

Testing Of Your Faith

James 1:1-5

1 James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings. 2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. 5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (James 1:1-5 (NASB))

As we open another book of these precious scriptures, this Book of James, the very first matter that the Lord brings forward for us to consider is the matter of our “faith”, and the “testing” of it. And that is a fitting beginning to this book because over the next five chapters, James will, in a no-nonsense way, tell us how we must “get up and get about” our relationship with Christ, else we might find that we, in reality, have no faith at all. He tells us in no-uncertain terms that our relationship with Christ is a “working relationship” and not one in which we can simply “get saved”, then sit back, doing little else more.

No, our relationship with Christ is one that is born out of faith, and is as we are told in Romans 1, “from first to last”, “from faith to faith”. Simply put, faith is the most essential connection that exists between our soul and the person of the Lord Jesus and it is fundamental to every part of our continuing relationship with Him, as vital to our soul as the air we breathe is vital to life itself.

May we take a moment here at the beginning of this study and rehearse words that we already know, but need always to be reminded of. From Hebrews 11, we know that the definition God gives regarding “faith” is simply that

faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.
(Hebrews 11:1)

Those are plain words, but what do they mean? Simply put, though not said in these words, faith must begin first with the belief that God Himself really does exist, and that He will bless and reward us if we diligently seek after Him. Those words in Hebrews 11:6,

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.
(Hebrews 11:6 (ESV))

But this belief that we must have cannot be simply of the general kind of belief, but must be of the kind that is intense and with committed fervor, one so strong that we will begin to actually trust that the things God promises in His word will really and actually come true.

And then, if and as we believe and trust in God, things actually do begin to take place, things that would not have taken place otherwise. It is as these words in Hebrews 11:1 clearly tell us, God will begin to bring things that we used to only hope for, into actual existence, that through our faith in Him, God will bring that which is “unseen”, that which resides in the invisible realms of God, into the reality of the “seen”, the visible world that we live in . . . that through faith, the things that we once only hoped for, suddenly become real.

But, as God is expressing to us here in these words, that kind faith will not come easily. As we will study in these words of James 1, for our faith to mature into the relationship that God desires for us to have with Him, our faith must be regularly “tested”, exercised and disciplined, and sometimes “painfully” so.

Turn with me again to these words in James 1, and we’ll allow God to explain them to us.

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Here, we have the Apostle James, understood by most bible historians to be the half-brother of the Lord Jesus. As I mentioned at the beginning, James’ personality and his style of writing reveal James to be a “no-nonsense”, “get straight to the point”, and then “get about doing what you know you should do”, kind of man.

But again, as I say those words about James, I want us to always be reminded that all of the words given in this bible were first “breathed” by the Holy Spirit, from the mind of God, into the mind of each of the writers, here James.

Also, take note here in these words that the first assumption made is that we who are reading these words are already “believers”, that we have at least the basic faith that is

required for salvation. Why? It is because, at least that much faith, and more, will be necessary for us to endure the things that will take place next.

Recall that I mentioned to us a moment ago that God's prescribed way for our faith to grow and be strengthened is for it to be "used", "exercised", "put to the test", and often. And note here that his words begin in a very odd way, telling us that we should "count it all joy" when and as our faith is being "tested". Verse 2,

2 Count it all joy, my brethren, when you fall into various trials. (James 1:2)

Why should "joy" be our first response to circumstances that are so often "painfully difficult". It is because we know that it is "God's hand" at work in us. Remember, satan does not want our faith to grow. Only God, our loving Father wants our faith to grow and increase. And it is God's guiding hand that brings about both our "trying circumstances" and then provides the "relief" we need during the trial. Listen to these words of assurance in Psalm 139, and take careful note of the presence of God's loving hand!

5 You have enclosed me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it. 7 Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? 8 If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. 9 If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, 10 Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me. (Psalm 139:5-10 (NASB))

And please be assured that this is what takes place in our trials. God's hand is holding us, guiding us and directing us.

In these words of our text,

2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials. (James 1:2 (NASB))

the words "consider it all joy" are better translated as, "count it all joy". In the word "count", God is telling us that we should have a "presumed belief" that it is His hand at work and because of that we can be confident and have peace and joy during the struggles that will come.

