

“How much of life is a test?”

James 1:2-8 NIV

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, (3) because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. (4) Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

“(5) If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

“(6) But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. (7) That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; (8) he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.”

Thesis:

Each trial we face gives us opportunity to prove the truth of God’s word.

Our text illustrates the gap between human wisdom and God’s Word.

Years ago the mother of a ten-year-old girl told me that parents discipline kids mostly because

the kids have invaded the parents’ comfort zones.

Any correction parents give children is selfishly motivated, she thought.

It had nothing to do with helping the child develop, or right and wrong.

I do not know how widespread the concept is among current parents, but some schools of thought promote the idea that kids should never be frustrated or told “no.”

Many schools of “higher” learning create “safe spaces” so students can avoid being exposed to any information they think is disagreeable.

James, Jesus’ half-brother-in-the-flesh taught otherwise.

“Consider it pure joy . . . whenever you face trials of many kinds . . .”

Trials and road-bumps assist us, he said.

Other Bible authors agreed with James; Jesus did, too.

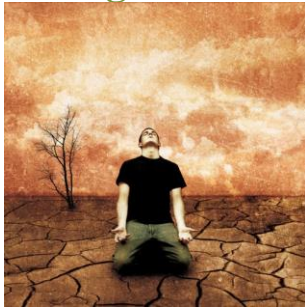
Most of us agree that God’s Word is often at odds with celebrated human wisdom.

Yet, we probably question how trials and tests benefit us.

We respect the Bible, but we are not always joyful when tough times come our way, are we?

In difficult times, we do not usually laugh and smile ourselves to sleep at night.

We tend to toss, pound pillows, and gulp sleep aids and quick-acting antacids.



Few of us enjoy our tribulations.

If we did, the morning, noon, and nightly news would be filled with laughter.

Pardon this little side bar, but after I wrote the expression “nightly,” I wondered why we can’t also say “morningly” and “noonly.”

Enough of this grammar nonsense; let’s get to the life-conflicts that vex us.

Our language confirms our misery.

My Microsoft Word Thesaurus provided these synonyms: for trials:

ordeals, hardships, pains, sufferings, troubles, miseries, distresses, burdens, worries, difficulties, anxieties, tribulations.¹

Are you comfortable with what our text says about these life high hurdles?

Have you recently had serious bouts with worry, pain, and frustration?

When Norma and I lived in the Wilshire area of Los Angeles, we sometimes visited the Los Angeles County Art Museum.

Norma hoped to help her bumpkin husband gain a little culture.

One day we were in line viewing paintings in a large museum display room.

As we stood surveying one painting, it made about as much sense to me as if we had dipped our dog’s tail in various paint cans and let the pup whack its tail against the canvas.

¹ Above is a partial list of possible synonyms available on my “Microsoft Word” program.

In my view, it was hardly more than, amorphous, disconnected color blotches.
“Senseless, modern art,” I thought.

Suddenly we heard sighs and gasps from across the room.

A woman had her eyes fixed in wonder on the painting that I considered so absurd. She apparently sensed my perplexity and she motioned for us to cross the room and see the painting from her vantage point.
She had already seen the painting up-close, but from her distant view realized and appreciated the landscape’s power.

What seemed so inane from our up-close view became magnificent from a distance.

The Painting: “Landscape with Figures” by John Edward Costigan, 1888-1872.



As we encounter it, life often seems futile, senseless, random, and cruel.

The Bible, though, gives a unique perspective.

There’s good news about life’s vexations:

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, Unless we prefer to be angry and upset, there is reason to feel joyful when we face adversity.

**How do we make that happen?
You already know much of this information.
You need only to remember it.**

First, God created the Cosmos and all life.

Life in all forms results from God’s original creation.

Life does not occur spontaneously.

Some folks get excited by the prospect of finding life on Mars or some distant planet.

If physicists should discover evidence of life elsewhere, it does not inevitably mean that life began on its own in that location.

We should not assume that God did not create that life.

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”²

When 15th century and earlier voyagers found people in the new world, they encountered folks who dressed differently and spoke languages unknown to the explorers.

But those “strange” people were basically the same nature; they shared a commonality with those folks.

God had created them, too.

God formed all that exists.

We should not be troubled if scientists find life in “outer” space.

If space voyagers find life in other parts of the Cosmos, they will likely learn that those lifeforms have physical properties similar to what we see on this planet.³

All life descends from God’s original Creation.

To my knowledge, what we do not see is life starting spontaneously anywhere.

Neither can we restore life to anyone who has died.

That has happened only once: the well documented and strongly attested resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God.

Second, most see life from the perspective that we are confined to 70-80 years.

That is why they grab all they can.

You go around only once, so enjoy it now.

The Bible gives us a rich, in-depth perspective.

³ Every now and then marine biologists discover sea creatures no one has ever seen before; some that scientists had previously thought were extinct.

² Genesis 1:1

God’s Word tells us that this life is a trial exam.

On what are we being tested?

