

James: A Working Faith

“Turning Trials into Victories”

James 1:1 - 11

Intro: Start new series book of James - “A Working Faith”.

Key verse of the book is 2:26, “faith without works is dead.”

Written by James, the half-brother of Jesus, (Wed. nites more detailed study of Jesus’ brother James, not a disciple).

To Jewish believers scattered by persecution aka the Diaspora,

One of most practical letters in the New Testament, sometimes likened to Proverbs. A “how-to” book of real, true faith that works.

He starts by talking to these scattered believers about how to handle the troubles and trials, the adversities of life.

Scott Peck begins *The Road Less Traveled* with the statement: “Life is difficult.” He continues:

“This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult—once we truly understand and accept it—then life is no longer difficult. Because once it has been accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters.”

“Most do not fully see this truth.... Instead they moan more or less incessantly, noisily or subtly, about the enormity of their problems, their burdens, and their difficulties, as if life were generally easy, as if life should be easy. They voice their belief ... that their difficulties represent a unique kind of affliction that should not be, and that somehow has been especially visited upon them. M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1978)

Trouble and difficulty come to everybody. People at every level of society live life in a minor key. Sickness, suffering, disease and death afflict both rich and poor.

Job suffered deeply and cried, “... *man is born to trouble as sparks fly upward*” *Job 5:7*

The psalmist said, “... *You have made me see troubles, many and bitter*” *Psalms 71:20*

Notice, 4 Keys to Victory in Trials:

1. Count - A Joyful Attitude - 1:2

“*My brothers and sisters, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,*” vs. 2

“Count” or “consider” is an accounting term, means to take stock of. Consider carefully. Investigate fully.

James does not say if trials come, but when they do come.

Lucy offers one of her unsolicited observations about life in a “Peanuts” cartoon. “Life,” she muses to Charlie Brown, “is like a deck chair. Some place it so they can see where they are going. Some place it so they can see where they have been. And some place it so they can see where they are at present.”

Poor Charlie Brown says, “I can’t even get mine unfolded!”

Apostle Peter also says, “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through as if something strange were happening to you. Instead be very glad (rejoice) because these trials will make you partners with Christ in His suffering, and afterward you will have the wonderful joy of sharing his glory when it is displayed to all the world.” 1 Peter 4:12, 13

Our hurts and difficult circumstances are part of God’s plan to help us grow. We should thank Him and rejoice for what they do in our lives.

Life is difficult. Suffering is inevitable. But misery is an option!

Gary Vanderet tells this intriguing story:

“Two men were once both seriously ill in the same small room of a hospital. One of the men, as part of his treatment, was allowed to sit up in bed for an hour in the afternoon in order to drain fluid in his lungs. His bed was next to the window. The other man had to spend all his time flat on his back

One of the disadvantages of their condition was that they weren’t allowed to do much: no reading, no radio or TV - they were allowed no visitors, so it was just the two of them having to keep quiet and still.

They would sometimes talk for hours of their wives, their children, their homes, their jobs, their time in the war, and all sorts of things.

Every afternoon when the man in the bed next to the window was propped up for his hour, he would pass the time by describing what he could see outside. And the other man began to live for those hours.

The window apparently overlooked a park, that had a lake with ducks and swans, and children threw them bread and sailed model boats. Young lovers walked hand in hand beneath the trees, and there were flowers and stretches of grass, and games of softball. Right at the back, behind the fringe of trees was a fine view of the city skyline.

The man on his back would listen to all of this, enjoying every minute — how a child nearly fell into the lake, or how beautiful the girls were in their summer dresses, or how a boy played with his puppy. He could almost see what was happening just outside the window.

Then one afternoon, when his partner described a parade, he got to thinking, “Why should the man next to the window have all the pleasure of seeing what goes on? Why shouldn’t he get a chance?”

He felt ashamed and tried not to think like that, but the more he tried, the worse he wanted a change. He’d do anything!

After a few days he had turned sour. He should be by the window. And he brooded and couldn’t sleep, and he grew more seriously ill.

One night as he stared at the ceiling, the other man suddenly woke up, coughing and choking, fluid congesting his lungs. His hands groped for the button that would bring the night nurse to his aid. And

the man in the next bed watched without moving. The coughing racked the darkness - on and on - choked off - then stopped - the sound of breathing stopped - and the man continued to stare at the ceiling.

In the morning, the day nurse came in with water for their baths and found the other man dead. His body was taken away quietly, with no fuss.

As soon as it seemed decent, the man asked if he could be moved to the bed next to the window. And they moved him, made him quite comfortable, and left him alone to be quiet and still.

The minute they left, he painfully, laboriously propped himself up on one elbow, and looked out the window. It faced a blank wall."

