

COPING WITH THE TRIALS OF LIFE
JAMES 1:1—12

Introduction:

1. Thanks for the invitation to be your interim minister—my wife is...
2. What caught my attention to begin a preaching series from the book of James were two items: Jim Harless hadn't preached a series from James in the last five years and then with the short time Isaac was here the initial words of James resonated with me and I hope they will as well with you.
3. Let me read the first 12 verses of James and see if they connect with you: **James 1:1-12** For me, and I trust for you, what James writes about speaks to the proverbial “elephant in the room” that may be present at Tri County Christian Church. . . your founding minister just retired—you had a good transition plan in place and then your new minister resigned just after 6 mnths. You have had some families leave as a result of all this . . . and you are individually and corporately as a church, going through a trial of life. A trial that has left you all hurting. . .
4. Someone has described the book of James as being the Gospel of Common Sense and his God-breathed advice about coping with the trials of life is helpful and should be heeded.
5. James, a servant of God and Christ, and thought to be step-brother of Jesus, instructs us to do the **opposite** of what we would naturally do when trials and difficulties come our way . . . he says, “consider it pure joy”. Rather than joy . . .
6. What might be some of our “natural” reactions to trials? Anger—fear—frustration--discouragement--questions--disappointment--when trials come joy is not the first thing that comes to mind. In this short passage James will give us insight into how we can react to the trials of life with . . . JOY.
7. Verses two and three make it clear that . . .

I. TRIALS TEST OUR FAITH (verse 3)

A. How Do Trials Test Our Faith?

1. Trials test our relationship with God. Trials raise questions in our minds about the **wisdom, goodness and love** of God. How could God let this happen to me/us? Why didn't God prevent this from happening? If God is so good and loving why didn't he stop this tragedy? If God knew Isaac was leaving in 6 mnths...

2. Trials raise doubts in our minds and they test our relationship with God. When Job faced the difficulties of life brought to him by Satan it was Mrs Job who said “curse God and die” while a more godly perspective was in his mind when he said—shouldn't we accept good from God as well as trouble? Trials do test our faith.

3. When I was a teenager I had a paper route and I rode my bike 11 miles a day delivering papers. If you have ever tried to ride your bike in the wind and deliver papers at the same time, its a trial—or at least it was for me. I got madder and madder and, as we have a habit of doing, we blame God for the trial and I cursed Him out of my frustration and anger. I mean who else are you going to blame? He's the maker of the wind.

4. That particular trial tested my faith at the time and I failed the test. I certainly didn't react with joy—and that was such a minor trial.

5. Trials test our faith in God on a a few different levels. As I mentioned a moment ago, trials raise questions in our minds about the wisdom, goodness and love of God. Listen to the Psalmist: **Ps. 77:1—4, 7—9** Trials can test our relationship with God. A 2nd insight James challenges his readers with is this . . .

II. TRIALS CAN DEVELOP OUR PERSEVERANCE (VS 3&4)

A. Perseverance Is Endurance—Sticktuitiveness

1. Fly on windshield. We are told that perseverance makes us stronger for the next time. That is true. We need to recognize that trials provide an opportunity for spiritual growth in the area of perseverance.

2. The Hebrew writer exemplified perseverance this way: “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Pioneer and Perfector of our faith, who for the joy set before him, **endured** the cross, scorning its shame . . .” (12:2)

3. The trials we face—the testing of our faith—can develop perseverance.

4. **Where do these trials originate**—where do they come from? Trials may be the result of our own personal choice. Trials may be Gods testing of our faith—Do you remember God said to Satan—have you considered my servant Job—and God allowed Satan to create havoc in Jobs life.

5. Think about Joseph—trials came from within the family—they came from false accusations (Potiphars wife)--they came from a persons forgetfulness.

6. Trials may come from religious or political persecution. Saul thought he was serving God when he persecuted Christians. At the time of James' writing, the emperors of Rome were starting to persecute Christians. Christian people today are being attacked for their religious beliefs.

7. Trials may come from any and all directions. They may come in clusters and if handled correctly they can develop the godly and spiritual trait of perseverance in our lives. Perseverance is patience, steadfastness, constancy, unswereved. It is to remain strong in spite of pressure.

8. Gearge Sweeting has said: “The fiery pressure of the furnace produces the hardened steel. Tremendous pressure in the earths elements creates the costly diamond. The crushed flower produces perfume.” In a lighter vein someone has said, “A Christian is like a tea bag; he's not worth much until he's been through some hot water.” If we believe God is in control trials can produce patience.

