SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

JAS. 1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

3 Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

4 But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

7 For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

8 A double minded man *is* unstable in all his ways.

9 Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:

10 But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.

11 For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

NOTES

Enduring Trials in Wisdom

Lesson Text: James 1:1-11

Related Scriptures: Romans 5:1-5; John 15:1-11; Mark 9:14-29; Isaiah 40:6-8; James 4:13—5:6

TIME: between A.D. 40 and 48 PLACE: from Jerusalem

GOLDEN TEXT—"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5).

Lesson Exposition

THE FAITHFUL RESPONSE AND PURPOSE FOR TRIALS—Jas. 1:1-4

Humble greeting (Jas. 1:1). The fact that James identified himself as a servant of the Lord, rather than the half brother of Jesus, demonstrated humility. His audience consisted of Jewish Christians scattered outside of the land of Israel.

Unnatural joy (Jas. 1:2). When facing trials, many of us worry or despair. James called for Christians to be joyful in the midst of trials (vs. 2) and ended with an assurance of blessedness (vs. 12).

Purposeful trials (Jas. 1:3-4). Christians can experience joy amid trials not because such difficulties are themselves enjoyable but because such tests produce endurance (vss. 2-3). Have you ever heard people say "No pain, no gain"? James told his readers to be joyful while enduring trials not only because perseverance was the evidence of the genuineness of their faith but also because such testing helped *produce* patience in them. Perseverance should be an encouraging sign for believers. It is evidence that the Holy Spirit is at work within them.

Each successive test perfects or completes us (Jas. 1:4). The goal is to not just survive trials but to grow and to better handle them as we are molded into the image of Christ. The next time you face hardship, ask God to make you more like Christ.

What is the reward for endurance? First, testing produces perseverance. Because these trials spark our growth, joy will be our reward as we grow in Christlikeness (Jas. 1:2; cf. 1 Pet. 1:6-9). There should be joy in the victory over sin, self, and Satan. Second, as we endure trials, testing produces confidence in our profession of faith. If one has saving faith, such faith will be accompanied by works.

THE PATHWAY THROUGH TROUBLING TRIALS—Jas. 1:5-11

James's choice to appeal to God-given wisdom (Jas. 1:5). Parents encourage young children to ask for help when they have a problem. Those who have lived through similar situations likely possess wisdom to pass younger generations. It makes sense to glean from the wisdom of those who have gone before us. Wisdom is the key to successful endurance.

James hinted that Christians could lack wisdom. If so, they should ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach. Sadly, not everyone asks God for wisdom.

James's warning to avoid doubting and worldly wisdom (Jas. 1:6-8). James added one caveat: only those who ask without doubting will receive wisdom (vs. 6). By doubting what God has said, people malign God's character. Those who doubt are like waves driven by the winds. James highlighted their instability and lack of control. Those who doubt are driven by outside forces and their own passions.

James did not say that God will never answer the prayers of those who doubt, only that we should not *expect* God to respond if we doubt. God sometimes graciously answers the prayers of His doubting children (cf. Mark 9:21-27). But God does not *promise* to always do so.

James's example of the double-minded (Jas. 1:9-11). The two paths are marked by their opposite behaviors and beliefs. These include faith versus doubt (vs. 6), belief versus inaction (1:22; 2:14-26), and pure and undefiled religion versus worthless religion (1:26-27).

James provided a contrast: the rich and the poor. Surprisingly, the lowly brother was able to boast in his high position. Scripture frequently describes boasting as sinful (cf. Prov. 11:2; 1 Cor. 3:21). Yet while boasting in our own flesh, ability, or status is sinful, boasting in the Lord and His actions is good and expected. James intended this the same way that Paul did when he quoted Jeremiah to the Corinthians, saying, "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:31; cf. Jer. 9:24). Christianity is the greatest equalizer of the human race! God shows no favoritism (Deut. 10:17; Rom. 2:11). The ground is level at the foot of the cross.

James highlighted that the cross of Christ puts everyone, both rich and poor, in an equally exalted position as children of God and heirs of the kingdom of God (cf. Jas. 2:5).

James provided another image of the futility of the rich attempting to forge ahead with worldly, earthly wisdom. Such people are like grass that withers.

Those who refuse to let go of the world can expect to receive earthly treasure. Instead of persevering in their faith, they will fade and pass away.

Those who endure trials by relying on God's wisdom will remain steadfast and be rewarded with the crown of life promised by God to those who love Him (1:12).

—Jim Leavenworth

QUESTIONS

1. What does James's introduction reveal about his character?
2. Why did James tell his readers to be joyful in the midst of trials?
3. What is the goal for Christians in the midst of trials?
4. What did James hint that some Christians might lack, and what did he say was the solution?
5. What caveat did James add to his promise?
6. What image did James use of doubters, and what does this image teach about their character?
7. What surprising contrast did James make?
8. Why was the boasting James wrote about not sinful?
9. What truth did James reveal when talking about rich and poor Christians?
10. What can those who refuse to let go of earthly treasures expect?

—Tom Greene

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. No matter our rank, we should consider ourselves servants of Christ (Jas. 1:1).
2. Our circumstances need not control our attitudes—we can rejoice in difficulty (vs. 2)!
3. As we endure difficulties, we can trust that God is growing us, even if we do not see how (vss. 3-4).
4. We should ask God for wisdom whenever we are confused (vs. 5).
5. God values faith highly, and so should we. Intentionally cultivate your faith (vss. 6-8).
6. All people are equal before God (vss. 9-10).
7. Impressive people will die and quickly be forgotten (vs. 11).

—Tom Greene

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How do you react during trials?
2. If you do not react the way you should, how can you change that?
3. What specific trials might you face this week, and what would responding in joy look like?
4. How might people realize they lack wisdom?
5. How quickly does God tend to give wisdom when we ask for it?
6. Why should doubters not assume God will answer their prayers?
7. Does God answer doubting prayer?
8. Are there any areas where you are tempted to be double-minded?
9. How can we boast in being exalted without sinning?
10. What does it look like to boast in being made low?

—Tom Greene

Golden Text Illuminated

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5).

Few truths seem as paradoxical as James calling us to count it all joy when we fall into temptations (Jas. 1:2). Having joy during trials seems impossible. Our instinct is often to feel overwhelmed, discouraged, or angry. James points us to a heavenly perspective and invites us to ask God for wisdom, with the promise that God will respond. Humble acknowledgment of our lack is key to receiving divine insight.

God gives wisdom generously, and He does not reproach us for asking. His wisdom is not a limited resource that might run out, nor is it given with strings attached. It flows freely to all who ask in faith, providing the insight to navigate even the most challenging circumstances with joy. Wisdom illuminates the purpose of trials as opportunities for spiritual growth and refinement. With this perspective, we can count trials as joy, recognizing them as tools in the hands of a loving Father who is shaping us into the image of Christ. God can use everything, even pain and disasters, for our good (cf. Amos 3:6; Rom. 8:28).

Wisdom helps us to maintain a joyful attitude, not because our circumstances are always pleasant but because we understand the eternal significance of even our trials. Patient endurance yields spiritual maturity and completeness in Christ. The joy that emerges from this process is a deep-seated contentment and confidence in God's goodness and purposes. Make a habit of seeking God's wisdom daily.

—Gene Kissinger