

CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES TOWARD TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS

(Turning Trials Into Triumphs)
James 1:1-12
Adeoye, Emmanuel (Evangelist)

James tells us that we can have this same experience today. No matter what the trials may be on the outside (**James 1:1-12**) or the temptations on the inside (**James 1:13-27**), through faith in Christ we can experience victory.

The result of this victory is spiritual maturity.

If we are going to turn trials into triumphs, we must obey four imperatives: *count* (**James 1:2**), *know* (**James 1:3**), *let* (**James 1:4,9-11**), and *ask* (**James 1:5-8**). Or, to put it another way, there are four essentials for victory in trials: a joyful attitude, an understanding mind, a surrendered will, and a heart that wants...

Count a Joyful Attitude (James 1:2)

Outlook determines outcome, and attitude determines action. God tells us to *expect trials*. It is not "if you fall into various testings" but "when you fall into various testings." The believer who expects his Christian life to be easy is in for a shock. Jesus warned His disciples, "*In the world ye shall have tribulation*" (**John 16:33**).

Paul told his converts that "*we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God*" (**Acts 14:22**). Because we are God's "*scattered people*" and not God's "*sheltered people*," we must experience trials. We cannot always expect everything to go our way.

Some trials come simply because we are human-sickness, accidents, disappointments, even seeming tragedies. Other trials come because we are Christians.

Peter emphasizes this in his first letter: "*Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you*" (**1 Peter 4:12**).

Satan fights us, the world opposes us, and this makes for a life of battle. The phrase "fall into" does not suggest a stupid accident. Translate it "encounter, come across." A Christian certainly should not manufacture trials. The Greek word translated "divers"

means "various, varicolored." Peter uses the same word in **1 Peter 1:6** - "***Ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.***"

The trials of life are not all alike; they are like variegated yam that the weaver uses to make a beautiful rug. God arranges and mixes the colors and experiences of life. The final product is a beautiful thing for His glory.

The key word is ***count***. It is a financial term, and it means "***to evaluate***." Paul used it several times in **Phil 3**.

When Paul became a Christian, he evaluated his life and set new goals and priorities. Things that were once important to him became "garbage" in the light of his experience with Christ. When we face the trials of life, we must evaluate them in the light of what God is doing for us.

This explains why the dedicated Christian can have joy in the midst of trials: *he lives for the things that matter most*. Even our Lord was able to endure the cross because of "***the joy that was set before Him***" (**Heb 12:2**), the joy of returning to heaven and one day sharing His glory with His church. 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, then trials will make us bitter, not better. Job had the right outlook when he said, "***But He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold***" (**Job 23:10**).

So, when trials come, immediately give thanks to the Lord and adopt a joyful attitude. Do not pretend; do not try self-hypnosis; simply look at trials through the eyes of faith. Outlook determines outcome; ***to end with joy, begin with joy***. "But how," we may ask, "*is it possible to rejoice in the midst of trials?*" The second imperative explains this.

Know - an Understanding Mind (James 1:3)

What do Christians know that makes it easier to face trials and benefit from them?

Faith is always tested When God called Abraham to live by faith, He tested him in order to increase his faith.

God always tests us to bring out the *best*, Satan tempts us to bring out the worst. The testing of our faith proves that we are truly born again.

A. Testing works for us, not against us. The word *trying* can be translated "*approval*." Again, Peter helps us understand it better: "*That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth*" (**1 Peter 1:7**).

A gold prospector brings his ore sample into the assayer's office to be tested. The sample itself may not be worth more than a few dollars, but the *approval* - the official statement about the ore - is worth millions! It assures the prospector that he has a gold mine. God's approval of our faith is precious, because it assures us that our faith is genuine.

Trials work for the believer, not against him. Paul said, "***And we know that all things work together for good***" (***Rom 8:28***); and, "***For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory***" (***2 Cor 4:17***).

B. Trials rightly used help us to mature. What does God want to produce in our lives?

Patience, endurance, and the ability to keep going when things are tough.

"We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope" (***Rom 5:3-4***). In the Bible, *patience* is not a passive acceptance of circumstances. It is a courageous perseverance in the face of suffering and difficulty.

Immature people are always impatient; mature people are patient and persistent. Impatience and unbelief usually go together, just as faith and patience do. ***"Be . . . followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises"*** (***Heb 6:12***). ***"For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise"*** (***Heb 10:36***).

