

Responding to Trials

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Date: 20 January 2019

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[0 : 00] Turn with me to the book of James, James chapter 1. Quick little recap, we're in a part 2 of a small series just on dealing with trials.

James specifically writing this letter to Jewish believers who were underpersecuted in Jerusalem and then they scattered abroad. They scattered across the New Testament world.

Many of them struggling with their faith as they became Christians, faced persecution, lost jobs, lost family members, those that they trusted and hoped in to help them, chose no longer to be there because they followed the name of Jesus.

So he pens this small but very practical and effectual letter. So last week I introduced this idea of understanding the subject of trials.

The first section is James wastes no time and gets to this section. He simply says that we are surrounded.

[1 : 17] And I answered four questions of you last week and two are of significance. The first question that I answered is, what is a trial? And the second question that I answered is, why does God allow trials?

The reality of our existence, if you breathe, you face trials. There is no one who is free of trials.

Now today I want to consider the question, how does God want us to respond in the face of trials?

How does God want us to respond in the face of trial? So before I get into answering that question, I'm going to simply remind you of what I stated last week.

First question is, what is a trial? A trial of life is an event or events in our lives that challenge us. They stretch us.

[2 : 21] They test us. They are hard, difficult circumstances. Trials need to be separated from temptations.

Trials tend to be those pressures of life that come exterior against us. Now, a trial can lead to temptation when we don't deal with it biblically, but trials of their own are not temptations.

Some examples could be persecution of faith, persecution of your morals, your integrity. A trial is poverty, bereavement, sickness, facing the results of an accident, attack on your character.

But scripture makes it quite clear. These trials are unavoidable. As you breathe, you will experience them, and they cannot stop from happening.

I think we all know this truth. We live in a fallen, imperfect world, and we will encounter many challenges in life, some much more greater than others, but we will face them.

[3 : 39] So last week, I spent a great amount of time listing eight types of trials that we faced, or reasons why God allows trials.

I'm just going to name them. There was eight of them. One, to test the strength of our faith, to know that we're indeed saved. It gives us these trials. Two, to humble us.

Three, to remove our reliance on worldly things, whether it be our job, our wealth, our intellect. Four, to call us to eternal and heavenly hope.

The reality is if life was perfect here, we would have no longing for God, would we? If it was perfect here, we would forget that there's a place far more greater than us.

Five, to reveal what we really love. Six, to teach us to value God's blessing. Seven, to develop enduring strength for greater usefulness.

[4 : 41] And eight, to better help others in their trials. So we know we will all experience trials in this life.

We know that God allows trials. Now the question that needs to be answered is, how are we as believers to respond to trials?

And no, grin and bear it isn't one of them. So I'm going to list for you today five attitudes that we are to develop in order to endure trials biblically.

I'm going to go over five attitudes. So if you're taking notes, you can just write down one, two, three, four, five. I'm going to let you know exactly what they are. So let's open up by reading what James has to say about this.

So turn chapter one, James. I'm going to start reading and be using the ESV version one. James, a servant of God and in the Lord Jesus Christ to the 12 tribes of the dispersion.

[5 : 49] Those are those who've dispersed from Israel and now find themselves around the Middle East. Greetings. He begins with this almost impossible statement.

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.

[6 : 57] Because like a flower of the grass, he will pass away. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass. Its flowers fall and its beauty perishes.

So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits. 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.

So we read right here, verse 2, our first attitude to develop is a joyful attitude. A joyful attitude.

Count it all joy. If you're reading from the NIV, it will say consider it pure joy.

Now for those of you who are in the midst of trials, your immediate response is, is he nuts? Is he nuts? The last thing we want to feel in a trial is joy.

[8 : 10] But we need to look at the word. It says count it or consider it. It's a very interesting word. If you know your grammar, it's an imperative word. And what's an imperative word?

It's a command. What's interesting is that this isn't a suggestion. Try to be joyful. Try to be pure in your joy.

