

A Theology of Trials Part 1

Scripture Focus

James 1:1-9

Key Verse

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance” (James 1:2).

Overview

God’s purposes in trials are often higher than we expect. Therefore, it is essential that all believers be equipped with a firm theology of trials that they might please God in time of trouble by prayerfully depending on His providence to bring about His purposes.

Theme

Trials are useful tools in God’s hands for bringing Christians into greater conformity with the perfect image of Christ.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will grow in his understanding of the nature of trials, their place in life, and their usefulness in the hands of a sovereign God.

Outline

- I. Servants of God Profit in Trials (vv. 1-4)
- II. Servants Pray in Trials (vv. 5-9)

Getting Started

Ask: What is the last act you saw someone perform that you would consider an act of service?

Ask: Is there anything on your mind that is really a big struggle for you right now?

Note: We are going to study through the letter that James wrote to a group of Jewish people that had trusted Christ as Savior. In the first eight verses we will see how a servant of God faces big struggles and succeeds.

Searching the Scriptures

Read: James 1:1-15

James presents many issues that Christians face and demonstrates how we are to respond in a manner that is totally opposite to how non-Christians respond.

Ask: How is having the attitude of a servant opposite from how the world encourages us to act?

Note: These verses we just read tell us how to respond like Christ in difficult struggles. Ask them to see, as you study each verse, if they can spot the way in which this text tells us to respond in a manner that is opposite to how the world responds to struggles and consistent with Christ.

Asking For Help:

Ask members of your class to pray for the struggles of another class member, praying that God will show them in this passage just how to respond to difficult trials.

Exposing the Text:

Read verse 1 again and note that “bondservant” is a person who gives up his own will and desires, and does only what his master wills.

Ask: How are Christians to be bondservants? Say: This means that we must daily seek to do what God wants, even if that means we don’t get to do what we want to do. Encourage your class to ask themselves if they are pursuing what God desires. James is writing to the twelve tribes, which were Jews that had trusted Christ as Savior. These were people who, because of their public profession of faith in Christ, were kicked out of their homes, fired from their jobs, and ignored by their friends.

Ask: How do you think these people felt as they experienced such difficult trials? They knew these things would happen if they trusted Christ as Savior, but they willingly came to Him.

Ask: How did these Jewish Christians demonstrate the attitude of a servant?

Note: The first opposite we see in this text is

I. Servants of God Profit in Trials (vv. 1-4)

- A. “joy”:** Joy is a part of the Christian’s life in two ways: First, joy is only available to those who know Christ as Savior and Lord; second, joy is only experienced by those Christians who give up their will for the will of God. Note: We can consider it joy in our trials because of the faithfulness of God through our trials.
- B. “when”:** Ask: Does verse 2 say that Christians may never go through difficult times? No, it says “when” telling us that we will all go through tough times as we follow Christ.
- C. “fall into various trials”:** Here is the opposite. James instructs these persecuted believers to consider it “joy” as they are in these terrible trials. Ask: If you jump into a swimming pool from the high dive, can you keep your head above water? Once you are under the water and open your eyes, what do you see above you, below you, to your right and to your left? All you see is water. Note: That is the picture James gives in describing trials. No matter where we go or look, all we can see and think about are those trials. He is talking about being totally immersed in a trial.
- D.** Verse 3 tells us why we should consider it “joy” when we are covered by a trial. - **Read verse 3.**

