



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 (**James 1:12**).

Devotional

One of the more interesting aspects of the book of James is that in many places, the phrasing of James's teaching sounds close to the sayings of Jesus, particularly as recorded in the gospel according to Matthew. It seems clear that our author knew the teaching of Jesus firsthand, giving further support to the view that the James who wrote this letter was the brother of the Lord Himself.

Today's passage is an excellent example of this. We are told that those who remain steadfast under trial will be blessed to receive the crown of life promised to those who love God (James 1:12). This wording closely matches Jesus' statement in Matthew 24:13 where we are told that only those who endure to the end will be saved.

This verse provides a corrective to those who might think that James is not very concerned with theology, for here we see that he has much to say about the doctrine of perseverance. Only those who pass through trials with steadfastness will inherit eternal life. Only those who stand firm through these things will be saved.

This is not to say that in the final analysis salvation rests on our ability. The Bible clearly shows that we cannot save ourselves and that only the sovereign electing and preserving grace of God will bring us into His presence (Psalm 69:13–15; Romans 8:29–30; Philippians 1:6). Nevertheless, the presence of God's electing grace in our lives is demonstrated by the fact that we cling to Him in our trials. We know that we have true faith only as we work out our salvation in fear and trembling, resting our hope of salvation on Christ alone (Philippians 2:12–13).

Those who face trials and in the end fall away demonstrate that they never had true faith from the beginning. On the other hand, those with true faith heed this teaching. They will be able to count it joy when their faith is tested because they know such tests will produce steadfastness (James 1:2–4). They will ask God for wisdom without doubting (vv. 5–8) so that they will be able to pass through the trials

brought by poverty or by riches. As James has already shown us, and will further explain, authentic faith deals with affliction by persevering, ever clinging to Christ in the midst of trial.

CORAM DEO (In the Presence of God)

What are the trials in your life? Are you currently facing some sort of persecution for your faith in Christ? Do you find yourself suffering from an illness? Is a lack of money causing you to doubt, or is the fact that you lack nothing causing you to rely more on yourself than on God? Whatever your circumstances may be, go to the Lord in prayer, and ask Him for the courage to stand firm in the midst of trial. Then go and encourage others to cling to Christ in their trials as well.¹

Open it

1. From whom have you sought advice? Why have you chosen this person?

Read it

JAMES 1:1-11

Explore it

2. What should our response to trials be?
3. To whom should we turn when we lack wisdom?
4. What does this promise of wisdom hinge upon?
5. What does the Christ follower receive when he passes the test?

¹Ligonier Ministries Devotional found @ <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/crown-life/>

Apply it

James begins by reminding us that sooner or later (probably sooner) we will all face trials of various sorts. The word “face” has the idea of falling or stumbling over a problem. Picture someone driving down the highway in a convertible. The top is down, the music is blaring, and the driver is having a blast. Not a problem in the world, not a care or a concern. Without warning there is a sudden jolt, the car swerves to the right and comes to a halt. What happened? The car hit a massive pothole and suddenly the happy journey is over. Life is like that for all of us. No matter who we are or where we live, trouble is just a phone call away. A doctor may say, “I’m sorry. You’ve got cancer.” Or the voice may inform you that your daughter has just been arrested. Or you may be fired without warning. Or someone you trusted may start spreading lies about you. Or your husband may decide he doesn’t want to be married anymore. The list is endless because our trials are “multi-colored” and “variegated” (the phrase “many kinds” has this idea behind it).²

6. What are some “multi-colored trials” that you have faced in your past? Did you see these trials coming in advance or did they come unexpectedly?
7. James 1:2–12 gives us a glimpse into the reality of life as a Christian. How can knowing that first-century believers and even relatives of Jesus struggled and suffered with trials give you hope when they come your way?

How, then, should we respond to these hard times that suddenly come to us? James offers what appears to be a strange piece of advice: “Consider it pure joy” or “Count it all joy” (KJV). That sounds so odd that one wonders if he is serious. “Count it all joy? Are you nuts? Do you have any idea what I’ve just been through?” It does sound rather idealistic, if not downright impossible. I confess to being bothered by this so I decided to check it out in the Greek. No help there. The word “joy” means ... joy. Pretty simple. So I decided to check out some other translations. One version says, “Be very glad” and another says, “Consider yourselves fortunate.” That didn’t help at all, so I turned to the translation of J. B. Phillips, hoping for some light (if not a way of escape). This is how he handles verse 2: “When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives, my brothers, **don’t resent them as intruders, but welcome them**

² Sermon by Ray Pritchard entitled Handbook For Hard Times found @ <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/handbook-for-hard-times/>

as friends!” As I have pondered the matter, and considered my own difficulties with this concept, the thought occurs that “counting it all joy” when troubles come is not a natural response. If we want a natural response, we can talk about anger or despair or complaining or getting even or running away. It isn’t “natural” to find joy in hardship. But that’s the whole point.