He simply say, no, you must be joyful in your trial. The fact of the matter is, we know it is not a natural response to a trial to feel joyful.

But what James is appealing to here is that it's not a matter of going by your feelings. It's actually submitting yourself and using your will.

This is a conscience-determined commitment of every faithful believer. Why?

[9 : 15] Well, a lot of it has to do with what we learned about why God allows trials in our lives. But the reason we are to be joyful because it's an understanding that the Lord is in the trial just as much as he is in the overcoming of that trial.

You get me? God is just not present in the trial, but he's present in the overcoming of that trial. And guys, I honestly believe this is an incredible work of the Holy Spirit that some of us can attest to.

You know, sometimes we look at people and they're going through such trials and we say, man, I could never live that. Could never do that. Couldn't. Couldn't live through the death of a child. Could not live through losing my wife to cancer.

I could not live with financial ruin. But what's interesting, all those that I know that follow Jesus who have been through those circumstances have come out incredibly changed.

And if you would have asked them before, would they have able to do that? They would have said, not a chance. But something happens with the believer, through those trials, that God is present with them and grows from him.

[10 : 41] The joy comes from an understanding. It's that it's for our benefit and it's for God's glory. The joy is anchored in the sincere trust and promises of God.

We can look upon them as something that will make us stronger in him. The reality is in that moment, we don't really think so.

But sometimes we need to look beyond the immediate to the future. Let's be honest.

For some of us, it's really hard, right? That trial has got you completely where you are right now. The only thing you're thinking about, every emotion that you have, is right there in that trial.

It's tough. But what's interesting is the more mature we get, the more we understand this point.

[11 : 49] That the work now benefits us later. I've got a great illustration from my time in university. We had a friend, great friend, lived in residence with us, but he would never go out with us.

Never go out with us. He was our age. He loved social, fun guy, but he always wanted to stay in, do his homework, and we used the excuse, come on, we need to blow off some time. We need to get away.

He said, nope, I got to do some work. This is a guy who came from an underprivileged family. He believed in working hard. And we finally get to see each other a little bit when we first started getting married.

Well, things paid off for this guy because he actually showed up in a private jet, driven to the wedding in a limousine that was bigger than the one for the bride and groom, right?

He understood that working hard paid dividends later on. Nobody takes pleasure in the testing. It's not like he's a guy who liked school, and I've spent time with him since then.

[12 : 54] He just knew what was at the end of it more than he did when we once lived in university. And it's the same principle.

It's understanding that God has something more for us beyond today. Fact of the matter is, when we are in the midst of trials, what do we do?

We pray more, right? We tend to be more sensitive to God's presence. In fact, we cry out for it. We tend to be more sensitive to God's goodness.

We tend to be more sensitive to his grace. And then we find ourselves giving thanks for some really innocuous things that we wouldn't be thankful for.

My friend went through a major trial, losing his wife, and now he appreciates the walks that he can have with his kids far more greater than he could before. He understood.

[13 : 55] He's giving thanks for things, and a greater love for the Lord has developed in him. Our prayer life increases. Our time with God and his word increases.

The fact of the matter is, some of you are only at church because you're in a trial. That's what often led us to hear the gospel. When everything's going great and rosy, do we think about God?

No. We tend to think this is the result of our lives rather than God. Who's our example on this? None other than Jesus Christ, who in Hebrews 12, 2, it writes, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

God knew, Jesus Christ knew what was beyond the cross. Paul writes to us in Philippians 4, 11, 13, he says, Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.

I know how to be brought low. I know how to come and abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need, is that I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

[15 : 23] The Gospels give us a wonderful presentation of Jesus Christ with this cup of wrath in the Garden of Gethsemane. Lord, if it is your will, take this from me.

Paul, who had this thorn in his side, prayed three times, Lord, take this trial from me. What he's telling us is it's okay for us to pray to God to deliver us from these trials.

But we also have to understand that God may say, No, I want you in this trial. The point of this trial is to endure them.

It's to endure them. Our natural desire is to stay safe, to stay comfortable, to not deal with things.

