

### **Introduction**

Many people think they are Christians and claim to know God. Yet when severe difficulties come into their lives and expose the reality that they don't truly know Him and that they were unable to deal with the trials, their faith is revealed to be dead, non-saving faith. Without the resources available to those who believe in God, they forsake their involvement in Christianity.

Trials are intended to prod people out of their security and awaken them to the fact that they either trust God or don't in direst circumstances. Trials affirm the legitimacy of our faith or expose its illegitimacy. That is what James has in his mind in this opening section of his epistle. He is concerned throughout the entire epistle with the matter of living faith and offers a series of tests intended to reveal the legitimacy of someone's faith. The first test is the test of severe trials. We need to understand the strength or the genuineness of our own faith.

Trials cannot destroy true faith; they only put it to the test and strengthen it.

### **Review**

Trials have many purposes. God sends trials to humble us, to wean us from the world and focus on eternal things, to reveal the objects of our love, to teach us the value of God's blessing, to enable us to help others in their trials, to develop in us greater strength for greater usefulness, and to chasten us for our sin and push us toward perfection. James, however, is concerned with primarily one reason God sends trials: to test the genuineness of our faith. The question that James really answers is, How can true faith endure any trial and remain intact? He presents five means to persevering in trials that are characteristic of true faith.

#### I. A JOYOUS ATTITUDE (v. 2; see pp. xx-xx)

"My brethren, count it all joy, when ye fall into various trials."

#### II. AN UNDERSTANDING MIND (v. 3; see pp. xx-xx)

"Knowing this, that the testing of your faith worketh patience."

#### III. A SUBMISSIVE WILL (v. 4; see pp. xx-xx)

"Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing."

### **Lesson**

If you are a Christian who is experiencing a trial and desire to keep a joyous attitude, an understanding mind, and a submissive will, but are still struggling,

you probably lack the wisdom and the power to endure it. You need wisdom--the practical insight needed to face the circumstances of life. You'll not be able to maintain the first three elements of a living faith unless God gives you more than just your human faculties to work with.

#### IV. A BELIEVING HEART (vv. 5-8)

##### A. The Prayer for Wisdom (v. 5<sub>a</sub>)

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God."

##### 1. The response to trials

Divine wisdom is especially important when you are going through a trial and desiring to endure it for the holy purposes of God. Human reasoning will provide few answers.

Wisdom to any Jewish reader at the time this epistle was written was the understanding needed to live life to the glory of God. It directed one how to live in obedience to the will and the Word of God.

When a believer is being tested, he will recognize his need for strength and will look for a greater resource to hold on to in the midst of the trial--God Himself.

The search for wisdom is man's supreme search. For those of us who know and love the Lord, He provides that wisdom.

The kind of wisdom we are talking about is not philosophical speculation. We're talking about the absolutes of God's will, the divine wisdom that is pure and peaceable (James 3:17). Divine wisdom results in right conduct in all of life's matters. When some Christians go through troubles, their first response is often to run to some other human resource. Although God may work through other believers, the Christian's initial response to trials should be to ask God directly for wisdom that will allow you to be joyous and submissive in finding and carrying out God's will.

Verse 5 is a command to pray that is not optional for the Christian. It is as mandatory as Paul's instruction to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). Trials are intended to drive us to dependency on God by making us realize we have no sufficient human resources.

##### 2. The resource in trials

a) Proverbs 3:5-7--"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

Be not wise in thine own eyes." When you're going through a trial, you must put your faith in God's wisdom and not in you own limited understanding.

Trials have a way of enhancing your prayer life. They drive you to your knees to call on God for what you do not have and so desperately desire. God's intention is that you recognize the bankruptcy of human reason.

b) Job 28:12-23--"Where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Man knoweth not its price; neither is it found in the land of the

living. The depth saith, It is not in me; and the sea saith, It is not with me. It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price of it. It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it; and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral, or of pearls, for the price of wisdom is above rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold. Whence, then, cometh wisdom? And where is the place of understanding? Seeing it is hidden from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. Destruction and death say, We have heard its fame with our ears. God understandeth its way, and he knoweth the place of it."

The supernatural wisdom needed to understand the trials of life is not available in the world around us. If you need wisdom, you must acquire it from God. Job's friends meant well, but they didn't have the right answers. The right answers are available from God if we seek Him.

