

SERMON NOTES
James 1:2-12
“Giving Thanks in Trials”

Intro:

- *What trial or temptation are you facing?*
- Perhaps you are facing a financial crisis or business problem // or you're being unjustly criticized // or you are depressed // or are overeating // or are dealing with a physical health problem or a marital problem or a family problem // *Perhaps it is a conflict at work – or with someone at church // maybe someone in your family has a drinking problem // maybe you are dealing with sexual temptation or a materialistic attitude // maybe you are being put down for your beliefs*
- What is going on? Test of Faith? Temptation? Reaping what you have sown? *Spiritual Attack? Persecution? Serving a Higher Purpose? Life's Unfairness in a Fallen World? Character Development? Spiritually Mysterious?*
- What is the difference between a trial and a temptation? Is the problem you are facing the activity of Satan or a test God is sending for your good -- or just life in a fallen world?
- *How can we know?*

I. PROPER ATTITUDE TOWARD TRIALS (1:2)

James 1:2 (NIV) ²Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,

- The book of James deals with several tests of a living faith: *a lifestyle of good deeds // active concern for widows and orphans / meeting the practical needs of the poor and needy //*
- And here in chapter 1: **the reality of a living faith is demonstrated by its reaction under adversity**
- The word translated “trials” in verse 2 and the word translated “tempted” in vss. 13-14 come from the same Greek word – also the same word as in the Lord’s Prayer: *“Lead us not into temptation”*
- The word means: *a testing being directed toward an end – to discover the nature or quality of the object or person being tested*

- In a good sense, the test may be applied in order to demonstrate the strength or good quality of the object tested – *that is called a trial*
- But when the testing is applied with evil intent so that the person will fail and give in to evil desires – *that is called a temptation*
- *The devil tempts us to bring us down – but God tests us to build us up*
- **God tests our faith – but He never tempts people to do evil**

James 1:13 - 15 (NIV) ¹³When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. ¹⁵Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

- *We are called to endure trials but to resist and flee temptations – it is important, therefore, to discern the difference*
- Trials refer to external adverse circumstances that test our faith – whereas temptations are enticements to sin
- **We give thanks for trials that God can use to make our faith stronger – but we do not thank God for temptations – rather, we flee temptations**

James 1:2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,

- *The word for “consider” (or “count”) refers to a rational evaluation – a deliberate, well-reasoned choice*
- And it is in the aorist tense in Greek – indicating a definite decision or attitude –
- *As a definite act of the mind and will, we are to adopt as our habitual attitude that we will regard the various trials we encounter in life as the ground and occasion for joy – complete and pure joy*
- This is a startling command
- *Most of us regard Joy as a feeling we experience when doing something pleasurable*
- Spending time with someone you love // watching your favorite team win the big game // eating your favorite food // buying some new clothes // receiving some positive recognition and a bonus at work // playing with a happy child
- *These are the natural occasions for joy – and such feelings do not need to be commanded – they are spontaneous*
- But here James is exhorting us: *When you encounter various kinds of trials and tests of faith – make a rational decision to put those experiences in the Joy*

column – make a rational decision to rejoice in the midst of life’s undesirable and unexpected adverse circumstances

- James does not say that we are to feel it all joy – or that these things are joy-producing in themselves – *rather he is calling us to adopt a joyful attitude toward these hardships and trials*
- **Why?**

II. REASONS SUPPORTING PROPER ATTITUDE (1:2-4)

James 1:2 - 4 (NIV) ²Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

- *What do we need to know in order to make a rational decision to rejoice in our trials?*
- **Knowing that the testing of our faith produces endurance and perseverance and staying power**
- A coach never really knows what kind of team he has until they have played a couple of games
- *During pre-season practices, he can get a general idea of their strengths and abilities – but until the players are tested in actual game situations – he never really knows how they will perform under pressure*
- Faith can be developed in Bible studies and worship services and ABFs and home groups – *but you never really know how strong your faith is until your faith is tested in a real-life trial*
- The true test of faith is not how much a person talks in a Bible study or how much Bible knowledge they have
- ***The true test of faith is how a person handles adversity***
- **Therefore, a believer is to have the same attitude toward trials as an athlete would have toward game day**
- *Who wants to just practice all the time?*
- James Vandenberg
- Iowa’s basketball team
- *Let’s lace ‘em up and see what we’ve got – see what we’re made of*