Vanderet concludes, "Some people always seem to face a blank wall, and yet they know a beauty and joy in the midst of their pain that is enriching. As a result they make life come alive for those around them. They cultivate a joyful attitude." [Gary Vanderet, "The Skill of Handling Life's Troubles," Cultivating a Faith that Endures (Palo, Alto, CA: Discovery Publishing, April 27, 1986), 3].3

Job 23:10 When God has finished with me, I shall shine as gold.

This attitude is only possible because we know something:

2. Know -An Understanding Mind - 1:3

"knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience." James 1:3

"patience" really means endurance, or perseverance!

We know that the testing of our faith produces perseverance.

Trials test faith.

Not a test to find if faith is there.

A test to strengthen faith.

"that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revealing of Jesus Christ" 1 Peter 1:7

The word used here for tested is the word used in the LXX to describe the process of refining silver. It is put into the flames to burn off the impurities and strengthen the quality of the silver.

God does not test us to destroy us but to purify and strengthen us.

Great little parable of endurance. It seems that an old dog fell into a farmer's well. After considering the situation, the farmer decided that neither the dog nor the well were worth saving. So, he decided to bury the old dog and put him out of his misery. When the farmer began shoveling, the dog was hysterical. But as the farmer kept on shoveling, and the dirt hit his back, a thought struck the old dog. Each time a shovel full of dirt hit his back, the dog would shake off the dirt and step up. So, blow after blow, the dog would shake it off and step up. No matter how painful those shovels of dirt were, the old dog fought panic, he just kept shaking it off and stepping up. Finally, the dog, battered and exhausted

stepped triumphantly over the wall of that well. What he thought would bury him actually benefited him because of the way he handled his adversity.

Perseverance is the ability to shake it off and step up when a load of trials are dumped on you.

3. Allow - A Surrendered Will - 1:4, 9-11

"But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." James 1:4

Perseverance has an ongoing purpose – to bring you and me to maturity; completeness.

God is working in all of our trials and through perseverance can produce mature character.

Take Joseph for example,

Sold into slavery by his brothers. That was not right.

Double-crossed by Potiphar's wife who falsely accused him of sexual advances.

Probably felt deserted by God as he languished in prison for many months.

His perseverance and faithfulness to God produced maturity, a complete man who was no longer the spoiled child with a coat of many colors.

So he was prepared to handle the leadership position next in power to Pharaoh, which put him in a position to save the lives of the people of God.

His perseverance through his trials produced maturity.

That's what perseverance did for Moses.

40 years as a fair-haired boy being brought up in Pharaoh's court.

Killed a man and had those 40 years in the Sinai wilderness tending the sheep of Jethro, his father-in-law

Mix of good times and bad marked by a steady trust in God showed how perseverance produced the character needed to face down Pharaoh and lead the Jewish people out of Egyptian bondage.

This 80 year-old man had his toughest 40 years ahead of him, as he led God's people through the desert.

Bad things do happen to good people, but you and I are privileged to walk closely with the Lord.

God allows our faith to be tested so that out of the long-haul testing comes perseverance which produces maturity.

Every person who has gone through tough trials will tell you that they would not want to go through it again, but wouldn't trade anything for the lessons learned and the character developed through the trial.

Trials can bring out the best in us.

Trials can show us what we are made of and make us better than we were.

When we surrender – allow – bear up under the load

God doesn't work in us without our consent — we must surrender our will to His! If we face trials without a surrendered will, we will remain immature infants, babies who always whine and moan!

Ills — James 1:9-11 explores this truth with two classes of Christians — the poor and the rich.

“Believers who are poor have something to boast about, for God has honored them.

And those who are rich should boast that God has humbled them. They will fade away like a little flower in the field. In the same way, the rich will fade away with all of their achievements.”

Life is so uncertain that tragedy and despair may strike at any time. It is foolish to trust in anything—like wealth—that may be lost in a moment. It is only wise to trust in things that cannot be lost.

The poor who are Christians have a high position in God's view despite their low state in the world. The wealthy may seem powerful now, but God will bring them low in the end unless they humble themselves now. This is a complete reversal of status.

James calls for a proper attitude toward material things. He understood the true nature of riches. They are so impermanent, like a lovely blossom so quickly destroyed by the burning sun and desert wind.

God's testing has a way of levelling us all. It is not our material resources that are going to get us through the trials of life, but our spiritual resources.

So God says, if you lack the wisdom to make it, ask me for it!

4. Ask - A Believing Heart - 1:5-8

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” James 1:4

God supplies wisdom to those who ask. But there's a condition: you must ask in faith, believing. Next week we'll explore more about how to get wisdom so you can turn victories into trials.

Review what we learned today:

1. Count it all joy when troubles come.
2. Know that God is working to make you strong, complete and mature.
3. Let, allow, or surrender your will, to God's working in your life.
4. Ask God for wisdom in faith, believing, not doubting.