And He further accentuates that point with the word that follows, the word "encounter". It is a word that is better translated as "fall into", that the difficulties we are encountering are not of our own making, we "fall into" those trials.

And yes, we can often be the causer of our own troubles. But this that God is presenting to us here in these words is very different. These trials are trials that are brought to us and we “fall into” them. This is the perfect and loving hand of God, guiding and walking us into and through problems, for the distinct purpose of training us up in ways of righteousness.

This is similar in many ways to the discipline spoken about in Hebrews 12. Listen!

5 . . . “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. 6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” 7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he (God) disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. 11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:5-11 (ESV))

Loving words from a loving Father. And it’s the same with the trials spoken about here. We can “count it all joy” because we know that if we endure, we will “reap a peaceful fruit of righteousness from having been trained by it”.

And note in these words that God places a very high value on our “endurance” of these trials.

2 Count it all joy, my brethren, when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-3)

Other translations, render the word endurance as “patience” and “perseverance” and “steadfastness”, and all those are correct. But the thing that takes place is so much more than our simply being able to “put up with” or “outlast” the pain and suffering from the people or the circumstance that we are involved with. God desires that we put our eyes on Him and be steadfast in our faith in Him, knowing that it is His hand at work. In other words, if we just “hold our breath” or “hold our tongue” and bear it for the moment, then we will have gained nothing. We must ever and always know that it is God’s hand that we are to look too. And then and only then will we “reap a harvest of righteousness and be trained” by our trials.

These words also remind me of the words given by the Apostle Paul in Romans 5. There he tells us that

3 . . . we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Romans 5:3-5 (ESV))

The trials spoken about in our text, and the sufferings spoken about here in Romans 5, are very much the same. As believers, we have been "justified by faith", but that is only the beginning, the "first step". And God's plan is to immediately begin to grow and mature us in our faith, and He does that through suffering and trials. For that reason, we should not be surprised when trouble suddenly surrounds us and assails us. Our response is to be like that of a soldier who "runs towards the battle". We are to "chisel our face forward" and "get about" the trial that lies before us.

And again, as we read here, God places a high value on our endurance. Verse 4,
4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:4)

Folks, the prizes are only awarded to the ones who finish their race. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 9,

24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. (1 Corinthians 9:24 (NASB))

And in Hebrews 12, we read,

1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2 (NASB))

Our "endurance" is so very, very important to God, because it is only through "endurance" that we are able to finish the race that's set before us. And folks, as I look at my age, I know that I have only a few years remaining in my race. And I really do want to finish my race well. I want to, by faith, "endure" my race to the end and not be ashamed as I stand before the Lord Jesus to receive my "prize", the "Crown of Life".

But, as we said a moment ago, none of this is easy. Sometimes, at the very moment that we feel like we can see our “dream” coming into being, suddenly, another trial comes our way, and then another, and another.

And sometimes those trials can be very confusing. That’s because sometimes we get too focused on our “dream”, “that thing that we were hoping for”, and we fail to remember that the “testing” is not about “the thing we are hoping for”, but instead is about our “faith”.

But it’s so hard to always remember that difference. The “substance”, that thing we had been hoping for, becomes so very important to us. And right about the time we think we are able to see our “hope actually becoming substance”, and are reaching out to take hold of it, it “slips away” from our grasp.

When that happens, we turn and we say, “God I don’t understand? Was I wrong all along? Did I misunderstand from the beginning? Did I take my eyes off you and put my eyes on the prize and value the prize above you? I don’t know. I thought I was doing my part. I thought that I was seeking you at every turn. But just when my dream was about to come true, it suddenly faded. The “substance” that I had “hoped for” did not become real.

When that kind of disappointing result takes place, we are often brought low, and into a real “crisis of faith”. Thankfully, that’s when God reminds us of these words here in verse 5. Here He tells us

5 . . . if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (James 1:5 (NASB))

God is such a gentle and loving Father and He is always only a breath away. In our crisis of faith, we can cry out to Him, and He will hear our cry and come to our aid. And His wisdom is “good”, “always good”.

And not only will He give us understanding about what we are to do next, He will refresh us so that we can endure through the next steps of our trial. Praise the Lord!

A question as we close. Are you right at this moment, enduring one of these trials of faith? May I encourage you to not try to avoid your trial. It is God’s hand at work. Step on into it, and trust the Lord Jesus for His help.

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