

Thriving Through Trials

Learning to Handle Trials & Temptations in a Godly Manner

Discovering Practical Christianity¹ (James) Series – Part 1

Aug 20-21, 2022

James 1:1-18

Introduction

- **Who here is currently going through a very difficult season in life?**
- **Life is hard.** It can be difficult due to either a trial or a temptation. How do we handle difficulty correctly? How do we not blow up when things get difficult? How do we not sin in our fear and frustration? How do we not get derailed from our first love and purpose?
- **God's in Charge** - The first step is to realize or remember that God is in charge. This trial or temptation didn't take Him by surprise. He's been ready for this for months or years. He knows how to use it for our good.
- **Purpose in Pain** - That means the struggles of a child of God have purpose. It's not waste, it's not random. It may be bad but that doesn't mean God can't use it for good.
- **God Uses All Things** - Regardless of what it is and how it started, we are guaranteed that our Heavenly Father is going to use it as part of our maturing, growing and strengthening.
- **God's not trying to tear us down. He's refining us.** The trials we face are like the refining fire. It's making our discernment and faith stronger. In the most difficult times God brings good gifts and redeems bad seasons.
- **How God Develops His People** - Question: Are we the full and mature version of ourselves? Are there things that need to change in us? Of course there are. Then, how is God supposed to build us and train us? How is He supposed to mature us? Isn't most growth due to resistance? Doesn't all resistance seem frustrating or hurtful in the moment? But it builds for the long-term (a bird hatching from an egg; a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis; a person working out at the gym – tearing down muscles to build them stronger, etc.). **Just because something feels bad doesn't mean it is bad. Even if it's bad, that doesn't mean that God will leave it bad.**
- **Our study today:** Seeing Trials Rightly and Seeing God in the midst of it.

Hard Times Can Make You BETTER or BITTER

Lesson

- **Getting a Grip on Context** – Let's read the full passage we are studying up front and then we will tear it apart.
 - **James 1:1-18** - *"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings. ² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all*

¹ "Sometimes called "the Proverbs of the New Testament," the book of James practically and faithfully reminds Christians how to live." ESV Commentary Notes

without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. ⁹ Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, ¹⁰ and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. ¹¹ For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits. ¹² Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. ¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. ¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures."

- **You've Got Mail**

- **Grasping the Context of the Author and Recipients**

- **James² 1:1 - "James, a servant³ of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes⁴ in the Dispersion: Greetings."**
 - **Set up the Book: Author = James⁵ - Who's James? Why do we care?**
 - **One of the earliest New Testament books written – AD 40-50**

² "There is no definite evidence of knowledge of the Epistle of James or even its name till 180; and the Western Church, with the sole exception of Hilary of Poitiers (d. 366), shows no knowledge of it until Jerome's Vulgate (c. 383), after which on Augustine's insistence it was admitted into the Roman canon. The Syrian Church was a generation later in overcoming her reserve. There is no evidence of any Syriac translation of any of the Catholic Epistles until the Peshitta (early 5th century A.D.). In Alexandria, Origen (185–254) is the first to champion the genuineness of the Epistle of James, to quote it as current scripture, and to name the author as (an unspecified) James, whom he sometimes calls "apostle" (Ropes, pp. 92f.). The Epistle's place in the canon is now assured, the only point in dispute being the order of the Catholic Epistles; and this was settled by Athanasius in his Easter Festal Letter (A.D. 367). In Asia Minor Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 390) and Basil the Great, following the Alexandrian canon, set their own to verse with the Catholic Epistles in this order: James, 1, 2 Peter, 1, 2, 3 John, Jude. In Palestine Origen's example inspired Eusebius to urge the "disputed" Epistle's inclusion in the canon. After its recognition by the early Church Councils, the status of the Epistle of James remained unchallenged until the Reformation. While John Calvin accepted it with little question, Luther's hostility, both notorious and ill-founded, has influenced most commentators since. The Council of Trent (8 April, 1546), by decretum de canonicis officially declared the Epistle of James "Holy Scripture." NICNT Commentary, James Adamson

