

## TURNING THE CASUAL INTO THE ACTUAL

### Part I – An Enduring Faith James 1:1-18 (NLT)

I am not a manual reader kind-of-a-guy. Every time I need to build a piece of furniture or hook up an electronic system I try to do so without reading the manual guide. With just a conceptual picture in my head I try to build that bookcase or set up that stereo system without consulting any instructional handbook. Of course, more often than not, the finished product never turns out the way it supposed to. I had to end up reading the manuals that came with the products. By following the directions carefully I was able to build that bookcase and set up that stereo system correctly. I would not have wasted any time if I read the manual first before I started the project.

The book of James is like a practical manual for proper living. It is an instructional guide that teaches us how to live a righteous lifestyle according to God’s purpose. If we carefully follow the spiritual lessons in James, not only will we accomplish the calling of God in each of our lives, but we will live in effectiveness and fulfillment. We do not have to figure life out on our own; God will guide us down the right path.

The letter starts off with a greeting:

<sup>1</sup> *This letter is from James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.  
It is written to Jewish Christians scattered among the nations.  
Greetings!*

Right after the greeting the problem of trials is discussed.

<sup>2</sup> *Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy.*

Again, the letter to James is a very practical writing. It does not waste time in theological words and philosophical thought. It jumps right into an issue common to all humankind: life trials and troubles.

The word *trouble* actually means “trials of any kind,” or various trials of life. Trials are chaotic and messy. They are cruel and brutal. Trials are complex and multi-faceted. They can come in different forms: physically, economically, socially, psychologically, spiritually. They are not simple to understand, and even more difficult to find solutions for. When we face trials we commonly do one of two things: we either run away from them, or we find a quick solution to remedy the situation. Trials are not meant to be kept dear to our hearts; we find ways to rid of these destructive elements from our lives.

We cannot deny the fact that life’s troubles are very real. But, why should we consider them to be *opportunities for joy?* (verse 2) The key lies in the truth that God will use these trials as opportunities for mature growth to those who trust in him. Hence:

1. Life's trials, though **unpleasant**, are to be viewed as **advantageous** for us as long as we remain under God's lordship.

It is just like taking medicine as a child. I used to hate taking Robutussin, which is a cough medicine. It just tastes so awful. But you know what, my cough would always be healed in a matter of days! Trials do not taste good at all; they are quite unpleasant. Nobody wishes for them. But you know what, trials remind us why we need to depend on God's reconciling work constantly in life. When we face financial hardship, a loss of a loved one, a job demotion, or are in a spiritual wilderness, we are forced to look to the God in whom we have placed our loyalty and security upon. God will then refine us in the midst of disorderly events and bring us back to divine order. Look what happens when our faith is being tested:

*<sup>3</sup> For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. <sup>4</sup> So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything.*

Why does endurance grow when our faith is tested? Because it allows us to deepen our knowledge and trust in God's perfect purpose. This reminds me of the testing I had to endure before I married my wife. I was unsure whether she was the right person for me. I questioned whether the both of us had similar visions needed to serve God. I even wondered if I was really ready for marriage itself. But, I trusted in God's providence during this difficult time of my life. I learned to develop the character of spiritual completeness, in which every area of my life was surrendered to God in order for him to shape and refine me to trust in him fully. This included my relationship with my wife. And God pulled through for me, not only assuring me that my wife is the lifelong partner that he had intended for me, but that he will use the both of us to play a role in sharing his love to other people. In the midst of hardship God turned my weaknesses into spiritual strengths. That is why we should rejoice when we face trials of every kind. Thus:

2. The testing of our faith will result in **active commitment** to God, not in **passive defeat**.

Imagine a tree that remains rooted to the ground when facing a powerful storm. That is what active commitment, or *endurance*, means. To endure means to hold onto God steadfastly as trials try to blow us away from his perfect will. If we give up we will be swept away from the only One who can develop completeness in us. But, if we remain in God during the most difficult times, God will fully mature us in character, both morally and in our behaviors.

Now, developing an attitude of endurance in the midst of testing requires wisdom. And, not any kind of wisdom will work here. It must be a wisdom that comes from God alone.

*<sup>5</sup> If you need wisdom—if you want to know what God wants you to do—ask him, and he will gladly tell you. He will not resent your asking. <sup>6</sup> But when you ask him, be sure that you really expect him to answer, for a doubtful mind is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> People like that should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. <sup>8</sup> They can't make up their minds. They waver back and forth in everything they do.*

The word *wisdom* basically denotes God's righteous expectations for human life. In other words:

3. In order to develop enduring faith we need to view life from God's perspective, not ours.

We need to be wise if we want to cultivate an enduring faith. But such a wisdom must be consistent with what God teaches and reveals through his teaching (the Bible) and through the presence of the Holy Spirit. That way, our journey in life is being shaped by God's perspective and not by our sinful desires.

