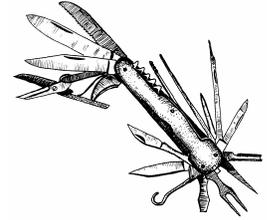


Journey Into Faith That Works



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 which are scattered abroad* (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 abroad*. 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: *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations* (1:2). James doesn’t say “if” *you fall into divers temptations* but **when** (emphasis mine). The word translated *temptations* (PEIRASMOS, pee-ras-mos) in this passage refers to trials or adversity for the purpose of testing. 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. Thus, our problems are a test of our faith and are *divers* (POIKILOS, poy-kee-los), which means 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 *temptations* or problems *all joy*? James tells us in the next verse: *Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience* (1:3). Then, what does James tell us in verse 4?

Problems develop *patience* (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 *count it all joy* when we have trials designed to make us spiritually mature (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 lack wisdom, let him ask of 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 of God, that giveth to all men liberally, wisdom shall 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 *ask in faith, nothing wavering* (1:6a). The greatest enemy of answered prayer is doubt. James says doubt causes us to be *like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed* (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 shall receive any thing of 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.

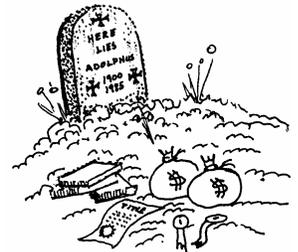
There is a divine purpose behind every problem God allows us to have. Therefore, **problems refine our faith, cause us to rely on God**, and . . .

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

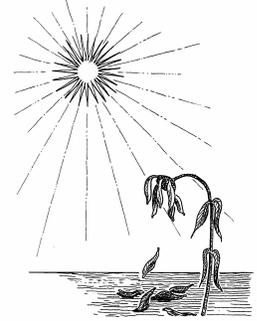
Problems are not respecters of persons. Thus, James writes: *Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted* (1:9). *Low degree* refers to those who are economically poor. Poverty, or having less than others, embitters some Christians. However, as believers we should recognize that though we may be materially poor, we become spiritually rich when we endure problems.

In contrast to poor believers, James writes: *But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away* (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?

The phrase *vexation of spirit* refers to grasping at the air. Therefore, all our earthly stuff means nothing 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?



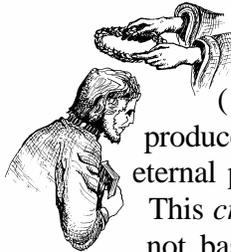
In verse 11 James says problems remind us life is short and we too can pass away suddenly like a flower in the heat of the sun. Problems remind rich and poor alike that it is not what we have but who we are that's really important.



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 that endureth temptation* (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 *shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that 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.
