trials are common among people?**

- Health issues
 - short-term; long-term; mental health/depression
 - What if you are not the one with the issue, but you are the caregiver?
- Marriage problems
 - Do you think two sinners living under the same roof, who brought all their emotional and spiritual baggage with them, might experience a few trials from time to time?
- Financial issues – too little money; too much money
- Persecutions – severe; nuisance
- Would it be fair to say that all of life is a trial in one form or another?

- **What are some other – shall we say, less spiritual – ways we often respond to trials? Specifically, how do you normally respond to trials?**

- Anger, depression, rebellion, run away
- How about “grin and bear it”? Stoicism

- **What can happen if we respond wrongly to the trials in our lives?**

- They can become the source of bitterness, disappointment, and failing faith.
- They can even lead us to begin to doubt God.

- **One more thought:**

- Just like Romans 8:28 (“And we know that God causes...”), James 1:2-4 is not primarily intended to be a truth we reach out to in times of difficulty and trial, although it can be helpful in that regard.
 - But it’s better if it reflects our mindset. It should characterize our lifestyle.

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

- **In a few words, state the apparent theme of this passage.**
 - Ask God for wisdom
- **Words to define:**
 - Wisdom – practical truth; Proverbs; the quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgment
 - Wisdom has been defined as “the discipline of applying truth to one’s life in the light of experience.”
 - One thing to keep in mind; don’t overlook the fact this verse comes right after James’ instruction about how to think about trials.
 - Generously – enough or more than enough
 - Reproach – disapproval; disappointment; resentment
 - John Calvin essentially put it this way: God doesn’t mind if we keep coming back to him over and over again.
- **Now restate the verse with these definitions in mind.**
 - *MY VERSION: If you are facing a trial and are unsure what to do, ask God. He will not resent your asking. On the contrary He will generously give you the wisdom you seek in dealing with the challenge.*
- **Why should we ask for wisdom when we are going through a trial? Wouldn’t strength – or relief! – be better?**
 - We certainly want to know how to respond to the trial or test.
 - Wisdom is not just about knowing what to do; it is also about how to think about what is happening. How does this make me more mature?
 - I remember when I was a young Christian, I used to pray, “Lord, please help me to learn whatever lesson you have in mind for me in this test, because I sure don’t want to have to go through this again!”

6-8 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. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

- **In a few words, state the apparent theme of this passage.**
 - Don’t doubt; trust God.
- **Words to define:**
 - Faith – believing God will do what He has promised to do
 - Double-minded – wavering, undecided, vacillating; prone to change
 - A person who is double-minded is constantly saying, “Yeah, but...”
- **Now restate the verse with these definitions in mind.**
 - *MY VERSION: When you ask God for wisdom in facing a trial, believe that He wants to give it to you, and that He will give it to you. If you are wavering in unbelief, you should not expect to receive anything from God.*
- **What is wrong with doubting?**
 - Doubting reflects your opinion of God. You are basically saying you don’t think he will keep his promises.