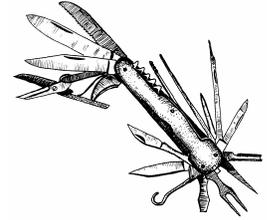


Journey Into Faith That Works



LESSON 1 . . . The Purpose for Our Problems (1:1-12)

NOTES

James is a very practical book because it deals with issues of life such as problems, temptation, money, prejudice, anger, misuse of the tongue, social injustice, etc. Written by James (the half-brother of Jesus) who became a leader in the church at Jerusalem, this epistle is basically a manual on having a “faith that works.” It was originally written *to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations* (1:1). After the death of Stephen, persecution caused many believers in Jerusalem to flee for their lives, leaving their jobs, homes, and properties (Acts 8:1-3). Therefore, James writes this letter to Jewish Christians living outside Palestine and also to us today who are *scattered among the nations*. Believers of James’ day, as well as we today, will experience what truth revealed by Jesus in John 16:33b?

James wrote this letter to teach believers of all time how to deal with the stress, problems, and trials of life. In this passage James reveals four purposes for our problems, beginning with . . .

Problems refine our faith (1:2-4).

James writes: *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds* (1:2). James doesn’t say “if” *you face trials* but **whenever** (emphasis mine). We can count on having problems. We are either in a problem, coming out of a problem, or going into a problem, because life is basically a series of problems. The word translated *trials*, “temptations” in the KJV, (PEIRASMOS, pee-ras-mos) refers to adversity for the purpose of testing. Thus, our problems are a test of our faith and are *of many kinds*, meaning they come in all shapes and sizes. One nice thing about problems is we don’t get bored because they come in such a wide variety.



Why should we consider our *trials* or problems *pure joy*? James tells us in the next verse: *because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance* (1:3). Then, what does James tell us in verse 4?

Problems develop *perseverance* (HUPOMONE, hupo-mon-aye), which is an active response to adversity. Therefore, problems help us become stronger in our *faith*, but they also expose our weak areas. Someone has said, “Christians are like tea bags. You don’t know what’s in them until they get in hot water.” Peter tells us problems come upon us so our faith, which is more valuable

than gold, may be refined (1 Pet. 1:7a). What is the result of the refining process through problems, according to 1 Peter 1:7b?



Our values determine our joy. If we value character more than comfort, then we will *consider it pure joy* when we have trials designed to make us spiritually *mature and complete* (Jas. 1:2 & 3). Job had the right attitude toward problems. How does he express his attitude in Job 23:10?

Trials are really *gold* “in the making” as far as our faith is concerned because **problems refine our faith** and . . .

Problems cause us to rely on God (1:5-8).

If we never have problems we are unable to handle on our own, we will never sense our need of God. This is why James tells us: *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God* (1:5a). *Wisdom* is the ability to apply knowledge to our problems. Divine *wisdom* enables us to allow problems to refine our faith and develop our character. So, when we have a problem, we should ask God for *wisdom* to see what He is trying to develop in us through this problem. However, pride can block divine wisdom in our lives. That is why we find what truth in Proverbs 11:2?

The first step in receiving wisdom from God is admitting we need it. The reason our problems sometimes overwhelm us is our *pride* causes us to try to handle them all by ourselves. When we swallow our *pride* and *ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, wisdom will be given to us* (Jas. 1:5b). God will never respond to our request for wisdom by saying something like: “You made your own bed; now lie in it.” He will never scold us for our deficiency of wisdom.

Not only are we to pray for wisdom, but James also writes that when we ask we *must believe and not doubt* (1:6a). The greatest enemy of answered prayer is doubt. James says doubt causes us to be *like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind* (1:6b). One minute we’re up, and the next we’re down. Instability is nothing but lack of faith, and if we lack faith, we *should not think we will receive anything from the Lord* (1:7). As someone

has said, “Pray and believe, and you will receive; pray and doubt, and do without.” How does Jesus express this truth in Mark 9:23b?

When we lack faith, we are *double-minded* (Jas. 1:8a). The word translated *double-minded* (DIPSUCHOS, di-sue-kos) means “two souled.” It is being wishy-washy and vacillating between God’s way and our way, God’s desire for our lives and our desires. If we are *double-minded* we will be *unstable in all* we do (1:8b). That means God can’t count on us to fulfill His purpose for our lives. Being single-minded means we are totally committed to God.

There is a divine purpose behind every problem God allows us to have. Therefore, **problems refine our faith, cause us to rely on God**, and . . .

Problems refocus our priorities (1:9-11).

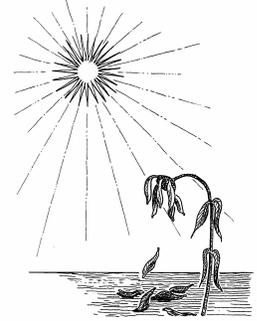
Problems are not respecters of persons. Thus, James writes: *The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position* (1:9). *Humble circumstances* refers to those who are economically poor. Poverty, or having less than others, embitters some Christians. However, as believers we should recognize that though we may be materially poor, we become spiritually rich when we endure problems.

In contrast to poor believers, James writes: *But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower* (1:10). Trials and problems teach well-to-do believers that possessions and prosperity cannot buy peace and tranquility. Trials teach the wealthy the vanity of riches because problems reveal that in spite of having wealth they still need God. Solomon owned more livestock than anyone in Jerusalem. He amassed enough silver and gold to be wealthier than Wal-Mart’s Sam Walton or Microsoft’s Bill Gates (Eccles. 2:7-8). Yet, what does Solomon, the wisest man to ever live, say about his enormous wealth in Ecclesiastes 2:17b?

It’s all *a chasing after the wind* because “you can’t take it with you.” The only thing we will take into eternity is our character. Problems cause us to refocus on what’s really important, reminding us of what truth in 1 Timothy 6:7?



In verse 11 James says problems remind us life is short and we too can pass away suddenly like a flower in the heat of the sun. Problems remind rich and poor alike that it is not what we have but who we are that's really important.



Problems refine our faith, cause us to rely on God, refocus our priorities, and . . .

Problems result in rewards (1:12).

James mentions two rewards for enduring problems according to God's purpose. The first reward is: *Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial* (1:12a). The word translated *blessed* (MAKARIOS, ma-kar-ee-os) means "divine delight." It is a deep joy that comes from knowing we are pleasing God. Some people think happiness comes from escaping trials, but for us as Christians it comes from enduring trials by letting them fulfill God's purpose in our lives.



The second reward is we *will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him* (1:12b).

God's purpose for our problems in this life is to produce spiritual growth and maturity. However, there is an eternal purpose as well—that we might *receive the crown of life*. This *crown* doesn't represent eternal life because our salvation is not based on works (Eph. 2:8-9). The word translated *crown* (STEPHANOS, stef-an-os) refers to a wreath given as a prize at Greek athletic games. Therefore, James is referring to rewards based on works or how we respond to our problems. Jesus said He will come in His Father's glory with His angels (Matt. 16:27a). Then, in the last part of that verse what does Jesus say He will do?

However, our motivation for enduring trials shouldn't be for reward, but as James says because we *love him* (1:12). As someone has said, "Trials make our love for the Lord show and grow or tilt and wilt." Problems make us better people or bitter people. There is a divine purpose for every problem God allows us to have because **problems refine our faith, problems cause us to rely on God, problems refocus our priorities, and problems result in rewards**. In the space below, sum up the divine purpose for your problems and what your response to them should be.