How do we know what God wants us to do? All we need to do is ask him! Note how God responds to our request – *he will gladly tell you and will not resent your asking.* (verse 5) What do we learn about God here? God is not a selfish God; he desires to focus his full interest upon us. We belong to him exclusively. His complete attention is on us. He does this so that we recognize how much we need him when we face the multifaceted complexities of life's trials. We will not develop a character of enduring faith if we are disconnected from the wisdom of God.

But, when we seek God for wisdom we must approach in confidence that he will answer and that his answer is perfect and true. (verse 6) When we doubt we are questioning whether something is true or not. If we approach God with an attitude of doubt, we are questioning whether God's character is righteous and true or not. If we are in such a scenario, then we should not expect to receive anything from God. (verse 7) God wants to see a mature faith in us when we petition him for guidance. God wants to see spiritual confidence in us that through his grace he can bring to order what is out of control in our lives. God wants to see whether we will continue in allegiance to him in the middle of trial and persecution. Therefore, when we call out for God's wisdom believe in faith that God will deliver us. Do not doubt him and he will set us free.

A practical illustration of enduring faith is found in the next few verses:

*<sup>9</sup> Christians who are poor should be glad, for God has honored them. <sup>10</sup> And those who are rich should be glad, for God has humbled them. They will fade away like a flower in the field. <sup>11</sup> The hot sun rises and dries up the grass; the flower withers, and its beauty fades away. So also, wealthy people will fade away with all of their achievements.*

Financial security is one sphere that affects all of our lives. To live in poverty prevents a person from obtaining the basic necessities to live. But to be rich can also present its own trials because a person could depend on his achievements and accumulations rather than on relying upon God. In either case, whether we are rich or poor, we must remain submissive to God's wisdom and obey his perfect will. If we are poor we must remain joyful because of the spiritual riches that God has lavished upon us. In this way God will honor us. (verse 9) And if we are rich, we must learn to remain humble because everything that we have came from God to begin with. (verse 10) If we choose to find security in our finances and accomplishments, God will make sure that our security will not last. (verses 10-11) A flower can grow and die at any moment. So, too, can a rich person who solely relies upon what he has rather than being fully devoted to God alone. Do not let the world determine your successes and failures; lean upon God's perspective and he will show you whether you are truly successful or not. Victory in life is determined by God only. If we are able to be rooted in God's truth we will endure and persevere through the various trials that we face, with the end result being a fostering of a mature character.

Besides recognizing how God, in his wisdom, uses life's trials to develop enduring faith in us, it is also important to know what the consequences are when we choose to either obey or disobey God when confronted with these same trials.

<sup>12</sup> *God blesses the people who patiently endure testing. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.* <sup>13</sup> *And remember, no one who wants to do wrong should ever say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else either.* <sup>14</sup> *Temptation comes from the lure of our own evil desires.* <sup>15</sup> *These evil desires lead to evil actions, and evil actions lead to death.* <sup>16</sup> *So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters.*

For those who endured the testing of their faith with the help of God, God will bless them and reward them with the crown of life. (verse 12) What this means is this:

4. Expect **personal fulfillment and victory** as God's blessing as a result of your faith in him.

God rewards those who remain faithful to him in all moments of life, especially in the most difficult of times. The *crown of life* not only represents eternal life in the future, but also an abundant life in the present. Our trust in God's guidance directs us to an existence filled with victory, worth, blessings, and depth. This kind of a lifestyle is a reward from God for those who sought God with confidence and boldness. If we want to experience life in a greater dimension of quality, love and honor God. Accept all that he is giving to each one of us without doubting him. As a result your life will grow exponentially in mature intensity and excellence.

And do not ever believe that just because God allows us to endure trials means that God is tempting us to sin. It is very clear here that the source of temptation is our own evil desires. (verse 14) God's holiness prevents within him any room for disruptive thoughts and actions upon his people. Being the perfect God precludes him from harming or destroying us. God is love and his goodness does not allow him to hurt us. Instead, it is our own selfish evil ways that lead us to disruptive behaviors, and, ultimately leads us to eternal death.

<sup>17</sup> *Whatever is good and perfect comes to us from God above, who created all heaven's lights. Unlike them, he never changes or casts shifting shadows.* <sup>18</sup> *In his goodness he chose to make us his own children by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his choice possession.*

Only good comes from the Lord. The source of all that is perfect is God alone. (verse 17) God chooses to give what is excellent to us because he loves us infinitely. God is constant, never-changing, never-shifting. What he promises to us he will keep; his position never changes just because human circumstances change. That is the reason why it is wise to put all of our trust in him and become his precious children. (verse 18) We cannot go wrong by submitting our lives to him. And when we face great trials in life we know we have a God next to us who will deliver us from evil and restore us in mature excellence and character. Trust in his perfect wisdom and he will reward you with a life full of spiritual riches and value. And watch your faith grow in character and endurance!

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