9. As you may well know, difficulties **may not** develop this character in our lives. Trials may produce bitterness, anger, fear, a will that just gives up. As we have already read perseverance has a goal—God has a goal in mind which can only be achieved through trials and that goal is expressed 3 ways—so that we may be mature—complete--and lacking in nothing. Trials can make us to be everything God would have us to be. Mature describes a surgeon who is completely educated and prepared—being complete describes a baby born with all its parts. Lacking nothing describes a racing team which doesn't lag behind anyone.

10. Trials can make us go crazy and do strange things. They can cause us to think wrong. Right thinking is vital when we face trials and therefore we need God's wisdom, as it can be found through prayer.

III. TRIALS CAN TEST OUR WISDOM (5—7)

A. The Question That Never Goes Away . . . is the title of a book by Philip

Yancey.

1. The question that never goes away has to do with suffering—massive kinds of suffering—like what happened in Japan with the tsunami—and Newtown, Connecticut with innocent children being gunned down.
2. Trials like this and cancer for you and me, and an unexpected death by suicide, or burying your own children have a way of testing our wisdom. They are so shocking we can't even think straight. Trials have a way of numbing our sensibilities and they may cause us to have some unresolved issues with God. If God is so good how could he let this happen? If God is so powerful, why didn't he step in and stop this madness? Either he is no good or he is not very powerful—is the conclusion. Why the silence from the mouth of God?
3. Trying to figure out life's trials without the wisdom of God leaves people in a lurch—and might I say that even with the wisdom of God trials can be very difficult.

B. Trials Should Lead Us To God

1. God desires us to ask Him for wisdom. James tells us about God's character in verses 5—7. God desires to give his wisdom, generously. He will give wisdom generously and he won't find fault with the asker who is coming yet again asking for wisdom. He will answer the request for wisdom—it will be given to him.
2. God is not a stuffed shirt—he is not stingy—he won't begrudgingly answer our request for wisdom. He won't be throwing it back in our face-- “weren't you just asking for wisdom this morning, or yesterday?”
3. The truth about God is that we are to ask and it will be given, seek and we shall find and knock and the door will be opened. That is God's promise, not mine, and God will be faithful to his word!!
4. However, this prayer for wisdom is conditional: **HE MUST BELIEVE AND NOT DOUBT**. He must trust God and move forward knowing God will help him figure it out. A Doubter, on the other hand, is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. A doubter is unstable—a doubter is Mr. Two-Face—he is a double-minded man.
5. The man/woman who prays for wisdom must be a person of conviction—steadiness and be ready to receive the Lord's answer.
6. Verses 9—11 don't automatically seem to fit the scenario of trials. They appear to be a couple of unrelated or unconnected verses. Yet I believe it is true that poverty and riches may cause various kinds of trials and difficulties. In these 3 verses the emphasis is more on those who are rich than those who are poor—**9--11**
7. Poverty, the OT tells us, can lead a person to steal; while wealth is fleeting—poverty and wealth can create difficulties in a person's life.
8. Finally, James indicates that . . .

IV. TRIALS ENDURED WILL BE REWARDED (12)

A. He Is Blessed

1. School, of all grades, has always been a test for me. I

always feared receiving the report card at the end of the school year. I was personally thrilled when I passed from one grade to the next. I was thrilled when I graduated from college and when I received my Masters Degree I was overjoyed. I must say, I was so proud of myself because I had endured college for so many years. I had persevered (17 years) and I was personally rewarded with some self-satisfaction.

2. I had passed all the tests required of me. I had answered the professors questions satisfactorily and I was blessed.

3. To the man or woman who perseveres under trial he will be blessed and receive the crown of life—he will receive eternal life. He will receive the victors crown.

B. He Will Receive The Crown of Life

1. There is no reward promised to the man who turns his back on God when going through a trial. Not everyone receives a trophy simply for participating. The crown goes to the ones who have stood the test—who have endured the trial and kept pressing on.

2. Let me finish with one final thought and it is the last phrase of our text today: **vs. 12** Trials, difficulties and heartaches don't always lead a person to spiritual growth—they don't always drive you to God—they don't always consider it pure joy—trials can lead one away from God and down the path of bitterness, despair and defeat to the point they miss the grace of God. The Hebrew writer says it this way: “See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.” (12:15)

3. Trials and heartaches can cause us to question God's love for us and in turn it can dampen and destroy our love for Him. Down the road from our house there is a sign in someones yard that says: God loves you—always has—always will. Trials can make us question God's love. Trials can sour our love for Him. Trials may cause us to turn our back on Him.

4. God has promised the crown of life to those who endure the trials of life . . . to those who love Him!!