However, until we deal with our trials, that God is the one who has us in here, there's a purpose for these trials.

[16 : 29] We are not to complain, but to engage God and see what he has for us in the trial. Warren Weersbe, an Old Testament commentary writer, writes, Our values determine our evaluations.

If we value comfort more than character, then trials will upset us. If we value the material and physical more than the spiritual, we will not be able to count it all joy.

If we live only for the present and forget the future, the trials will make us bitter, not better. So the first thing that James is pleading with his New Testament saints is you have to joyful attitude and you need that and you get that by understanding God is in this.

Now this attitude is complemented by the next attitude that we're going to talk about here and the attitude to develop is an understanding mind, an understanding mind.

James 1.3 says, For you know, for you know, you're going to have knowledge that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

[17 : 55] If you're using an NIV, it says perseverance. The fact of the matter is a quality of saving faith is persevering faith, a faith that endures to the end.

To have a faith that doesn't endure to the end is a dead faith. It gets you nowhere. All invested in a dead faith is of zero value.

So he wants us to know something. And he's talking about this know is not the kind of knowledge that is just remembered.

The fact of the matter is you and I know a lot of stuff. Do you guys know that? You guys know a lot of stuff. When I was in high school, my favorite athlete was Bo Jackson.

Does anybody remember Bo Jackson? Someone does, right? He played football and he played in baseball. And he was this humble guy and he had this shoe.

[18 : 58] I saved and I saved to get his shoe. I got it. And it was ripped. I was hurt. I saved all that money, brought it home and one of the stitches came out.

So I wrote Nike and I said, this is what you gave me. A defective shoe. You know what Nike did? They sent me the newer version of the Bo Jackson shoe that was not even in the stores, right?

I had that shoe. I could tell you he was the first athlete to become an all-star in baseball and football. Some consider him the greatest football player that ever lived.

He is certainly one of the greatest college players that ever lived. He's 6'1", 230 pounds. He was born November 30th, 1962. He won the Heisman as the greatest football player that year.

He ran 40 yards in 4.12 seconds. I can also tell you that he was the 8th of 10 children and he was born in Bessemer, Alabama.

[20 : 06] And oh yeah, he qualified for the Olympic team as well. I knew a lot about Bo Jackson. If I ran into Bo, he would not know me at all.

There is no relationship. It's not an intimate knowledge of him. I don't know him. I know things about him. The know that James is talking about is not that kind of knowledge.

He's talking about the kind of know that comes from experience, that comes from being in the pain. It's being in the hurt. It's being in the valley. When you've been there, when James writes, you know the testing of your faith produces steadfast, you can go, that's me.

You've been there. It's not a theory. You know this from experience. Like any great athlete who trains, that first workout is horrible.

But you know as you continue to submit to the training through the pain and all that it offers, you get somewhere. You can get there and you know it.

[21 : 32] You see, our joy in the midst of trials comes from knowing that God is maturing us. If we do not know this, there is no joy.

Thus, why James is telling us that we need to have an understanding mind. A lot of people want to say that trials produce patience. That's not what trials are supposed to produce.

But it's the patience in the trials that build up endurance for the Christian life. Without endurance, that's why I can go to the gym and I've been pretty, you know, I told you guys, right, my goal looked like Ray Crume in four weeks, I think it was, right?

Looks like it's probably going to be like four to six years. But anyway, I've been doing it. I've been consistent with it but I'm still not there yet, right? I have to build up every workout has to depend on the next workout.

See, steadfastness is a permanent inner quality of strength which increases each time a trial is patiently and trustingly endured.

[22 : 43] Paul simply tells us in 2 Thessalonians 1.4, 1.3, sorry, therefore, we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that are enduring.

This is the evidence of the righteous judgment of God that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God for which you are also suffering.

Endurance is what gets us to the end of the race. So, one, we need a joyful attitude. Two, we need to have an understanding mind.