"He that believeth shall not make haste" (***Isa 28:16***).

God wants to make us patient because that is the key to every other blessing. The little child who does not learn patience will not learn much of anything else. When the believer learns to wait on the Lord, then God can do great things for him.

Abraham ran ahead of the Lord, married Hagar, and brought great sorrow into his home (***Gen 16***). Moses ran ahead of God, murdered a man, and had to spend forty years with the sheep to learn patience (***Ex 2:11ff***). Peter almost killed a man in his impatience (***John 18:10-11***).

The only way the Lord can develop patience and character in our lives is through trials. Endurance cannot be attained by reading a book (even this one), listening to a sermon, or even praying a prayer. We must go through the difficulties of life, trust God, and obey Him. The result will be patience and character. Knowing this, we can face trials joyfully.

We know what trials will do in us and for us, and we know that the end result will bring glory to God.

This fact explains why studying the Bible helps us grow in patience (**Rom 15:4**). As we read about Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, and even our Lord, we realize that God has a purpose in trials. God fulfills His purposes as we trust Him.

There is no substitute for an understanding mind. Satan can defeat the ignorant believer, but he cannot overcome the Christian who knows his Bible and understands the purposes of God.

Let - a Surrendered Will (James 1:4, 9-12)

God cannot build our character without our cooperation. If we resist Him, then He chastens us into submission. But if we submit to Him, then He can accomplish His work. He is not satisfied with a halfway job. God wants a perfect work; He wants a finished product that is mature and complete.

God's goal for our lives is maturity. It would be a tragedy if our children remained little babies. We enjoy watching them mature, even though maturity brings dangers as well as delights. Many Christians shelter themselves from the trials of life, and as a result, never grow up. God wants the **"little children" to become "young men,"** and the **"young men" He wants to become "fathers"** (**1 John 2:12-14**).

Paul outlined three works that are involved in a complete Christian life (**Eph 2:8-10**). First, there is the work God does *for us*, which is salvation. Jesus Christ completed this work on the cross. If we trust Him, He will save us. Second, there is the work God does *in us*: **"For we are His workmanship."**

This work is known as *sanctification*: God builds our character and we become more like Jesus Christ, **"conformed to the image of His Son"** (**Rom 8:29**). The third work is what God does *through us* - service. We are **"created in Christ Jesus unto good works."**

God builds character before He calls to service. He must work *in us* before He can work *through us*.

God spent twenty-five years working in Abraham before He could give him his promised son. God worked thirteen years in Joseph's life, putting him into *"various testing"* before He could put him on the throne of Egypt. He spent eighty years preparing Moses for forty years of service. Our Lord took three years training His disciples, building their character.

But God cannot work in us without our consent. There must be a surrendered will. The mature person does not argue with God's will; instead, he accepts it willingly and obeys it joyfully. "**Doing the will of God from the heart**" (**Eph 6:6**). If we try to go through trials without surrendered wills, we will end up more like immature children than mature adults.

One difficult stage of maturing is *weaning*. A child being weaned is sure that his mother no longer loves him and that everything is against him. Actually, weaning is a step toward maturity and liberty. It is good for the child! Sometimes God has to wean His children away from their childish toys and immature attitudes.

David pictured this in **Ps 131**: "*Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child*" (**Ps 131:2**). God uses trials to wean us away from childish things; but if we do not surrender to Him, we will become even more immature.

In **James 1:9-11**, James applies this principle to two different kinds of Christians: the poor and the rich. Apparently, money and social status were real problems among these people (see **James 2:1-7, 15-16; 4:1-3, 13-17; 5:1-8**). God's testing *have a way of leveling us*. When testing comes to the poor man, he lets God have His way and rejoices that he possesses spiritual riches that cannot be taken from him.

When testing comes to the rich man, he also lets God have His way, and he rejoices that his riches in Christ cannot wither or fade away. In other words, it is not your material resources that take you through the testing of life; it is your spiritual resources.

Ask - a Believing Heart (James 1:5-8)

The people to whom James wrote had problems with their praying (**James 4:1-3; 5:13-18**). When we are going through God-ordained difficulties, what should we pray about? James gives the answer: ask God for *wisdom*.

James has a great deal to say about wisdom (**James 1:5; 3:13-18**).