Seeking God for answers is more important than running to your friends or professional counselors for them. I believe the promise of wisdom for those who seek it is one of the greatest promises in all of Scripture. What more would we want than divine insight to understand and respond properly to every trial of life?

c) James 5:16-18--"The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not in the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." God responds to the prayers of His children.

If you're going through some deep trouble in your life and it hasn't enriched your prayer life, then maybe the trouble will keep going on until you finally wake up and begin to do that. Wisdom is available if we will but ask God for it.

#### B. The Provider of Wisdom (v. 5b)

"God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not."

We have a gracious God who desires to give us that which we desire. The word "liberally" means "unconditionally and generously, without bargaining." I believe God will provide the wisdom to understand any trial if we will ask Him. If we don't ask, the Lord may allow the trial to continue until we demonstrate that we have learned to be dependent on Him through the trial. "Upbraideth not" means that God will not scold us for requesting wisdom. On the contrary, He will hold back nothing, giving generously without reservation.

1. Proverbs 2:2-6--"Incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hidden treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding." While God makes wisdom available to those with a seeking heart, there's a sense in which He holds it back until you come and ask for it, demonstrating

your dependence on Him.

2. Jeremiah 29:11-14--"I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found by you, saith the Lord."

3. Matthew 7:7-11--"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you whom, if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father, who is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him?" When you go through a difficult trial, go to God in prayer. He will generously give you the wisdom you need to understand that trial and properly respond to it.

4. James 1:17--"Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." It is God's nature to give generously without reservation. He does not give reluctantly because of our unworthiness. He gives graciously because of His goodness.

#### C. The Promise of Wisdom (v. 5c)

"it shall be given him."

If you lack wisdom, you're commanded to ask God for it. No wisdom needed for the believer's perseverance through a trial is ever withheld from that believer who asks. Isn't that a wonderful promise? Sometimes we don't ask; we do everything but ask God. We ought to be found on our knees crying out from our hearts for God to give us His direction.

1. Psalm 81:10--"I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt; open thy mouth wide and I will fill it." God wants to provide every needed resource for a believer in the midst of trial.

2. Mark 14:38--"Watch ye and pray, lest you enter into temptation [trials]." Jesus cautioned his disciples about entering trials and allowing them to become temptations. Prayer can enable us to endure a trial victoriously as we cast ourselves in dependency on God.

#### D. The Prerequisite for Wisdom (vv. 6-8)

1. The condition for the seeker (v. 6a)

"But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering."

The believer's request for wisdom should be offered in confident trust in God. The word "wavering" conveys the idea of doubting, or more literally, someone who

is divided within himself as to his thinking. If he lacks wisdom, it's not God's fault. If you don't understand your trial--why your spouse died, your health is deteriorating, or your finances are a mess, or you are having problems with your car, your job, or your children--you probably haven't asked God with unwavering faith to give you wisdom. Perhaps you have prayed somewhat insincerely with wrong motives like those who James condemned as praying for things to consume on their lusts (4:3). Maybe you're not praying in accord with 1 Timothy 2:8, which says to pray "without wrath or doubting." You might be doubting whether God is able or willing to help. Unwavering faith simply believes that God is a sovereign, loving God who will supply everything needed for understanding the trial and being able to endure it. Whatever the trial is, you're to believe that God allowed it for His purpose and your spiritual maturity.

## 2. The contrast of the doubter (vv. 6b-8)

### a) The analogy (v. 6b)

"He that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed."

The wavering person who goes to God and doesn't really believe that God can provide the wisdom is like the billowing, restless sea, moving back and forth with its endless tides, never able to settle.

(1) Joshua 24:15--This mind-set is reminiscent of that which Joshua warned against when he addressed the Israelites, saying, "If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day who ye will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the river, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

(2) 1 Kings 18:21--Elijah condemned the Israelites for their wavering faith, saying, "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but is Baal, then follow him."

(3) 1 Corinthians 10:16-22--Paul condemned the Corinthians, some of whom were still involved in pagan worship and then participating in the Lord's Table.

(4) Revelation 3:16--People who claim to be Christians but vacillate back and forth in their faith are like the lukewarm people who are neither hot nor cold, whom the Lord will spew out of His mouth. Such wavering people who fail to cling to God in confident trust are like the surging sea.

### b) The anticipation (v. 7)

"Let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord."