- i. **“testing of your faith”**: we know this trial is test, designed to produce something in our lives. The opposite here is that when the world goes through a trial they look at the trial as an enemy against their life, not a servant of their life.
 - ii. **“produces”**: Here is another opposite. Ask: If a lost person goes through a trial that causes them to lose their friends, money, home, and job, are they confident in what is being produced in their life or are they sad over what is being reduced from their life? Ask: So what is opposite about the way a Christian responds to a trial according to verse 3? Note that we are confident; God is producing patience in our lives through the trial. We look at the production while lost people look at the reduction a trial brings.
- E. In verse 4, James encourages these scattered believers to “let patience have its perfect work.” He is calling on them to let God complete the process of growing them and producing His qualities in their lives through the trial.
 - i. **Note**: Here is another opposite in the text. Lost people want to take a recess when trials come, but James says Christians are to continue through the process, trusting that God is producing in them.
 - ii. **Ask**: What does verse 4 say is the end result of the process we go through in our trials? **Note**: “perfect and complete, lacking nothing” describes a person who has reached the goal. Here, it is specifically describing a believer who trusts God through the trial and comes out of the trial with the qualities God desired to produce in him. **Ask**: How is this end result of a Christian’s trial the opposite from the end result of a person without Christ that goes through the same trial?
- F. **Application**: Go back over the first four verses and count the number of opposites we see in these verses. Ask: How should you look at the trial you are going through differently because you are saved? Go back to verse 2 and note that since we are saved and desire to be in God’s will and not our own, we can say that it is a joyful experience to face this painful trial because we know that God is producing in us through the trial.

II. **Servants Pray in Trials (vv. 5-8)**

- A. **Ask**: What do lost people do for help when they are in trials? After some class members have offered answers, note that lost people look for help in themselves, friends, and sometimes in false gods or forces of nature.
- B. **Ask**: What does verse 5 tell us, as Christian servants, to do when we are confused by our trials?
 - i. **“lacks”**: point out that James is talking to the Jewish Christians who have been immersed in a trial. Note that they certainly

would not have found an answer to their questions in any other place by God. They lacked wisdom.

- ii. **“wisdom”**: **Ask**: How does a person receive a reputation for being wise? Wisdom is the Christ-like quality that enables a person to avoid making decisions that will lead them down a pathway of sin. In a trial, we want to follow God’s pathway so that we do not create more problems than the trial itself brings.
- iii. **“ask”**: **Ask**: Who does verse 5 tell us to ask? James tells these persecuted believers that the only One that can give them direction in their trial is the One who knows all things.
- iv. **“gives”**: **Ask**: What does verse 5 promise if we ask God for wisdom in our trials? Emphasize that we can trust God to do what He promises to do.
- v. **“without reproach”**: **Ask**: Why might someone not want to ask God for help? After several answers, note that “without reproach” means God will not find fault with us when we confess that we do not know what to do and need His help. Rather, God will give us all we need to see the trial from a new perspective and make the right decisions in the trial.
- vi. **Ask**: What condition does verse 6 place on our prayer for wisdom?
 - 1. **“ask in faith”**: Note: this is reminding the reader of the “servant” mentioned in verse 1. The prayer of faith is one that begins with the servant saying “yes” before he ever knows what God is going to require. **Ask**: Would you go to a prison and tell a criminal that you will do whatever he asks? No, why not? Emphasize that we can go to God and commit to do whatever He asks because He is Holy and will never lead us in the wrong direction. So, to “ask in faith” is to first say, “God, I am asking what direction You want me to go in this trial, but I am first committing to go in whatever direction You tell me to go, before You ever give me wisdom to know which way to go.” [Note that you will pray in just a minute a prayer of faith.]
- vii. **Ask**: How, in verses 6-8, does James describe a person who doubts that God will answer?
- viii. **“driven and tossed . . . unstable”**: Note that this is what happens when we try to find the right direction by looking in places other than God’s Word. Seeking direction in our trials from any other source makes the trial worse. Looking for answers in your trial from anyone but God is like jumping out of a small thunderstorm and into a powerful hurricane.
- ix. **Ask**: How, according to verses 5-8, is the servant of God the opposite of the person who doubts God?

- x. **Ask:** What negative promise is given to those who do not “ask in faith” when they are confused by their trials? How is this different from the promise in verse 5?

Making It Personal

Ask your class to pray aloud: “God, I am saying yes to whatever You tell me to do. I trust that You will lead me in the perfect direction. Thank You for always being faithful.”

Review

Remind your class of the importance of pleasing God by depending upon Him for strength in trials as well as submitting to His purposes.

Memory Verse

Encourage your class to memorize James 1:2-4.