- Listening to sermons and attending Bible studies are like practices – absolutely necessary – *players cannot just show up on game day and expect to perform at their best* – you’ve got to put in the time on the practice field and the weight room
- *But it’s on the field of battle against a real opponent that you find out where you are weak and where you are strong*
- **Trials are the proving ground for our faith**
- *Where are the strengths and weaknesses of our faith? Where does our faith need to grow and deepen? Where do we need to grow in our knowledge of God and His ways? Where do we need to repair the holes in our breastplate of righteousness or shield of faith or umbrella of protection over our family? Where are we most vulnerable to sin and temptation and spiritual attack? Where does our character need further development? Where do our attitudes need adjusting?*
- **Am I better able to handle life’s challenges and frustrations and hardships and disappointments and setbacks and adversities now than I was 5 years ago? Has my faith grown? Or have I just been marking time in church?**
- We don’t find out the answers to those vital questions while sitting in a SS class
- *It is in the midst of trials that we discover the true nature of our faith and spiritual maturity*
- **Therefore, a believer is to have the same attitude toward trials as an athlete would have toward game day**
- *How is a player – or team – going to perform in the 4th quarter of a hard-fought, tie game?*
- The coach can simulate those situations in practice – but you never really know until you’re actually in the 4th quarter of a tie game
- *Will your team make the key plays and key stops when needed – or will they get fatigued and wear down and fall behind – or will your team outlast the opponent and seize the victory?*
- Finishing strong is essential: Far more games are won or lost in the 4th quarter than in the 1st quarter
- *Likewise in our faith journeys – perseverance is essential*
- **Steve Farrar (PK): Of 10 guys committed to Christ in their 20s, only one will finish strong**
- *The other 9 out of 10 lack sufficient perseverance to finish well and finish strong*
- They falter toward the finish line – if they get there at all
- **Their faith has no staying power -- a prayer doesn’t get answered and they never get over it / they struggle with a doubt and let their doubt overpower their faith / some Christian offends them and they can’t let go of the hurt and anger / they stop**

coming to church / they stop reading their Bible / their work becomes their life / *their sport becomes their god / they get too busy for God / they get seduced by the things of this world // they stumble and fall and never got back up on their feet // they start compromising their faith and quietly revert back to their pre-Christian life*

- *At one time they were actively growing in their faith – but their faith had no staying power // they had no endurance for a lifelong race // they lacked perseverance*

James 1:3-4 For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. ⁴So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything.

- *How's your spiritual endurance? How are you at finishing what you start? How are you at staying the course until the race is finished and the job is done?*
- How are you in the 4th quarter – when you're tired and weary – and the enemy has been getting in some good licks – and life has taken some unexpected twists and turns – and the stresses and pressures are mounting up – and others around you are dropping out?
- *Do you have the strength of character and endurance and mature faith needed to finish strong?*
- Why do we consider it pure joy when game day comes – when the trials of life assault us – when our faith is tested?
- *Because then our endurance has a chance to grow – and perseverance produces strong, godly, mature character that enables us to finish strong*
- James calls this kind of character “*perfect and complete – lacking in nothing*”
- “*Perfect*” does not mean sinless – but rather mature – attaining its proper goal – fulfilling its potential – characterizing a full-grown faith and life rather than an immature faith and life
- “*Complete*” means whole, intact in all its parts, fully-rounded character inclusive of all the virtues
- *Put together, perfect and complete refers to the kind of character that is not lacking in any of the virtues – having all of the qualities of Christ-like character – and with all of those “fruit of the Spirit” qualities having reached ripeness and maturity*
- **That kind of character is not developed overnight – that kind of character is produced by persevering under trial**
- *It is with that outcome in mind that we are able to “consider it pure joy whenever we face trials of many kinds”*

III. THE NEED AND CONDITION FOR WISDOM IN TRIALS (1:5-8)

- You are facing a financial crisis – or some unjust criticism – or a health problem – or a family problem – or a conflict at work –
- *Is it the result of some sin in your life? Is it a spiritual attack? Is it the result of too much stress – or overeating? Are you being persecuted for your faith – or are you just being judgmental and disagreeable? Is this problem the work of Satan – or is this serving God’s Higher Purposes – or both? What is God up to in this situation? What is He trying to teach you?*
- *How should you respond? How should you pray? How should you act? Should you fight – or flee – or stand firm? Is this a situation you should accept as God’s will – or try hard to change for the better?*
- *Wouldn’t you agree that it is much easier to rejoice in trials when you discover God’s perspective on the situation?*
- It’s no fun to reap what you sow – but at least you understand what is going on and why and what you need to do about it
- *It’s no fun being persecuted for righteousness’ sake or coming under spiritual attack because you are being effective in your Christian service and witness – but at least you understand what is going on and are confident that God is pleased with you and that He will assume responsibility for caring for you and protecting you*
- But perhaps the most difficult kind of trial to go through is the one that makes no sense – there seems to be no reason that you can identify or understand – you are clueless as to why you are suffering this way
- *It is difficult to know what your response should be when you cannot see God’s perspective on the situation*

James 1:5 ⁵If you need wisdom—if you want to know what God wants you to do—ask him, and he will gladly tell you. He will not resent your asking.