³ "James calls himself the slave of God and Jesus in a spirit of loyalty and devoted service to both. Paul uses the term thus in the opening only in the Epistle to Titus. It is a thoroughly Hebrew ('ebed) rather than a Greek concept, used in loyalty and respect toward prophets and rabbis, e.g., Gamaliel, Johanan b. Zakkai,⁵ and here toward God and our Lord Jesus Christ, as in the (non-Pauline) Epistle to the Hebrews." NICNT Commentary

⁴ "We hold that James, the Lord's brother, is here writing as a Jew—not "a Jewish Christian" (Ropes, p. 17), but a Christian Jew—to Jews, and that he was writing with full hope that the Jews as a whole would turn to Christ. In his Epistle he is to preach both aspects of the Christian religion, both faith and works, both of which he is impressing on the Jews as the carnal descendants and heirs of Abraham." NICNT Commentary

⁵ "Possibly one of the earliest of the New Testament writings (A.D. 40–50), the book is believed to have been written by Jesus' brother James (Gal. 1:19)." ESV Commentary Notes

"The personality of James is to be felt at once in his choice of words: of the 570 words in the vocabulary of the Epistle about 73 do not occur elsewhere in the NT—about ten more than in the parallel case of 1 Peter, which is of approximately the same length. Of these 73 words 46 occur in the Greek Septuagint, with which James was obviously familiar; and one of the not more than three quotations that he expressly introduces with "The Scripture says" (Jas. 4:5) is neither in the Scriptures nor traceable anywhere else at all." NICNT Commentary, James Adamson

- **The Brother of Jesus⁶** - James. Pillar in the church. Key leadership along with Peter and John. Likely 1st bishop of Jerusalem church.⁷
 - **What it's like to be the brother of the Messiah** -
- **Servant of God & Jesus Christ** – Is it possible that James' discussion of his identity can reveal how we ought to perceive ourselves? James called himself a slave of God. That means he views God as in charge. It's all about God's agenda and priorities. It's God's mission and God's kingdom. His own kingdom doesn't factor in the grand scheme of things. He is wholly sold out to what God wants. He is here to serve.
 - **Is that how you view yourself?** – **So much of our struggle in living the Christian life is a power struggle.** It's us fighting God for the throne of our lives. It's us wanting to be in charge and build our own life to make us feel better. But who are we really? Why are we on this planet? What's our purpose? Who is God and who are we in light of Him? How would a servant/slave of God act? Much of Christianity is discovering and living into our Christian Identity.
 - **Actual Lifting is Light** – Jesus famously said, 'come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.' The actual lifting of Christianity is relatively easy. So, **why is living as a Christian so difficult sometimes? Because we are only semi-surrendered.**
 - **Paul's Full Surrender statements** – I don't think that the Apostle Paul was perfect. I don't think he was the best Christian this planet has ever seen, but he was on fire and hardcore. He has to be up there on God's list. He said phrases like, 'for me to live is Christ to die is gain.' His perspective was, 'I'm here for God so whatever happens, happens. If I die I'm better off so...bring it.' **Dead men don't have any fear.** I wish I could say I'm like this but I'm not that mature yet. I'm still clinging to control and trying to build a good life here on this planet.
 - **Lordship** – We commonly refer to Jesus as Lord, but we need to remember that is a title. It means that He is the Master. if He is Lord, we are not. Lord = boss, master, one in charge, one who sets the tone, one who creates the priority list. There is no room for competition to the throne in your life.
 - **Who's he writing to? Twelve Tribes = Jewish believers**
 - **The Diaspora/Dispersion** – Jewish believers who scattered throughout the Mediterranean world (still part of the Roman Empire) due to persecution. They were **religious refugees.**

⁶ Gal 1:19 – “But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.”

Gal 2:9 – “...and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.”

