

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 1-4-15 AM NOTES
"WISDOM IN TRYING TIMES"
JAMES 1:1-4
#1 in Series, "James: Practical Wisdom"

Proverbs 18:5 (NKJV) "*It is not good to show partiality to the wicked, or to overthrow the righteous in judgment.*"

James 2:1 (NKJV) "My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with partiality."

Mark 6:3a (NKJV) "Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?"

James 1:2 (KJV) "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations."

James 1:13 (NKJV) "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone."

I. Count—Choose Joy in Trials (v. 2)

A. The Certainty of Trials

Job 14:1 (NKJV) "Man *who is* born of woman is of few days and full of trouble."

John 16:33b (NKJV) "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Acts 14:22 (NKJV) "strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *saying*, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.'"

1 Peter 4:12 (ESV) "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."

"We must always be ready to meet at our average moment anything that any possible enemy could hurl against us at his selected moment."
—Winston Churchill

B. The Diversity of Trials

1 Peter 1:6 (NIV) "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials."

C. The Choice Made in Trials

Hebrews 12:2 (NKJV) "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

1 Peter 1:6-7 (NKJV) "⁶In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Matthew 5:11-12 (NKJV) "¹¹Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹²Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

II. Know—See God's Perspective of Trial (v. 3)

A. We Must Know What the Trials Test

Job 23:10 (HCSB) "Yet He knows the way I have taken; when He has tested me, I will emerge as pure gold."

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.*

—William Cowper (1774)

Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV) "But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

"A faith that has not been tested cannot be trusted."

—Warren Weirsbe

B. We Must Know What Trials Produce

Philippians 2:12b (NKJV) "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

"In the Bible, *patience* is not a passive acceptance of circumstances. It is a courageous perseverance in the face of suffering and difficulty."

—Warren Weirsbe

Romans 5:3b (NKJV) "...also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance."

III. Let—We Must Surrender to God's Purpose (v. 4)

The only way *out* of a trial is *through* it.

A. God's Purpose Is Our Perfection

2 Corinthians 12:8-9 (NKJV) ⁸Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. ⁹And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

B. God's Purpose Is That We Might be Complete

"Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my seventy-five years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness, whether pursued or attained."

—Malcolm Muggeridge

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"WISDOM IN TRYING TIMES"
JAMES 1:1-4
#1 in Series, "James: Practical Wisdom"

Today, we begin a journey that will last 3-5 months of traveling verse by verse through the book of James. It is difficult to find a main theme in the book of James, but I think that it is primarily a book about practical wisdom. In this study, we will gain practical wisdom about trials, poverty, riches, materialism, favoritism, social justice, our speech, worldliness, boasting, praying, what to do when we are sick, and lots of other areas that we deal with in everyday life. It seems that the burden that the Holy Spirit has laid on James' heart as he is inspired by the Spirit to write this book is that real faith works! It works its way out into every area of life. A "faith" that doesn't affect every area of your life is a dead faith and dead faith saves no one. The book of James screams out, "Live out what you believe!" Of the 108 verses in James, 59 of them are commands.

One of the things you will notice as we go verse by verse through James is its similarity to the Old Testament book of Proverbs. James, like Proverbs goes quickly from one subject to another giving practical godly wisdom. Allow me to give you just one example of the similarity. **Proverbs 18:5 (NKJV)** "It is not good to show partiality to the wicked, or to overthrow the righteous in judgment." **James 2:1 (NKJV)** "My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with partiality." Both Proverbs in the Old Testament and James in the New Testament major on practical wisdom in the everyday life of the believer.

Let's look at the first verse of James as an introduction to the book. Most all conservative Bible scholars agree that the human author the Holy Spirit inspired to write this book is James, the half brother of Jesus. After the virgin birth of Christ, Mary and Joseph had other children. In several places, the Bible speaks of Jesus' brothers and sisters. One example is **Mark 6:3a (NKJV)** "Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?" You would think that James would have introduced himself in verse 1 as "James, the half brother of Jesus". In addition, James was the leader of the church in Jerusalem – the first church. Instead of "James the brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church", James calls himself a servant – literally a slave – of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Think of it: James grew up in the same house with Jesus. They ate together, played together and worked together in Joseph's carpenter shop. Yet, when he introduces himself, it is James the slave of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

James writes as a slave of Jesus and God the Father to the scattered. The church in Jerusalem had been scattered because of persecution kicked off with the stoning of Stephen (led by Saul of Tarsus who became the Apostle Paul). The early church was made up of primarily Jewish converts until after Cornelius was saved as is recorded in Acts 10. James is addressing the church that is scattered throughout the Roman Empire.