There's no sense in such a person supposing he will receive anything from the Lord.

The one who doubts God and isn't solidly committed to Him is characteristic of an unbeliever or even a weak Christian who's acting like an unbeliever. When faced with a trial, an unbeliever who professes to know Christ will doubt God and get angry with Him and eventually sever his association with a church. A true Christian who is spiritually immature may respond in a similar manner because he reacts

emotionally to his difficult circumstances and doesn't fully trust God. In the midst of trial he will not experience a joyous attitude, an understanding mind, a submissive will, or a believing heart. He will seem unable to ask for wisdom from God and unwilling to take advantage of the resources He has provided, never knowing the resolution available to him through faithful, persistent prayer to God.

c) The analysis (v. 8)

"A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways."

Being "double-minded" (Gk., dipsuchos) is the state of having one's soul or mind divided between God and the world. James 4:4, 8 says, "Friendship of the world is enmity with God .... Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded." A double-minded person is a hypocrite who believes in God periodically but when trials come he fails to place in trust in God and therefore receives nothing. Loving the world and trying to love God at the same time is impossible.

When you enter a trial, you will be able to endure it when you receive divine wisdom, having the confidence that God gives freely without holding back anything that is necessary to have victory in it. The condition is that your faith be unwavering.

Otherwise you will not only be unstable in every area of life, but you will not receive the wisdom you have requested. True stability in life comes to those who trust God in the midst of a trial.

V. A HUMBLE SPIRIT (vv. 9-11)

A. The Exaltation of the Poor (v. 9)

"Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted."

This is a command for the poor Christian to rejoice. The scattered Jewish believers to whom James wrote (v. 1), were victims of persecution and deprivation, so poverty among them would have been common. The Greek word translated "low degree" is used in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, to refer to the financially poor. "Rejoice" refers to the boasting of a privilege or a possession.

It is the joy of legitimate pride. The poor Christian may have nothing in the material world to rejoice about, but he can rejoice in that he is exalted in the spiritual realm in his standing before God. He may be hungry, but he has the Bread of Life. He may be thirsty, but he has the Living Water. He may be poor but he has eternal riches. He may be cast aside by men but he has been received by God.

He may have no home here but he has a glorious home in the life to come. And in this life he may have trials, but God is using them to perfect and exalt him spiritually.

So, the Christian who is deprived can accept his trials because of the knowledge that God is exalting him spiritually through those difficult circumstances and the hope of receiving an incorruptible and undefiled inheritance that will never fade away (1 Pet. 1:4). Paul said that as children of God we are "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ--if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not

worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us [when we are resurrected] (Rom. 8:16-17). True riches are ours, so poverty is a short-lived trial that can be endured as we look ahead to a glorious time of exaltation. Don't find your joy in worldly circumstances and possessions or you will surely be disappointed if things change and you lose them. Rather, find your joy in the fact that God saved you and is moving you toward Christlikeness until you enter His presence.

## B. The Humiliation of the Rich (vv. 10-11)

### 1. The acknowledgement of eternal values (v. 10<sub>a</sub>)

"But the rich, in that he is made low."

The well-to-do Christians, who don't seem to experience the trials of life related to poverty, can rejoice in their humiliation, because the trials they experience help them realize that their possessions can't buy true happiness and contentment and that their dependence is on the true riches of God's grace.

The poor Christian rejoices in the provision of God for his material needs and in the wealth of his spiritual position in Christ (Eph. 1:3), and the rich Christian in the humbling that reveals that material blessings are only temporary and that spiritual riches are eternal. Both social classes of Christians can rejoice that God is no respecter of persons and that they have the privilege of being identified with Christ. Trials humble all believers to the same level of dependency on God.

Money doesn't buy people out of their problems, although it may solve some economic ones. Whether to the poor or the rich, trials come into life to humble us to the point of recognizing our resources are in God.

The great Lutheran commentator, Lenski, said, "Faith in Christ lifts the lowly brother beyond his trials to the great height of a position in the Kingdom of Christ, where as God's child he is rich and may rejoice and boast. Faith in Christ does an equally blessed thing for the rich brother: it fills him with the Spirit of Christ, the spirit of lowliness and true Christian humility . . . . As the poor brother forgets all his earthly poverty, so the rich brother forgets all his earthly riches. The two are equals by faith in Christ" (The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1966], pp. 534-35).

