

A Study in James
Part 2 – “Face Your Trials”
James 1:1-11

The Christian life can be full, satisfying, and truly joyful; but it will never be easy! Christians, in addition to sharing the suffering and sorrows common to all men, must often endure trials and hardships inflicted upon them because of their relationship with Christ. It is not surprising as we begin this study of *James*, that the brother of our Lord begins the main body of his letter with counsel regarding the facing and conquest of trials in the Christian life.

TAKE YOUR BIBLES, PLEASE...

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings. 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. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. 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. Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. 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. (James 1:1-11 ESV).

James' readers are *the twelve tribes in the Dispersion*. They had been forced to leave their homes and lands. They had been scattered across the known world by the severe persecutions from those who opposed their religious faith. None could argue that they were walking through tremendous trials and difficulties. They looked and found very few answers. Much the same as we find today when we are trudging through day after day of challenge in our complex culture. **The answer rests in attitude.**

Robert Louis Stevenson, the great Scottish novelist and author of Treasure Island, before the days of antibiotics, when he was bedridden with tuberculosis (known as “the consumption”) never let his optimism lag. It is reported once when his wife heard him hacking badly, she said to him, “I expect you still believe it is a wonderful day!” Stevenson looked at the rays of the sunshine bouncing off the walls of his bedroom and replied, “I do. I will never permit a row of medicine bottles block my horizon.”

More and more we are living in a win or lose culture. Years ago Grantland Rice, the great sportswriter, said it was not important whether you win or lose, but “how you played the game.” However, our society does not accept that premise. The important point to most is not how you play, but what the bottom line is; whether you win or lose. **The hope for success and the fear of failure are probably the two greatest burdens our population faces today.** In a society full of superstars and celebrities in every field, we feel the pressure to be on the winning side somewhere – in our homes – in school – at the office – or in our social contacts. The truth of the matter is that failure can be a wonderful experience if it is understood in the context of a positive attitude. After all, for the Christian, failure is never final!

Before we look at a few principles in this passage dealing with more practical and specific means for facing our trials, it is important to note the key word in the passage is *trials*. The King James Version uses the word “temptations,” however that really does not express the best meaning for this word. There are two general points to note about this word:

1. *First, they are things into which we “fall.”* The word itself suggests a falling into a thing so as to be completely surrounded by it. Jesus used the same word to explain how the man who was injured in the Parable of the Good Samaritan “fell among thieves.” (cf. Luke 10:30).
2. *Second, James speaks of these trials as being “various” (divers in the King James Version).* That is to say, they are of different natures and kinds. The Greek word literally translates “many colored,” it suggests an infinite variety.

So, no matter the trial you face, prayer is the way to face it. **That brings us to three specific ways to successfully face your trials:**

First, Face Your Trials Praying for Wisdom (vv. 2-5).

If you are like me, you are guilty of praying for the wrong thing when you're in trouble. I find myself praying for a way out, not wisdom! My prayer is sometimes, “Dear God get me out of this mess!” that's the natural thing to do, but the wrong thing. The better prayer is for wisdom. Notice how James puts it in verses 2-5. *Count it all joy* is the prefacing remark. Literally he is saying, “When you find yourself in trouble, count it all joy!” His recommendation to us is to count ourselves as “supremely happy.” What strange declaration! And, until we understand the process, it is VERY strange!

You see, trials produce endurance; endurance produces perfection and completion. Making us lack for nothing. When we understand that this is the process for gaining that, it isn't strange at all. It is the path to great victory. So, James says we are to pray for wisdom so that we will understand what God is doing in our lives during these times of trials. The wisdom he has in mind is more than just knowledge. He uses a word to indicate understanding. Two questions help us in seeking this kind of wisdom: *What should I do?* and, *What should my attitude be?* These two questions take us so far past the initial desire to merely question “why?”

Second, Face Your Trials Praying OF God (v. 5).

LISTEN... WATCH THIS... James did not write we ought to pray TO God, but that we are to pray OF God. There is a very important truth at work here. There are many people who pray to God, but very few who know how, or actually do pray of God. Praying to God merely involves our talking to him. Praying of God involves both talking and listening. There are three emphatic points that James makes in this regard:

1. *First, God is a giving God.* He is the God *who gives generously to all*. It is the character of our God to give to all men who have needs. Giving is just a part of His nature. He gave to us a world perfectly designed for our well-being, a body suited to live and function in this creation, a mind to think and feel and know the joys of this life; and, when we sinned in rebellion, he gave us His only begotten Son to redeem us!

2. *Second, God is a gracious God.* James says He gives *without reproach*. God doesn't give us a gift and then reprimand us. Often we give that way. He could ask what we did with the last gift He gave us. He might remind us of our unworthiness to receive any gift at all. Or, He might simply turn away from our requests knowing that we will abuse what he gives us. But, he does none of these. He gives and does not reproach.
3. *Third, God is a generous God.* James says two things in the words "generously" and "it will be given." There is a note of absolute certainty here. When you pray, God gives wisdom. Jesus said it this way:

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! (Matthew 7:7-11 ESV).

What strong encouragement! We can come with bold assurance and ask! When life seems to be crumbling around us, pray for wisdom, pray OF God! James would have agreed with John Newton, writer of one of our favorite hymns, *Amazing Grace*, as he wrote:

Thou art coming to a King;
Large petitions with thee bring;
For his grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much.

Third, Face Your Trials Praying in Faith (vv. 6-8).

Have you been wondering, "Where's the catch?" It does sound a little too good to be true, doesn't it? Well, there is a catch. Like all prayer, the prayer for wisdom is faith. Doubtful praying is a waste of time. It is a tall order to be sure. *Let me make two suggestions as we close this lesson in James' letter:*

1. *First, let your anchor down.* I once read about an old ship's captain who said, "Even if I'm in port for only one day, I let my anchor down." I believe that no matter how long or short a time you are going to be in a place, live like it was going to be forever. Another way of saying this is that we must learn how to live in the present tense. It is so tempting to celebrate yesterday and miss today!
2. *Second, learn to laugh.* Along these same lines, when you do remember yesterday with all its failures and unhappiness, the times when you have been wronged or hurt, the disappointments and sorrows, remember to laugh! Memories can never be completely wiped away, but they can be controlled. This is what God's forgiveness is all about. Remembering doesn't always have to be painful. **Memories of past failures may humble us, but they must never humiliate us.**

I read the following poem by Bertha Adams Backus and it fits so well:

Build for yourself a strong box,
 Fashion each part with care;
When it's as strong as your hand can make it,
 Put all your troubles there;
Hide the thought of your failures,
 And each bitter cup that you quaff;
Loch all your heartaches within it,
 Then sit on the lid and laugh!

Tell no one else its contents,
 Never its secrets share;
When you've dropped in your care and worry –
 Keep them forever there.

Hide them from sight so completely
 That the world will never dream half;
Fasten the strong box securely –
 Then sit on the lid and laugh!

All of us need to learn how to face our trials with victory. Facing the difficulties of life with only our power and wisdom is certain to lead us to spiritual shipwreck. Only our God is sufficient for these trials.

Let me close with some *ABC's FOR FACING TRIALS AND HAVING VICTORY:*

A stands for ASK. Not only do we ask God for what we want, but we ask God for what he wants for us.

B stands for BELIEVE. This means we believe in ourselves; in others who will help us and minister to us; and in God who will never leave us.

C stands for COMMITMENT. That means being obedient to do as he asks us to do in the trial.

Believe God today. Commit yourself to taking whatever next step he has given you to take!