- *There are lots of things we might need in a crisis or trial – strength // courage // healing // deliverance // encouragement // protection // money //*
- **But the need for wisdom to understand God’s ways and purposes is as great as any other need**
- *Wisdom is that moral discernment that enables the believer to meet life’s trials with attitudes and decisions and actions that are consistent with God’s will and purpose*
- Without wisdom, we are apt to make a bad situation worse

- *Without wisdom, we are apt to miss God's perspective and God's purpose in the situation*
- Without wisdom, we are apt to respond and act contrary to God's will
- *Without wisdom, we are apt to compound our fears and insecurities and mistakes*

- Wisdom was a central request in Paul's prayers for his churches:

Ephesians 1:17 (NIV) ¹⁷I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of **wisdom and revelation**, so that you may know him better.

Colossians 1:9 - 11 (NIV) ⁹For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all **spiritual wisdom and understanding**. ¹⁰And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience,

- *What are the characteristics of the wisdom that comes from God?*

James 3:17 ¹⁷But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no partiality and is always sincere.

- *How do we obtain this wisdom?*
- **By asking God – in believing prayer**

James 1:5-8 ⁵If you want to know what God wants you to do, ask him, and he will gladly tell you, for he is always ready to give a bountiful supply of wisdom to all who ask him; he will not resent it. ⁶But when you ask him, be sure that you really expect him to tell you, for a doubtful mind will be as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind; ⁷⁻⁸and every decision you then make will be uncertain, as you turn first this way and then that. If you don't ask with faith, don't expect the Lord to give you any solid answer.

- *God gives wisdom through the Scriptures // and God gives wisdom through other mature Christians // and God gives wisdom through experience – but the point emphasized here is that God gives wisdom directly in answer to believing prayer*
- *We never have to wonder if it is God's will to give us wisdom – Wisdom is always God's will for His children*
- We never have to wonder if God would be willing to give us all the wisdom we need

- *Giving is inherent within the nature of God – He has revealed Himself as a God who is continually giving to us*

James 1:17 (NIV) ¹⁷Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

- *Wisdom is one of those good and perfect gifts that God delights in giving liberally and generously to those who ask Him*
- He never scolds or belittles us for not already having enough wisdom and knowledge
- *He gives bountifully out of His infinite bounty*
- **It pleases God when we seek to know Him and His ways and His purposes**
- *It pleases God when we ask Him to show us His perspective on our situation*
- It pleases God when we desire to do His will and ask Him to show us His will so that we can follow His ways

- **But we must ask in faith – not doubting**
- ***Faith is the proper human response to the goodness of God***
- ***Believing prayer takes its stand upon the character of God***

- Doubting here refers not merely to honest intellectual reservations as to whether or not God will choose to intervene miraculously in our situation
- ***Rather doubting here refers to being double-minded and unstable – it is not merely having questions – it is an inner unwillingness to rely wholly upon God***

- The double-minded doubter is the man or woman who is sitting on the fence – *undecided about whether or not to follow Christ whole-heartedly* – torn between Christ and the world – *professing to love Jesus but prone to loving money and pursuing the things of this world and seeking the applause of men*
- The word for double-minded is literally “two-souled” – a man at war within himself – *with one soul oriented toward trust in God and the other soul loving the things of this world*
- **Such a person will not receive wisdom from God because such a person is not really committed to doing God’s will or following His ways**

- ***The number one condition for receiving wisdom from God is a heart to know God and to understand His ways and to do His will***

IV. PERSPECTIVES FOR RICH AND POOR DURING TRIALS (1:9-11)

- *James next addresses rich and poor believers and their responses to trials*

James 1:9 - 11 (NIV) ⁹The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. ¹⁰But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. ¹¹For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.