That's enough introduction; let's look at this very important text that focuses on wisdom related to the trials that the church goes through both individually and corporately. In verse 2, most translations use the word "trials", but the KJV says in **James 1:2 (KJV)** "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations". Which is correct? Were these Christians going through trials or temptations? Actually **the Greek word for trial and temptation is the same word**. The context helps us determine which way it should be translated. Generally, if the problem is on the outside, it is translated "trials" and if it is an inner struggle the translation is usually "temptation". A trial or test is some circumstance or action that God engineers or at least permits to prove us, purify us, and perfect us. Temptation is an enticement to sin and though God allows us to be tempted within the limits He sets, He is never the source of that temptation. **James 1:13 (NKJV)** "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone." While the translation of verse 2 in the KJV is not wrong, I think that the context clearly calls for the translation "trials" or "tests". To those who are going through trials, James has 3 commands that are summarized by 3 words – "Count", "Know", and "Let".

I. Count – Choose Joy in Trials (V2)

Remember that James was writing to Christians who had been driven from their homes and possessions, people who were being exploited by the wealthy, people who were being slandered and drug into court

because of their faith. James classifies all of these injustices as “trials” or “tests”. The word that is translated “trials” has the basic meaning of trying, testing, or proving. The Greek word has the meaning of testing something with the desire to see the quality of it. The verbal form of the word denotes the action of putting something to the test. The word was used of testing metals such as gold or silver to determine how pure they were and how much they were alloyed with impurities. Let’s look more closely at these trials or testings.

A. The Certainty of Trials

Notice the wording. It is “when” you fall into various trials. Christians **will be** tried or tested. The trials may originate with the Father or they may originate with the evil one, but even those that originate with the evil one are allowed by God and used to fulfill His purposes. Those who present Christianity as a pass that exempts one from trials and troubles and tests have a closed Bible, blinded eyes, and an empty head. Look at just a few of the many promises and warnings that we will go through trials. **Job 14:1 (NKJV)** “Man *who is* born of woman is of few days and full of trouble.” **John 16:33b (NKJV)** Jesus said, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” **Acts 14:22 (NKJV)** “strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *saying*, ‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.’” **1 Peter 4:12 (ESV)** “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.” That’s just a few of the multitude of passages in both the Old and New Testaments that tell us to expect trials and tests. Smiling preachers on TV may jerk Bible verses out of context and tell you that you can have the favor of God on your finances and dreams and avoid the trials of life if you will just dare to dream and believe, but they are lying to you. **You will go through trials** and Peter even calls them “fiery” trials in 1 Peter 4:12. Trials are not electives in God’s school of life; they are required courses. As we will see more in depth in a moment, God loves you so much that He allows trials in your life to reveal things in your life that need dealt with, to purify you, and to perfect you. It is only trials that can jolt us out of the ruts we tend to fall into. Rest in the fact that our trials are never out of control because they are under God’s control.

This world is a place of constant testing through trials.

B. The Diversity of Trials

The word translated “various” literally means multicolored. In **1 Peter 1:6 (NIV)** it is translated, “all kinds of trials.” Your trial may be a blister on your finger or an aneurism in your brain; it may be that you’ve lost your wallet or lost your business; it may be that your plans for the day are ruined or that your lifetime dreams have been crushed; it may be the trial of losing your pet or losing your spouse. There are many degrees of trials with much diversity, but the fact is that you will not escape trials. The unique trials are allowed in your life to accomplish the call and plans God has for your life.

C. The Choice Made in Trials

The word translated “count” in verse 2 means to evaluate or consider. What is it that we are to consider? We are to consider the trials and **think forward** to what God is doing through them. The result is to rejoice, to choose joy in the Lord. Our joy is not in the trial, but in the Lord who is using the trial! Jesus Himself gave us an example of this in **Hebrews 12:2 (NKJV)** “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Jesus took joy in **thinking forward** beyond the cross to the result of the cross – a blood bought church, an eternal bride, a redeemed people that the Father would give Him for eternity. Jesus endured the agony of the cross and even though He despised the shame, He took joy in what the Father would do through His agony and shame. Even so, we are to look beyond the pain of the trial to see the result on the other side of the trial. We **think forward** and take joy in what He is doing and will do through the trial. We see this same truth in different words in **1 Peter 1:6-7 (NKJV)** “⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ”. Jesus said the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount in **Matthew 5:11-12 (NKJV)** “¹¹ Blessed are you

when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” The rejoicing comes as we **think forward** to the results of the trial.

First, we are to count, to consider and then choose joy as we **think forward** from the trial.

II. Know – See God’s Perspective of Trial (V3)

Some would say (and I agree) that wisdom is getting God’s perspective on everything we may be dealing with. If we would have wisdom in trying times, we need God’s perspective on the trials that we face. The word translated “knowing” carries the idea of full understanding that most often comes from experience.