Equality is driven home through trials. When you lose a daughter, son, wife, or husband, it doesn't matter how much money you have. No amount is going to buy your way out of such a trial. Trials bring us to the same level of dependency on God and thus to the same level with each other. So we do not preoccupy ourselves with earthly things. We should not exalt those who have much over those who have little because earthly possessions are inadequate to buy us what we need spiritually.

### 2. The analogy of temporal values (vv. 10<sub>b</sub>-11)

"As the flower of the grass, he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and its flower falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth; so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways."

Rich people in general are usually not aware that their riches can't be taken with them. Only the rich who have been humbled before God realize that life is "a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (James 4:14). The picture James paints is of the flowering grasses and flowers of Palestine (e.g., the anemone, the cyclamen, and the lily) that flourish with beautiful color in February and are dried up by May.

James borrows part of his illustration from Isaiah 40:6-8. He literally says the burning heat, which could refer to the scorching wind known as a sirocco, destroys the vegetation in its path. That is illustrative of the fury of death and judgment of God that put an end to the rich man's earthly life and his material possessions.

The rich man should rejoice in his trouble because it divorces him from dependency on his material resources. When they are burned up, he will have the true riches, just like the poor man does. The wealthy Christian has a true spirit of humility that says, "I don't put my trust in the possessions of life, which passes so fast."

So, a Christian facing trials is to have a joyous attitude, an understanding mind, a submissive will, a believing heart, and a humble spirit that trusts not in his possessions but values the provision of God and His heavenly reward.

#### **Focusing on the Facts**

1. What do many unbelievers do who claim to be Christians when they encounter trials that reveal their lack of faith (see p. 1)?
2. What is the purpose for trials in relation to our sinning (see p. 1)?
3. Briefly describe wisdom (see p. 2).
4. When a believer is being tested, what will he recognize and look for (see p. 2)?
5. Although God may work through other believers, where should Christians initially seek wisdom (see p. 2)?
6. Trials are intended to drive us to \_\_\_\_\_ on God by making us realize we have no \_\_\_\_\_ human resources (see p. 2).
7. If you are going through a trial that has not caused you to seek God in prayer, what may happen (see p. 3)?
8. Describe God's character that should be an incentive for us to ask Him for wisdom (v. 5; see p. 3-4).
9. According to Jeremiah 29:11-14, how did God say He and His will would be found (see p. 4)?
10. How should the believer request wisdom from God (v. 6a; see p. 5)?
11. What analogy does James use for a doubting person? What can such a person expect

to receive from God (see p. 6)?

12. What is the "double-minded" person's loyalty divided between? What kind of friendship constitutes enmity with God (James 4:4; see p. 6)?

13. Identify "the brother of low degree" (James 1:9). Why can such a one rejoice (see p. 7)?

14. Why can a rich Christian rejoice in having been spiritually humbled (see p. 8)?

15. Explain how trials reveal the equality of poor and rich Christians (see p. 8)?

### **Pondering the Principles**

1. When a trial comes into your life, do you automatically seek God's wisdom for what He wants you to learn by it and how to properly handle it? If not, maybe you haven't established a close relationship with the Lord during the good times.

When He becomes your best friend, it will only be natural for you to seek Him for comfort and guidance when troubles arise. James 5:13 commands us to pray when we are suffering. And if we have fallen to the point where we are so spiritually weak that we can't pray effectively, verse 14 instructs us to call the spiritually strong to pray for us and the promise of the Lord in verse 15 is that He will restore our strength. Verse 16 encourages us to share our burdens and any sins that would destroy Christian unity and to support one another in prayer. Are you daily utilizing the power of prayer to maintain your spiritual strength so that when a trial comes along you will be better prepared to handle it?

2. Meditate on Ephesians 1-2 and 1 Timothy 6:6-12. If you are a Christian with limited financial means you can rejoice in the wealth of your spiritual position in Christ.

Rather than making it your life ambition to acquire the wealth that the well-to-do Christian has been blessed with, seek to have an attitude of contentment as you pursue godliness. If you are financially secure, you can rejoice in that God has graciously chosen you to be a child of His Kingdom. Rather than being preoccupied with trying to conserve your wealth for you and your family, invest it into the Kingdom. Make sure that you are actively involved in ministry yourself, and are not merely giving your money to the Lord to avoid giving yourself.

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