The third aspect of enduring trials is we need a submissive will. We need a submissive will. Take a look at verse 4. It says, let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete lacking in nothing.

Do you have it? It says, let perseverance finish its work. Again, what we see here is an imperative, a command, a command to be joyful, a command to know, and a command to let steadfastness have its full effect.

[24 : 03] Our task, we have to submit to the trial. Don't escape it. Don't run away from it. I know so many people that I've counseled, they don't take counsel, they run away.

Hey, I've got credit card problem. Guess what? I was able to get a bank loan to cover it. Guess what? Did you get rid of the credit cards? Well, no. You end up racking them up again, right? Stupidity. Submit to the trial.

God is trying to do a great and marvelous thing in you. God's promises are not bypassed by avoiding certain aspects, people, and situations.

Fact is, the Lord wants us to grow in our trials, to grow in our faith, to endure in our faith. When we learn to rejoice in our trials and come to understand that God uses them not to harm us, but to strengthen and perfect us, we have a whole new perspective on our trials.

Notice it uses the word perfect. It's not talking about meaning more moral or spiritual perfection as without sin. But the word usage there is to be fully developed.

[25 : 23] to be the person God means you to be. That's what perfection is. He's called you for something. He's designing you.

God has an intention for you. Stay in it. Stay in it. Don't go over here. Don't go over there. Go through the trial.

God has a purpose to have you be someone very specific. And it says, God, the tests, although arduous at times, are meant to complete us, to grow us, to mature us.

So we've seen joy, knowing a submissive will. And the fourth aspect that we're supposed to have is a believing heart.

A believing heart. This is an awesome point and I'm praying that you will be, you'll come to a greater appreciation of God on this point. One, notice verse 5, James 1.

[26 : 32] It says, any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God. Right? And what's the quality of God in this? Who gives generously to all without reproach?

And it will be given him. Get that? That's a promise. You ask, he gives. 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 will not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord. He is double-minded, unstable in all his ways. The reality is if we are left to our own wisdom to sort our way through the trials, we are not going to do well.

And because God understands the toughness of dealing with trials, he commands us to ask him. Ask him.

Do you guys get the significance of this? We're not to sort it out on our own. We're actually to go to God with this.

[27 : 42] To come to him with this. The fact of the matter is strong, sound faith is not based on feelings but on a knowledge and understanding on the promises of God's truth which is spiritual wisdom.

Notice that it says God who gives generously to all without reproach. There's an interesting point of the grammar here. The participle to give here is a present tense which indicates us that it's God's nature to be continually given.

Get that? God continually gives. Do some of you ever in that situation are afraid?

You know someone could give you something but you know if you give it might cost you another time right? I've got a friend newly married wife comes from a little bit of wealth parents willing to help them with a down payment on a new house.

I asked him you know how come you didn't do that? I knew her parents they had kind of mentioned it to me and he says because I know that has strings attached. He was smart he had wisdom.

[29 : 07] If I take that money I'm giving that family a say into everything that happens and they're not the most functional of people. So he's using this wisdom.

Guess what? God's not like that. Right? In fact the words without reproach means that God won't chide us.

He won't reprimand us. He won't scold us. He's not going to find fault in maybe some of the stupid foolish decisions that we did that led to this trial.

He's not even going to mention that. He's not going to grumble. He's not going to hold a grudge. In fact when you come to God there's not even a need to bargain with him.

Hey God if you do this for me you remove this cancer from my wife or from my mom or from my husband I'll do this man.

[30 : 13] I will commit to church let's say the next five weeks. Okay next five years. Right? You negotiate. You got this negotiation. God if you would only give me extra goodness then I won't ask anything else.

I think the only question that God ultimately asks us is my child why didn't you come to me sooner? Why didn't you come to me sooner? I love you.

I love you. He's not going to say why did you screw up in the first place? Why did you lose patience? Why didn't you believe earlier? Scripture says that when we finally come to him he is waiting to give generously.

God never reminds us how undeserving we are and we are undeserving. God never reminds us how unworthy we are and we are unworthy.