The Jewish people were lovers of wisdom, as the Book of Proverbs gives evidence. Someone has said that knowledge is the ability to take things apart, while wisdom is the ability to put them together. Why do we need wisdom when we are going through trials? Why not ask for strength, or grace, or even deliverance?

For this reason: *we need wisdom so we will not waste the opportunities God is giving us to mature*. Wisdom helps us understand how to use these circumstances for our good and God's glory.

James not only explained *what* to ask for (wisdom), but he also described *how* to ask. We are to ask in faith. We do not have to be afraid, for God is anxious to answer, and He will never scold us! **"He giveth more grace" (James 4:6)**. He also gives more and more wisdom. The greatest enemy to answered prayer is unbelief.

James compares the doubting believer to the waves of the sea, up one minute and down the next. While vacationing in Hawaii, I learned that you cannot trust the waves. I was sitting on a rock by the ocean, watching the waves and enjoying the sunshine. I heard a sound behind me, turned to see who was approaching, and instantly was drenched by a huge wave! Never turn your back on the waves - they are down, then they are up.

This is the experience of the "double-minded man." Faith says, "Yes!" but unbelief says, "No!" Then doubt comes along and says "Yes!" one minute and "No!" the next. It was doubt that made Peter sink in the waves as he was walking to Jesus (**Matt 14:22-33**). Jesus asked him, **"O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"**

When Peter started his walk of faith, he kept his eyes on Christ. But when he was distracted by the wind and waves, he ceased to walk by faith; and he began to sink. He was double-minded, and he almost drowned.

Many Christians live like corks on the waves: up one minute, down the next; tossed back and forth. This kind of experience is evidence of immaturity. Paul used a similar idea in **Eph 4:14** - **"That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they he in wait to deceive."**

If we have believing and united hearts, we can ask in faith and God will give the wisdom we need. Instability and immaturity go together.

James closed this section with a beatitude: **"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation" (James 1:12)**. He started (**James 1:2**) and ended with joy.

Outlook determines outcome. This beatitude is a great encouragement because it promises a crown to those who patiently endure trials. Paul often used athletic illustrations in his letters, and James does so here. He is not saying that the sinner is saved by enduring trials. He is saying that the believer is rewarded by enduring trials.

How is he rewarded? First, by growth in Christian character. This is more important than anything else. He is rewarded also by bringing glory to God and by being granted a crown of life when Jesus Christ returns. First the cross, then the crown. First the suffering, then the glory.

God does not help us by removing the tests, but by making the tests work for us. Satan wants to use the tests to tear us down, but God uses them to build us up.

In **James 1:12**, James used a very important word, *love*. We would expect him to write, "*the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that trust Him*" or "*that obey Him.*"

Why did James use *love*? Because love is the spiritual motivation behind every imperative in this section.

Why do we have a joyful attitude as we face trials? Because we love God, and He loves us, and He will not harm us. Why do we have an understanding mind? Because He loves us and has shared His truth with us, and we love Him in return.

Why do we have a surrendered will? Because we love Him. Where there is love, there is surrender and obedience. Why do we have a believing heart? Because love and faith go together. When you love someone, you trust him, and you do not hesitate to ask him for help.

Love is the spiritual force behind the imperatives James gives us. If we love God, we will have no problem counting, knowing, letting, and asking. But there is another factor involved: love keeps us faithful to the Lord. The double-minded person (**James 1:8**) is like an unfaithful husband or wife: he wants to love both God and the world.

James admonished, "*Purify your hearts, ye double-minded!*" (**James 4:8**) The Greek word translated purify literally means "make chaste." The picture is that of an unfaithful lover. Let's go back to the weaning. The child who loves his mother, and who is sure that his mother loves him, will be able to get through the weaning and start to grow up.

The Christian who loves God, and who knows that God loves him, will not fall apart when God permits trials to come.

CONCLUSION

He is secure in God's love. He is not double-minded, trying to love both God and the world. Lot was double-minded; when trials came, he failed miserably. Abraham was the friend of God; he loved God and trusted Him. When trials came, Abraham triumphed and matured in the faith.

God's purpose in trials is maturity. "Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." The Charles B. Williams translation says it graphically: "*But you must let your endurance come to its perfect product so that you may be fully developed and perfectly equipped.*"