⁷ “James, as first “Bishop” (or whatever we may style him) of Jerusalem...” NICNT Commentary

- **Where the Persecution was coming from**⁸ - This particular reference to scattering due to persecution could be the Roman Empire persecuting the Jews or the Christians. Since it's Jewish believers here we can't fully know. It appears to be a Christian thing but let's remember that the Roman Empire didn't care too much for Jews being monotheistic and rebellious against the Roman gods either.
 - **What about Christian Persecution?** - Christianity and the Roman Empire had a complicated relationship. Initially Rome didn't care that a new religious sect rose up, but then they started seeing problems between the Jews (an already quasi-accepted religion) and the Christians and that caused instability. Rome didn't like instability. Then they looked into Christianity and found that they too were monotheistic (believe in only one God). That was going to be a problem because Rome was known for a couple things and one of them was their tolerance and honor of the many gods that they believe gave them the victory to rule the world. They wanted peace with the gods. They wanted peace in their territory. Peace meant no problems. But the stubborn Christians were rocking the boat and for that reason the Roman Empire started getting irritated and began local persecutions. They would let Christians go from prison and martyrdom if they would deny Christianity and pledge their allegiance to the Roman gods. But most didn't. And it only got worse in coming seasons.
- **Refugees: Ukraine Example** - We've watched firsthand the situation in Ukraine with people forced from their homes and spreading out into the surrounding world. We watched people who one day were peaceful, the next running for their lives. We watch still today people trying to resettle in places that don't want them. We see families torn apart while men stay to fight and women and children leave for safety. We see food running out, the poor being stuck, the disabled unable to flee. We see burned out buildings that use to house jobs. It's all unstable and that's the biggest problem with being a refugee and fleeing for your life, there was no plan awaiting you to start your life again. It's all day-to-day and that's scary.
- **Refugee/Immigrant** - What's the difference between a refugee and an immigrant? An immigrant wants to leave their country, a refugee is forced out.
 - **What is so difficult about being a refugee?** – Loss of the familiar. We don't realize how much we rely on our support systems around us until they are gone. Most of us choose to relocate, but when it's forced on you, it's moving without a plan. It's terrifying to wonder what's going to happen to you and your family. No one really wants you putting a burden

⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christianity/Relations-between-Christianity-and-the-Roman-government-and-the-Hellenistic-culture>; <https://historyofyesterday.com/why-did-the-romans-persecute-christians-4125b106805e>; <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/persecution-in-early-church-gallery>;

on them. You instantly become a problem. It affects your identity, your safety, your stability, your peace, etc. Being new in a place has a million challenges: where do I get food? How can I get a job? Where will I sleep tonight?

- **What's Unique about being a Religious Refugees?** – Don't get me wrong, almost all of the religious refugees we are talking about in this story are still in the Roman Empire (Rome ruled the known world), they just changed locations of persecution, not escape it entirely. That means the threat is still there, but they needed to switch it up since they got chased out. There are two key struggles when you are religiously fleeing something:
 1. **Who are my people?** – If I'm chased out it means I've left my known community. I'm going out into a people group and tribe that doesn't know me and may not want me. My social structure and support network is disrupted or lost. That means I'm craving and desperately trying to find people who understand me and who I'm comfortable around as familiar.
 2. **Why did God let this happen?** – When we have religious persecution, it can make the worshiper or believer question whether they got something wrong. Most religious adherents deeply believe that if they are good and do the right things, that their god/God will protect and bless them, whether that is a true part of their religious beliefs or not. So, when something goes wrong, they don't know how to frame it or process it. It makes them doubt their protection.
 - **The Danger of Blaming God** – *When things go bad on earth we are tempted to think something is wrong with God.* The danger is that *when we shift God from our Savior to our Tormentor, there's a relational break.* Satan's goal is to separate us from our Heavenly Father and get us to no longer trust Him. He did it in the Garden and he does it today. If we question God's intentions and doubt His goodness, we will not rely on His help, which is what we need to emerge from trial thriving instead of damaged.
- **Temptation to Compromise and Cave** – When things become difficult, it's so tempting to alleviate the pressure, the fear, the hardship. We scramble under the strain and stress and start to find ways that we can live more easily.
 - **Why Compromise is So Dangerous and Serious to James** – James is writing on this subject because he knows that it's a very, very dangerous road. Why? Because *when we adjust Christianity too much it is no longer Christianity. When we compromise too far we are no longer who we think we are. When we distort the gospel too much, it's no longer the good news. When we give in to too much sin we put ourselves back in bondage.*