But check this verse in Psalm 81:10. His people Moses led them out in the wilderness. They're running out of food.

[31 : 27] Lord and he simply tells them I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

Open wide your mouth and I will fill it. Write that down. Open your mouth wide for I will fill it.

You are hungry you are in need I will take care of you. This is the character of God. You see everything is rooted in our understanding of God.

So we say hey be joyful that sounds crazy but when we start to know what God's purpose and who God is trials all of a sudden become a lot easier.

But it's interesting in this text it gives us a warning but let him ask in faith with no doubting. Fact of matter is sometimes we're in their trial and we covered this a few weeks ago when Jesus in the storm when things aren't going our way we doubt God's character we doubt God's promises we doubt God's purposes fact the matter is you may feel unworthy but it doesn't matter to God why because it depends on him it's his worthiness that counts not yours you may feel undeserving that doesn't matter to God because it's absolutely irrelevant to him even though you are undeserving unfortunately some of you may complain about trials you may doubt

[34 : 21] God has a purpose you may feel inclined to dispute with God you might argue with God you might wonder why he allowed calamity to come upon you in the first place and wonder why doesn't he provide you with the way out fact is if you doubt God at his word then you doubt his ability and trustworthiness and a faith like that is not going to accomplish much fact is when God is not trusted your situation only goes from bad to worse what happens to such a person 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 I know most of you guys are mountain people but those who have been in the ocean and the sea it is pretty powerful remember spending time in

Florida with my friends we are going out we doing some body surfing and we come out of the water and we're looking for the camp we don't realize that our camp's like five miles down the beach because we're not thinking that the water has been taking us down that's what happens right we get so caught up trying to do our own things we're being tossed and fro and then we wake up we finally get it together and we're lost where am I we gotta go back to the beginning to be double sold Matthew 6 24 says no one can serve two masters for either he will hate the one and love the other or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other the other masters you do you want it your way or God's way my friends I know some of you here serve yourselves you serve your desires you serve your feelings you serve what the world offers I'm telling you there's a current that's taking you away further and further from

God from where you supposed to be you cannot do that and be at peace with God the double mindedness will drive you crazy will defeat you and ultimately you will run away from God James gives us this great fifth point an attitude developed in the trial James 1 9 says let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation and the rich in his humiliation we need a humble spirit a humble spirit what James is saying here it doesn't matter if you are rich or poor the poor can boast in their exaltation or rejoice or be glorified but the high position is in Christ not in himself and this is the same place that a rich person can boast in the common mediator between these two people is trials hit the rich just as they hit the poor you know it's easy for us to look at man they've got that covered must be no problems

I mentioned to you before my friend's father-in-law was the wealthiest evangelical in the world and man there was problems in that family problems that I would not wish on anybody they were certainly not free of trials first john three two says beloved we are god's children now and what we will be has not yet appeared but we know that when he appears we shall be made like him because we shall see him as he is any hope that we have here on earth is going to be destitute it's going to crash loss of material possessions will drive a rich person to god but that doesn't mean they're safe from family or health issues what is of this world is temporary rich is temporary poor is temporary what is of value is a trusting relationship with the lord if anything trials are the great equalizer it brings all of god's children to depend upon him let's take a look at verse 12 this is where i will conclude 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 what about you will you receive the crown of life what does your response to trials tell us about you do you draw closer to god or do you question him curse him do you complain complain does it bring bitterness does it bring doubt or when you finally submit and receive all that god has for you my question to you once again and only you can answer this is will you receive the crown of life are you developing a joyful attitude are you developing an understanding mind are you having a submissive will do you have a believing heart and do you have a humble spirit if you don't you need to get on your knees thanks

I'm also going to give thanks for the food that we're going to have but during that time period those who've got kids could you get them the rest of us we need to break down this room and enjoy some really good spaghetti or piscetti in some of your houses is that alright alright let us pray dear lord heavenly father you have promised us a great deal all let us so we can see us again how can we and walk to you right