Trials have to do with trusting and honoring our Creator who alone controls life.

They include obeying God and being thankful, especially for what He has done through Christ.

Israel’s Old Testament wilderness experiences serve as examples and samples.

Notice these test insights in Deuteronomy 8:

“Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.

³“He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. ⁴Your clothes

did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years.

⁵“Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you. ⁶Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in obedience to him and revering him.

⁷“For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills . . .”⁴

Many tests the Lord sends are meant to show whether we really depend on God.

- He gives other tests to determine whether we observe and obey his commands.
- He already knows of course.
- But we must keep in mind that he purposely tries us.
- Life is not a random, unrelated sequence of events.

About 1500 BC, the Israelites were in misery as slaves of the Egyptians.

The Israelites worked hard on construction projects to benefit the brutal Egyptians and had little control over their lives.

⁴ Deuteronomy 8: 2-7 NIV

They cried out to God for Him to grant them freedom and lead them to a better land.

The Lord brought ten deadly plagues, which devastated the Egyptians.

Though the Israelites lived adjacent to the Egyptians, no plague affected them.

As the Israelites escaped, the Lord parted the sea and led them to safety while the Egyptian army suffered disaster.

Numerous times the Lord demonstrated that He would take care of Israel.

The road to the Promised Land led through desert areas.

The Lord did not lead Israel out in order to let them perish;

At times God led them to waterless places and to food shortages:

In tight situations, would Israel trust Him to care for them?

Would they honor their Creator and Redeemer?

As soon as water and food supplies ran short, instead of remembering that God had faithfully cared for them and trusting Him to supply their needs, most began complaining.

They disregarded God’s instructions, muttered about their leaders, engaged in immoral practices, cheated others,

became greedy—failing one test after another.

How do you deal with the life-tests the Lord gives you?

Do you trust Him and let his Word guide your behavior and attitude?

Are you reading His word every day so it is clear to you what he expects you to do?

Do you joyfully endure each challenge, faithfully loving our Creator and appreciating the truth of His word?

First, God created the Cosmos and all life.

Second, human life does not just happen; God’s Word tells us that this life is a test.

Three – “Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

In the same way we hope for physical completeness for us and our loved ones, the Lord

expects us to grow toward godliness and spiritual maturity.

He wants us to be entire and complete.

- **Iowa farmers presently hope that every corn and soybean plant will be mature and productive.**
- **Ranchers want their animals growing to full maturity.**

The Lord sees what you can become—a mature, productive, beautiful person.

God sends us those tests to enable us to see what His will is, to apply His will in those situations, and so we will know where we stand with him.

At Pepperdine I majored in Religion and English Literature and graduated in 1960. Norma and I hoped and prayed that I could soon find employment with a church. We would have been happy with about any ministry position. No church seemed to want me.

To pay my way through college, I worked fulltime (by then about three and a half years) for a major oil company. They had recently transferred me to a bulk plant a few miles from downtown Los Angeles.

That plant supplied gasoline, oil products, and numerous types of auto supplies (tires, batteries, fan belts, antifreeze, etc.) to dozens of service stations all over the L.A. area. In addition the plant also marketed oil related products, i.e. paint thinners, weed killers, solvents, kerosene to suppliers, corporations, and the State of California.

An experienced plant manager oversaw the operation. Each day brought a different set of circumstances. I enjoyed working side by side with most of the employees. After a few weeks, however, the manager began assigning me duties I did not especially enjoy. Most of them were solo tasks. Some were physically demanding, a few even a little scary and risky. As I recall, other than in management and accounting, there was hardly a position I did not fill during the six months I was there. Not many related to my college studies.

For a few days I worked for a department head, who was a little dictator.

Because I found little fulfillment in them, most of the jobs I tried to get done as quickly, safely, and efficiently as possible. The idea of quitting occurred to me of course, but Steve was four and Rob two, at the time and jobs were not plentiful. On the plus side, the company also supplied, medical, life insurance and retirement benefits.

Doubts filled my mind about where life was going and what the Lord’s plans were for Norma, the boys, and me.

One day the plant manager called me into his office and said, “I have placed you in different positions because I wanted you to be familiar with them. I have been testing you. I am recommending you for a promotion.

After a period of training, the company moved the family and me to Redding, California, where I became the company representative for a large area of Northern California and Southern Oregon.

We stayed in Redding until the Hollywood Church of Christ invited us to work in ministry (March 1963).

The Lord puts us in difficult situations to try us for greater assignments in his Kingdom. That is why James wrote:

“Consider it pure joy . . . whenever you face trials of many kinds, (3) because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. (4) Perseverance must finish its work so that you

may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

Paul emphasized the need for each of us to grow and mature in Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-15

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

“¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.

“¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.”⁵

⁵ Ephesians 4:11-15 NIV

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**God bless you as you joyfully persevere in Christ
each day.**

Read I Corinthians 10

Exodus 16:1-5 NIV

Bob Blair

PO Box 176

Cleghorn, IA 51014

www.robertblairbooks.com