- **The Scariness of Justification** – It’s scary how far we are willing to adjust the truth to make ourselves feel better about the compromises we make. It’s shocking what lies we can tell ourselves so that we can live with ourselves.
 - **The damage of spiritual compartmentalization** – compartmentalization can be good or bad depending on how we use it. It’s a mental exercise where we believe that there are separate parts of our lives that we can live differently in. It’s helpful for processing trauma. It’s helpful when we need to focus on work. It’s helpful when we get scattered. But it’s incredibly harmful when we spiritually compartmentalize and believe that we can be God’s children in one area, and children of the devil in another. For example: We worship at church, but harm our spouse at home. We are in Christian leadership but a predator in dating. We are respected in our company as a good person but secretly cutting corners.
 - What persecution looks like today –
 - When do we hold and when do we scatter?
- **A Painful Smile**
 - **Discovering the Joy in Trials**
 - **James 1:2-4** – *“Count it [ageomai – think differently] all joy⁹ [be glad], my brothers [and sisters], when you meet trials¹⁰ of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness [hupomone – patient enduring]. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect [telios – complete] and complete [holokleros – whole, undamaged], lacking in nothing.”*
 - **Joy?** – How in the world am I supposed to see a trial/temptation as joyful?
 - **Joy vs. Happiness** – both are a blessings from God. Sometimes one is more appropriate than the other (depending on the situation).
 - **Joy** – a deep set faith and hope in the nature of God and what He has done for us already and thereby what He will do for us in the future. It’s knowing that whatever happens in this life, we have all the important stuff covered with Jesus for eternity. It’s a settledness that we are going to be okay no matter what. It’s a sweetness that recognizes that God is in charge and is in control.
 - **Happiness** – the light-hearted sensation due to circumstantial blessing. In other words, it’s feeling great because things are going good. It’s

⁹ 5479. χαρά chará; gen. charás, fem. noun from chairō (5463), to rejoice. Joy, rejoicing, gladness.

¹⁰ 3986. πειρασμός peirasμός; gen. peirasμού, masc. noun from peirazō (3985), to make trial of, try, tempt. Trial, temptation, a putting to the test, spoken of persons only. When God is the agent, peirasμός is for the purpose of proving someone, never for the purpose of causing him to fall. If it is the devil who tempts, then it is for the purpose of causing one to fall.¹⁰

“It is characteristic of James that here he powerfully uses peirasmos for both the pleasant allurements of Satan and the painful afflictions of the body; both are apt to lead men to sin... Certainly blindness, for example, or disease tests a man; but so, for example, does sexual or other lust, or greed, or temper, or pride of wealth, strength, or beauty. In the former category we may use the term “affliction” or “adversity,” but in the latter both our friends and we ourselves are much more apt to speak and think of “temptation” than of “adversity” or “affliction”” NICNT Commentary

situational. It's wonderful to have when we can get it. God loves to make us happy but won't do so at the cost of deeper blessing. Happiness is temporary, but sweet.

- **When you MEET Trials** – what does James mean? He means **when it happens to you**. You may not have asked for it. You may not have had any hand in causing it. But here it is.
 - **What God CAUSES vs. what He USES** – one of the challenges that we go through when we are struggling is trying to figure out who to blame. We need to be cautious, as mentioned earlier of believing that God caused all of our problems. He is not trying to tear us down. A lot of our pain is caused by sin, ours and others around us. Clearly a lot of trials and temptations are caused by the enemy and our own flesh. So, we cannot immediately assume that God is just poking us like a child shining the sun at an ant with a magnifying glass.
 - **Ro 8:28** – “And we know that for those who love God *all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*”
 - **Guarantee to Use It for Good** - This famous verse tells us that although that are some things that God causes directly whether it's for our development or discipline, He guarantees that when He didn't cause it, He won't let it go to waste. He will use every bit of it for our good.
- **Types of Trials** – what did James have in mind? What trials do we go through today? Make it personal and relatable. It could be a loss of a home due to financial hardship. It could be a broken relationship. It could be grief over the death of someone we love. It could be getting fired unjustly or justly. It could be sickness and disease. It could be a million things. It's anything that bring struggle into our lives.
 - **Understanding Suffering** – We need to remember a short maxim to understand how to deal with the majority of suffering: **broken people; broken world, Good God**. We brought the suffering, God is the solution and help. Suffering happens when we deter from God's goodness. It's the result of sin both in the Garden of Eden and today.
 - **A Theology of Glory** – Whether God is getting glory from our suffering or from our healing & rescue is determined by a theology of Glory. Whatever brings God glory in the right way in the right timing is what He will go with. Remember, it's not about us.
- **Testing of Faith = Getting More Solid (perseverance/steadfastness)** – What does our faith look like with seasoning and succeeding through trials? **It makes you face future trials with confidence**. Been there; done that. Too many of us get rocked too easily and we panic in difficult times. Too often we are so caught up in our trial that we aren't able to hear the voice of God and stay on mission, we get derailed. But over time after we are peppered with pain and struggle, we learn how to not overreact and how to keep our head in the game. It's like special operations soldiers who have to keep their head about them when things