A. We Must Know What the Trials Test

Again, the word “testing” primarily means to prove genuineness. As I mentioned earlier, this Greek word was used for refining metals. We see the concept of testing through trials in **Job 23:10 (HCSB)** “Yet He knows the way I have taken; when He has tested me, I will emerge as pure gold.” What we know is that God stands behind every trial to work out his plan to purify and perfect us. William Cowper said it beautifully when he wrote these words in 1774:

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.*

Cowper was saying that we can’t correctly judge what God is doing when we look only at our circumstances, at the trials we are going through. We must trust Him that He knows what He is doing and that **His grace is directing His actions**. Even though His providential working in the trial seems to present a God that frowns at us, we know the truth that behind that frowning providence (working) is a smiling face of the Lord of grace who loves us and desires the best for us.

Exactly what do the trials test? They test our faith. **Hebrews 11:6a (NKJV)** “But without faith *it is impossible to please Him...*” Someone (Warren Weirsbe, I think) said, “**A faith that has not been tested cannot be trusted.**” How do you know that your faith is genuine? You know it is genuine when it stands and even grows stronger in times of trial. Faith says that God is at work through my trials and testing even when I don’t feel it. It’s easy to believe God when everything is going comfortably and everything is working the way that we want it to. But we know that our faith is genuine and that it stands when we are going through trials and we still trust Him and take joy in Him. In addition to proving our faith genuine, the trials strengthen our faith

B. We Must Know What Trials Produce

We see that our trial produces patience. The Greek word translated patience is translated “steadfastness” and “endurance” and “perseverance” in other translations. I think that “perseverance” is probably the best translation. Perseverance is very important to the Lord. He honors those that persevere and don’t give up. The word translated “produces” is interesting. It means to work something out. That same word is used in **Philippians 2:12b (NKJV)** “... **work out** your own salvation with fear and trembling”. Warren Weirsbe said it well. “In the Bible, *patience* is not a passive acceptance of circumstances. It is a courageous perseverance in the face suffering and difficulty.” [Warren Weirsbe, *Be Mature*, page 25]. The only way to develop patience or perseverance is through trials. **Romans 5:3b (NKJV)** “...we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance”. Perseverance doesn’t come through reading the Bible through (as important as that is); perseverance doesn’t come through listening to sermons and reading good books about the Bible. Perseverance comes as we go through trials and count them all joy.

We must know that trials test or prove our faith and that trials alone produce perseverance.

There is something that we need to **count**. There is something we need to **know**.

III. Let – We Must Surrender to God’s Purpose (V4)

The only way out of a trial is through it. The Lord doesn't promise to get us out of trials; He promises to walk with us through them. The purpose for allowing the trials is short-circuited unless we surrender to Him and let Him have His way in the trial. God is sovereign, but He doesn't treat us as robots. We must choose to refuse bitterness, anger, and self pity through the trials and choose to let Him work out His purposes as we walk through the trial with Him. You can always tell the people who have not "let Him" use the trial. They are typically angry, bitter people who define themselves by the trials. Are you bitter toward the trials you are going through or have gone through? I am calling you to repentance today. Until you repent, you will never experience the glorious benefits God has for you that the trial was designed to bring.

What is the purpose of trials that God allows us to walk through? There are two purposes given in verse four.

A. God's Purpose Is Our Perfection

The word translated "perfect" does not mean sinless; it means to be fully developed. An oak tree is a perfected acorn. Some translations translate it "mature". Again, this word does not mean sinless, but a person who is being perfected will sin less. To be perfect is to be being conformed to the likeness of Christ. Notice the sequence here. First we find ourselves in the middle of a trial (financial, physical, or relational). In the trial, our faith is tested. Are we going to think forward and see the result of the trial or do we become angry and bitter that the trial came? As we submit to God's working through the trial, we begin to experience endurance or patience as we go through the trial instead of running away from it. The result is that we are perfected, matured, made more like Christ. Paul uses this same word in **2 Corinthians 12:8-9 (NKJV)** "⁸ Concerning this thing [his thorn in the flesh] I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me [God did not take the trial away, but chose to use the trial in Paul's life]. ⁹ And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect [same root word that is used in James 1:4] in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Paul chooses to cooperate with what God desires to accomplish through the trial – to let Him do what He chooses. Apart from trials, there is no spiritual maturity.

B. God's Purpose Is That We Might be Complete

The word translated "complete" was used to describe an animal that had been examined and deemed approved to be sacrificed. It means having nothing lacking; having everything functioning as it was intended. Have you ever wished you could just get your life together? One of the ways God chooses to bring that about in your life is through trials. He has allowed the trial to make you perfect (mature) and complete.

CONCLUSION

Malcolm Muggeridge said, "Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my seventy five years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness, whether pursued or attained." [Quoted in David Platt, *Christ Centered Exposition, James*, page 7].

When trials come, don't give in to the temptation to become bitter. Count it all joy, know that the testing has the purpose of God behind it, and let God accomplish His purposes in you.