

REJOICING IN TRIALS

James 1:1-11

Fairly soon after the ascension of our Lord, the murder of Stephan ignited persecution against the newborn Church of Jerusalem (Acts 8). Numerous Jewish believers were driven out of Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch (Acts 11:19).

Perhaps as early as 34AD, James, the half-brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem Church, penned this letter to strengthen the faith of his brothers and sisters in the face of persecution.

Rather than punishment, James taught trials are an opportunity.

GOD USES TRIALS TO SANCTIFY US (JAMES 1:2-4)

James makes it clear trials are the rule, not the exception. He does not say, "Count it all joy *if* you meet trials of various kinds." You need not look for adversity; it will find you! That trials ought not be a surprise was also taught by the Apostle Peter (1 Peter 4:12-16).

Hardships, trials, are an inevitable part of our Christian lives. Trials come in all forms. We have all experienced or known fellow Christians who have suffered financial setbacks, physical hardships, broken relationships and persecution. Trials may come from one's boss, or from one's employees. Trials come in various shapes and sizes, but they all are a form of adversity.

James instructs us that when we encounter these trials, we are to wholeheartedly rejoice in them, knowing God will use them to sanctify us. These trials are a testing of our faith; they test the strength of our faith.

Adversity is like a stress test, pushing us up to and beyond our limits, so that we will recognize our dependence upon God, and call on Him for help in our time of trouble. Adversity is designed to produce steadfastness in our lives. *Steadfastness* translates a word that means *to bear up under*. It could also be translated *endurance*. We bear up under a trial when through the trial we trust God and look to Him to meet our needs. When we bear up under a trial in faith, God works in us to change us and bring about spiritual maturity. That's why trials are to be considered an occasion for joy. One writer summarizes James' teaching this way:

To resist and detest adversity is to resist the sanctifying and perfecting work of God in our lives. To rejoice is to embrace His perfecting work in us.

When trials hit, we find ourselves having a lot of questions; we're not sure what to do. In verses 5-8, we are encouraged to cry out to God for wisdom.

ASK GOD FOR WISDOM (JAMES 1:5-8)

James assures us we can ask and keep on asking, God will never reproach us for repeatedly asking for wisdom. He is glorified and we are sanctified when we depend upon Him for wisdom. The one absolute condition is that we ask in faith. This means when we ask, we are already committed to doing what God reveals.

If we ask in faith, we have an ironclad promise God will answer and reveal His wisdom.

The person who does not ask in faith, but doubts is the person who is not committed to doing what God reveals. He is of two minds: "maybe I'll do what God says, but if it doesn't make sense to me, I'll do what I think is best."

God will not reveal His wisdom to those not committed to follow it. To sit in judgment upon God's wisdom is the height of pride and arrogance. Rather than bearing up under the trial in faith and being sanctified; the double-minded Christian is blown and tossed about by the winds of adversity. The double-minded Christian is marked by instability and chaos. The life of faith is marked by stability and order and peace (Psalm 1).

POVERTY PREPARES, WEALTH DECEIVES (JAMES 1:9-11)

The *lowly brother* is a Christian who is poor. His *exaltation* is his poverty. His exaltation is his poverty in the sense that his poverty has prepared him well to be *steadfast under trial, to bear up under trial*. Poverty is a long-term trial in which the poor must continually depend upon God to meet their needs. Therefore, when other kinds of trials come upon the poor, they are well prepared, well trained, to remain steadfast in faith.

The *rich man* is a Christian brother who is wealthy. His *humiliation* is his wealth. The rich boast in their wealth when in fact that wealth is their humiliation. Their wealth is their humiliation because it does not prepare the rich man to be steadfast in faith. When adversity comes to the wealthy, on what do they rely to get them through? Their wealth.

Rather than turning to God when trials come, the rich man turns to his wealth. Unlike the poor brother, the rich brother does not bear up in faith, but fades away. His spiritual vitality peters out.

Poverty prepares the poor to depend upon God; wealth deceives the rich to depend upon riches.

CONCLUSION

1. We should count trials as an occasion for joy knowing God is using them to sanctify us.
2. God promises to give us wisdom in the midst of our trials if we ask in faith; if we are committed to doing what He reveals. God reveals His wisdom through His Word, through godly counsel of mature brothers and sisters, of the Elders and of the Deacons of the church.
3. Double-mindedness leads to a life of instability and chaos. Wealth causes the rich to fade away.

APPLICATION

1. I will rejoice in my trials and embrace God's perfecting work in me.
2. I will ask for and obey the wisdom God gives me in the midst of my trials.