fall apart and stay on mission. That can only happen when they are tested and tested. It's the difference between experience and a newbie.

- **When you are done, and did it well = maturity (full & complete)** – This is the joy we are looking toward when we go through tough times. We will be stronger and more mature and less rocked by future trials. We will know God more. We will know self more. We will close gaps that Satan uses as footholds. Maturity is possible; sinlessness is not. Maturity means that we are seasoned believers that know how to live according to God's will and not lacking anything of value. That is not only possible, it's our goal.

- **The Way to Wisdom**

- **Gaining Wisdom and Learning to Pray**

- **James 1:5-8** – *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask¹¹ God, who gives¹² generously to all without reproach¹³, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith¹⁴, with no doubting¹⁵, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”*
 - **Context: It's not just Wisdom for wisdom's sake.** It's wisdom for dealing with Trials.
 - **Why do we need wisdom¹⁶ in trials?** **Wisdom means knowing what's going on, why and what to do about it.** Our thinking and our strength are rarely enough. How do we put the pieces together so we aren't lost and panicky?
 - **Need Wisdom? Ask God** – Prayer and relationship with God. Downloads from the Holy Spirit. God wants to bring clarity.
 - **Side Comment: Praying in Faith** – what does it mean to pray in faith, or without faith? How can I not doubt if I don't know I'm praying rightly? What is faith? How can I confidently approach God and ask for the right things? (wisdom needs to come first to know even how to pray).
 - Heb 11:6 – *“...without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”*

¹¹ “In all Christian temptation wisdom is to be had “just for the asking,” a gift here described by James with an adverb etymologically meaning “simply,” a word often used in Greek in contrast to another Greek word connoting complex variety, in nature or art, from a patchwork quilt to an elaborate financial fraud.” NICNT Commentary

¹² “God is a giving God - James uses a participle as a attributive adjective here - this is God's inherent attribute.” Paul Thome Insights and Research

¹³ “without reproach - with no shame or an eye roll - God will not make you feel small for asking or struggling.” Paul Thome Insights and Research

¹⁴ “Here, in what Luther justly calls “one of the best verses of this Epistle,” James teaches that faith is the essential condition of prayer. The best light on this verse (and the kindred 5:15) is Heb. 11:6 (NEB): “anyone who comes to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who search for him.” In our present verse (1:6) “faith” does not, as in v. 3 above, denote “constancy in the Christian religion”; it means “confidence in prayer,” as in Sir. 7:10: “Be not of faint confidence in thy prayer.” It means the petitioner's faith, his belief and trust, that God will heed his prayer, and grant it or only in his superior wisdom deny it: thus Jesus in Matt. 26:39 and in Mark and Luke. In this as usual the teaching of James is identical with that of Jesus; as Mitton says (p. 30): “Here and in the Synoptic Gospels it means primarily the simple act of coming to Jesus with some need in complete confidence that He can and will deal with it.” NICNT Commentary

¹⁵ “...should also be done with the full intention of following God alone and not flip-flopping back and forth trusting in other people, things, formulas mechanisms, our own resources, our capacity to strategize, our social connections, our own perspective, or sheer willpower to face down, eliminate the adversity, or mitigate the pain of adversity. This is what is meant by “not doubting”. Paul Thome Insights and Research

¹⁶ “Wisdom”, throughout the OT and NT is the idea of having skill at living - making sound observations, judgments, speaking sound words, and connecting facts and information with appropriate action in life.” Paul Thome insights and research.