James isn’t talking about a “natural” reaction. He’s talking about a “supernatural” reaction made possible by the Holy Spirit who enables us to see and to respond from God’s point of view. I conclude, then, that counting it all joy is a conscious choice we make when hard times come. Truthfully, it’s probably a choice we’ll have to make again and again and again. And to do it we’ll have to take the long view of life, to understand that what we see is not the final chapter of the story. If we can make the choice to view life that way, then we can make the following statements about our struggles and our trials:

1) This is sent from the Lord.

2) This is necessary for my spiritual growth.³

8. James calls us to put the spiritual ahead of the emotional when trials come our way. How does this reversal change the way we respond to trials?

9. How have your feelings short-circuited your obedience to God in times of trials?

10. How does knowing God approves the trials we face and uses them for our spiritual growth encourage us to confront our trials head on rather than running from them in fear?

³ ibid

need hope, we will have it. If we need love, we will have it. If we need any of the nine-fold fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23), it will be produced in us. Nothing will be left out; nothing will be left behind.⁵

13. What are some promises that God has given us in the following passages that enable us to persevere in times of trials? Describe a time in your life where you have seen one of these passages come to life.

Romans 8:28

Romans 8:37

Deuteronomy 31:6

Psalms 46:1–3

Isaiah 59:19

NOW IF ANY OF YOU LACKS WISDOM, HE SHOULD ASK GOD (v. 5a).

Let's start with the "if." "If any of you lacks wisdom." That's a perfectly good translation that I would like to change to something like "when you lack wisdom" or "since you lack wisdom." It's not as if James is saying, "Well, you're smart enough to handle most of life on your own, but now and then you'll face a problem. Be sure and ask God for help." That's true in one sense, but it's misleading.

We're not as smart as we think we are. We're not as clever as we think we are. We're not as wise as we think we are. We always need God's help. We don't need God's wisdom some of the time. **We desperately need God's wisdom all the time.**⁶

14. If James is true in his assessment about our need for wisdom, how should this change our approach to the daily events of our lives, including the trials we face?

We are all a bundle of conflicting desires. We want to serve God, but we have our own plans. We want to be gracious, but we trample on anyone who gets in our way. We save our money only to spend it on foolish things.

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Sermon by Ray Pritchard entitled **How to Receive God's Wisdom** found @ <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/how-to-receive-gods-wisdom/>

as a child of God. On the other hand, if you are rich, be careful. Trials will remind you that money can't solve your problems, and all of the stuff you fill your life with can't cover up your hurts.

One day all that stuff is going to be burned in the fire, and you're going to have nothing left. Will your life be built on those physical resources or on the spiritual resources only God can provide?⁸

18. Why are we so quick to run to our riches in times of trials rather than to God? How are the poor at greater advantage than the rich in times of trouble?

We learn to live for His reward. James closes this section in verse 12 by saying the man who endures trials is "blessed," which is just one of many examples in the book of James where he deliberately alludes to the Sermon on the Mount. The key to understanding this whole book is realizing that James is leaning heavily on Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. When James talks about the "crown of life" that the man who endures will receive, there are two ways to misunderstand this image.

First, don't picture some "gem-studded headpiece worn by kings or queens": most original readers of this letter would have heard this word and immediately thought about the wreath that would be put on an athlete's head at the end of a race he won (Moo, James, 70). The picture here is that of running through the trials of this life victoriously to receive this crown.

Second, the crown of life should not simply be thought of as a physical crown with great splendor. No, the crown is actually a symbol of receiving the glorious reward of eternal life. At the end of these trials, God meets us with life, eternal life. So consider it joy because trials remind you that you are living for a reward to come. Paul puts it this way in 2 Corinthians 4: 17: "For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory."⁹

19. Enduring a trial God's way results in a glorious future. How does this truth allow us to persevere no matter the trials we face?

20. What trial are you facing today that you could use God's help with? Share this with your group so they can lift you up in prayer.

⁸ Platt, David. Exalting Jesus In James (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (Kindle Locations 184-191). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

⁹ ibid