

James 1

Life on this side of heaven will never fail to supply us with endless trials. If we compiled a list of the “various trials” that our Redemption community is walking through just today, it would be overwhelming. Some of us are experiencing mild agitation and inconveniences, while others are walking through soul crushing loss.

In this chapter, Jesus’ half brother James gives us insight into His heart for us as we cope with these hardships.

1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,

3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Consider it all joy, and let steadfastness have its full effect. The commands in these opening verses feel so counterintuitive when you are facing tragedy, loss, and pain.

As we endure, our attitudes, our character, our life, and our faith will become spiritually mature. The end goal of these trials is that we have a faith that is lacking in nothing, but that requires that we endure with Christ as our peace and comfort, rather than bailing out and looking to the world for coping mechanisms and escape from what is set before us.

Take a moment to identify the most difficult thing in your life right now. What is creating fear, anxiety, anger? And how can this passage apply to that situation?

“Consider it all joy”. This is an attitude. It is not a command to not be honest with God about how trials are effecting you. It’s a calculated response to choose to recognize the goodness of God in the midst of suffering, instead of choosing self-pity, whining, and blaming others. He has promised us He will never leave us or forsake us, and in these moments we have to choose to believe the character of God and cling to Him through worship and prayer.

Do we really believe what God has said about his presence and his purposes? That he will use it all to conform us to the image of Christ?

As we endure, our hope is that we can become more patient, more loving, more connected in our relationships. We will become more Christ-like through the process. That is our joy!

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

6 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.

7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;

8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

In verses 5-8, God anticipates our struggling with the commands in verses 1-4. Once we have set our minds on obeying those commands, we still may find ourselves feeling unsure about the next step to take. How do we discover God's will when we feel stuck?

If you are having trouble allowing God to work in your hard situation, the instruction here is to ASK God for wisdom! God knows that you are not always going to know what to do. What a weight off of our shoulders!

As this plays out practically in our lives, we should be asking God questions. Should I take this new job? Should we move to another city? Should we make this huge purchase? Where should we send our kids to school? Should I marry this person?

When verse 6 says "with no doubting", this isn't in relationship to our belief in God's existence. The word "doubt" here means "without a divided mind" or "without wavering". The command here is to seek wisdom from God, and THEN take the next step in faith to actually follow through with the wisdom He provides. We aren't commanded to ask God for his advice just so we can take it into consideration as we make our own decisions for our life.

When you come to God with a "double-mind", constantly wavering between wanting to follow His will or your own, you won't find the answers and peace that He has for you. "For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord."

If you are stuck in your situation right now, come to God with open hands and commit 100% to do whatever He shows you his will is.

Admit that you are stuck, admit that you cannot do it on your own, ask God for supernatural wisdom, and then be willing to do whatever God's wisdom demands.

We are bringing our deepest questions in life to a generous and giving God. We can trust that He is for us even when we are stuck. We have the freedom and responsibility to come to God and ask him for what we need!

9 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation,

10 and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away.

11 For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

Verses 9-10 call us to re-evaluate our circumstances through a lens of faith. By the standard presented here, the lowly man is exalted because he has a greater tendency toward faith. There is no plan B. He must completely rely on God to meet his needs. However, the rich man must be on guard because he will be prone to trust in himself rather than in God.

Whether we identify as the lowly man or the rich man in this scenario, we should take a step back and ask if we are placing our faith in things that are perishable or in things that are permanent?

When we fix our eyes on things that are unseen and imperishable, the promises of God and the hope of heaven, we can reframe the trials we are facing. Paul calls these trials “momentary, light afflictions”.

Is our primary motivation to love Christ and become like Him? Or simply to seek relief from the temporary affliction we are facing?

“Blessed is the man who perseveres”.

Jesus set an example of suffering that we may follow in his steps. May we suffer our trials with an attitude that honors him, so that people will see His love for us and begin to seek the source of our joy.

“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

Knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.”

2 Corinthians 4: 8-10, 14

-Amy Kennedy