- **What's the lowly brother mean?** – it means you've been knocked down somehow. Things aren't going your way. You've lost something, are weaker, etc. That's a vulnerable position and sometimes embarrassing and humiliating. But, does it have to be? In context this seems to be referring to a practical status of being poor financially.
 - **What's the Exaltation? How do you brag about getting lifted up?** – Isn't there something great about God helping in times of need? Shouldn't we be proud that the Almighty God sees us and helps us personally? Our bragging is about Him not ourselves. Maybe it's as practical as a poor person getting help from God when everyone else doesn't care about them. Maybe getting God's attention is something glorious.
 - **When Trials Hit the Poor** – one of the key elements of being poor is that we don't have a lot of margin to absorb hits. We can't escape with money. We can't escape with toys and distractions as easy. We can't afford to gloss it over. When it hits, it hits hard and directly. So poor people and rich people don't go through some trials the same. If it's a financial hit especially, it's very different. Rich can absorb financial hits, poor can't. But nevertheless **when God comes in to help, there's a greater thankfulness when we are desperate.**
 - **What about the Rich?** – First of all the Bible talks about rich people in a certain way. It's not that they have money and are wealthy but it's that wealth has them. It's not just the presence or absence of money, being addressed, but the heart of the individual. There are Christians with money and there are 'the rich'. The 'rich' are a group of people who make money their most important thing. It's what Jesus warned about. So there is little praise for 'the rich' in Scripture, but there is good things said about the wealthy. In this situation a trial came in and wiped out 'the rich'. They were humiliated and lost their wealth. What's good about that? It blew up your fake empire. It blasted money out of your heart as something to trust in. It gave you chance to be desperate and now you can look up to the Lord. **It opened an opportunity to connect with God**. So, why should we brag about that loss? Because it's a shot at becoming something more than our money. It's not where our worth comes from. It takes away crutches that we relied on and we are more dependent on God and He shows up bigger.
 - **Flowers and Humans are Fragile and limited** – This reminds us that it's not about us and it's about God's strength and not our own.
 - **Rich Man Passing** – If the rich man does not engage with God and continues in his own pursuit, he will be lost.
- **In the End**
 - **The Blessing of Standing Fast in Trial**

- **James 1:12** – “Blessed¹⁷ is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will¹⁸ receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.”
 - **Blessed?** – what does it mean to be blessed? We use it dangerously in the American culture as if it’s monetary only. We just read about the rich man passing away in pursuit of that. Blessed, in the Bible, means ‘satisfied that you are in the favor of God.’ There’s a settledness and a deep smile that God is watching over you in a special way and that means that things go differently for you.
 - **Blessed for Hanging in there the right way** – Again, there are benefits to doing it right. When the trial is over and you clung to the Lord and handled your side with grace and goodness, there is a blessing, a benefit, a reward for that.
 - **Reward? Crown of Life** – What’s that? Is it simply salvation? Is it eternal life? Is it something more? It seems that in most biblical contexts a crown as a reward is a indicator that God was pleased with you and you can wear it with joy and pride that you honored your Lord. It’s a physical expression of the phrase, ‘well done, my good and faithful servant.’ It’s not just eternal life, it’s not just living forever, it’s not just entrance into heaven, it’s proof that God was and is pleased with you. That’s what we are chasing after.
 - **God’s Promises to Those who Love Him** – that’s relational language (Promises & love). What makes a true Christian? One who loves God. God never renegotiates His promises. Take it to the bank.
- **Demon Seed**
 - **Understanding Temptation**
 - **James 1:13-18** – “Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. ¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”
 - **Context: Trials.** Same word here but Temptation is a type of trial. It’s one that the Enemy is in charge of. So, what happens if the enemy brings something into our lives to tear us down? What do we do with a trial like that?
 - **What’s the difference between trial and temptation?** The difference is who is using the difficulty for what. If God is using it for our good it’s a Trial. If the enemy is using it to tear us down, it’s a temptation.