- *There was virtually no middle class in the 1st century*
- About 10% of the population was wealthy – meaning in most cases – not needing to work – being able to live off their wealth (usually inherited) – and often exploiting the labor of others
- *And most of the rest of the population was poor – meaning not only having to work to scratch out a living – but having virtually no opportunity to escape their poverty no matter how hard they worked*
- Rich and poor would have had little social interaction in that day – with the rich far above the poor in social status – and with a superior attitude
- *Yet in the church of Jesus Christ – the few rich believers and the many poor believers were brothers in Christ – on equal footing*
- James exhorts those who are poor – and who live in humble circumstances – to rejoice and take proper pride in their spiritual riches and honor and privileges as children of God and co-heirs with Jesus Christ
- *They do not glory in their own achievements or possessions – but rather they glory in their exalted position and dignity and spiritual riches in Christ*
- Rejoicing in who they are in Christ and in their future inheritance as co-heirs with Christ enables them to give thanks in midst of the many trials that accompany poverty and financial hardship
- *And James exhorts those who are rich – to rejoice in trials that would humble them*
- Both the believer of low socio-economic status and the believer who is of high socio-economic status must evaluate themselves on the basis of spiritual values rather than worldly values
- *Both rich and poor stand on level ground at the foot of the cross*
- Sometimes God uses trials to remind the materially successful of that truth
- *Trials remind those who are materially successful that their wealth and success – and indeed their very lives – are like the flowers of the field that flourish in the spring but wither and fall away and perish with the scorching heat of summer sun and wind*

- So shall the rich man fade away in the midst of his worldly activities
- **The temptation for the rich believer is to put his hope for security in worldly wealth – and thus to become double-minded and spiritually unstable – and to miss out on the blessings of grace that God lavishes upon the humble**
- *Sometimes God uses trials to humble the rich so that they can receive more grace*
- Whatever your financial condition – you can give thanks to God for any trial that humbles you – *because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble*

V. THE OUTCOME OF ENDURING TRIALS (1:12)

James 1:12 (NIV) ¹²Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

- **When trials and testings of faith are faithfully endured – then they can be considered to be “pure joy” because they result in the blessings of spiritual maturity, character development – and the crown of life**
- *Persevering under trials proves the genuineness of our faith – the testing reveals that our faith and fidelity and love toward God are steadfast, firm and reliable*
- **God uses trials in this life to shape our character and prepare us for the life to come**
- *The crown of life is the ultimate reward for persevering in our faith and love toward God even through many kinds of trials throughout our lives*
- The crown of life refers to eternal life
- *This does not mean that eternal life is a reward for human achievement*
- The Bible is clear that eternal life is a gift received through faith in Jesus Christ:

1 John 5:11 - 13 (NIV) ¹¹And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹²He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. ¹³I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

- *But the Bible also teaches that genuine saving faith will be evidenced by our deeds:*

James 2:17 (NIV) ¹⁷In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Romans 2:6 - 7 (NIV) ⁶God “will give to each person according to what he has done.”
⁷To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.

- *The crown of life is promised to those who love the Lord*
- **There is more to loving the Lord than a one-time prayer to accept Christ**
- The word for love is in the present tense – indicating continuing action - *to those who continually love the Lord*
- **Love is the essence of genuine saving faith**
- *Trials are the tests that prove the genuineness of our faith and love – whether we will remain devoted to Jesus Christ in the midst of life’s disappointments and struggles – or whether we will turn our heart back to the world or money or some other god*
- **The crown of life is given to those who persevere under trial and remain faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ**

(Conclusion)

- Why give thanks to God in the midst of trials?
- ***Because trials are Game Day***
- Trials show what our faith is made of – whether our faith is genuine and real and solid -- or just a bunch of fluff and religious church talk
- *Trials show whether we’ve just been going through motions during practice sessions at church and in Bible studies – or whether we are actually listening to the Word and doing what it says and putting it into practice so that we are ready for Game Day*
- Trials reveal weaknesses that need to be strengthened and character flaws that need to be corrected and sins that need to be confessed and forsaken
- *Trials reveal where are the improvement-needed areas of our life and faith and character where God wants us to grow*
- Trials show how much we have matured in our faith and character since our last similar trial
- *Trials are opportunities to grow in wisdom and in spiritual understanding of God’s ways and purposes*
- Trials show us how far we have already come in our spiritual growth – and how far we have yet to go in our journey toward mature Christ-likeness
- *Trials can build strength, endurance and perseverance of faith and character*
- Trials can humble us so that we can receive more grace
- **And finally – when all of our Game Days are over – and we are still standing firm in our faith and devotion to Jesus Christ – we will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him**

Prayer

“Blessed Be Your Name”