¹⁷ **3107. μακάριος makários;** fem. *makaría*, neut. *makáron*, adj. A prose form of the poetic *mákar* (n.f.), blessed one. Blessed, possessing the favor of God, that state of being marked by fullness from God.

¹⁸ “James uses the future indicative “he will receive” here to show that this is not a gamble - but a certainty. Not a “maybe”, an ironclad promise - which he then states directly in v. 12b; “which He [the Lord] promised” Paul Thome Insights and Research

- **How do we know which is which?** – At first, it's very difficult to tell. A trial is difficult. Who's to say immediately whether the difficulty is motivated by good or bad. All we know is that it's difficult and painful. But along the way there are tell-tale signs of which one is happening. Any form of trial CAN tear you down, but what is God's posture here? Does He seem to be directing it, or does He seem to be working with it and the enemy started it? **Usually, the greatest clarity comes AFTER it's over, in retrospect.**
- **It doesn't really matter** – why? Because **we still need to maintain our character and our identity the whole way regardless** if it's from a good source or a bad source. Whether God gets us fired from our job or Satan, we need to respond appropriately.
- **God Doesn't Tempt** – remember tempting means trying to tear down for destruction. God doesn't tempt. God's desire is not to tear down. God's not going to want you, or force you to sin. That's contrary to His nature.
- **Where Temptation Comes From** – ultimately it comes from the Enemy but it uses our own fleshly cravings as fuel. The enemy can instigate, whisper, suggest, present, etc. But until our own flesh wants it and feeds on it and gives in to it, it's not going to be effective to tear us down (his goal). Therefore if we are talking about what helps temptation to thrive, it's our own flesh it feeds off of.
 - **Root in our Desires** – we want stuff. Usually we want stuff that comes at a cost to someone else (God or other people). When we allow those desires to rule us we have a problem.
 - **Sin Shift (acting on it)** – wanting something, longing for something, being tempted by something, being attracted to something forbidden, isn't sin. Jesus was tempted in all ways as we are, yet was without sin¹⁹. But the shift occurs when we act up on it. The desire 'gives birth to sin'. In other words we do something with it. We are not condemned for the temptations that come our way, but we are held accountable for the responses to the temptation.
 - **Sin Unchecked = Death** – sin is that which is contrary to God. When that is all that we are, there is not connection to God and that leads to spiritual death and ultimately to rejection from Christ (thereby Lake of Fire). It's Jesus dealing with our sin that allows us to have eternal life. But that means that the sin was dealt with and not just given free reign in our lives.
 - **Temporary Death** – I don't know if James intended on only talking about spiritual death which is eternal death, or if he was also referring to all the things that die in our lives that are good when we pursue any form of sin. Maybe the death of a good relationship because we chose sin to cross a line. Maybe the death of an opportunity in ministry because we chose self over service. Either way it's true.
- **Every Good and Perfect Gift Comes from God** – God doesn't give bad stuff to His kids. If it's valuable it's in God's pockets. If it's life-giving and beneficial, it's in

¹⁹ Hebrew 4:15

God's storehouse. That's the only stuff that He works with and the only stuff He lets His children have.

- **The last phrase is odd:** *Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures* – What does that mean? It means that God started it with us. He's the initiator of saving us. He chose to rescue us. That means that He is not interested in tearing us down, it would go against His whole plan in the first place. He saved us so that we would be proof and glory to Him. We would be a kind of 'firstfruit's' means a harvest of good things from what He created. He's more interested in our thriving than we are. So no, He's not interested in tempting us to be destroyed.

Conclusion

- **Hard Times Can Make You BETTER or BITTER** – What have they done to you? How can we change our perspective? What do we need to realign in our hearts about our trials to make them align better with how God is looking at it?
 - **Let's Pray Through Some of our Trials** – stand if this resonates with you...
 - **Temptations**
 - **Unable to Understand why it's happening**
 - **Seeking Guidance from the Lord on Next Steps**
 - **Struggling with Loss**
 - **Etc.**