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LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for July 27

James says to consider end result of trials

James 1:1-18

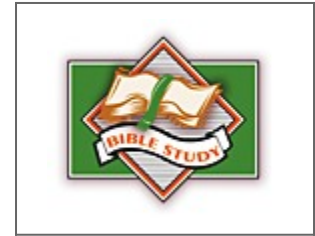
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Few people in their right mind will say, "I enjoy going to the dentist!"-or at least, you'd suspect they weren't in their right mind! After a pause for reflection, however, most would admit they enjoy the end result of prophylactic dental care-healthy teeth.

Be joyful in trials

The letter from "James" to the "12 tribes scattered" (1:1) is a short epistle filled with practical teaching for everyday life. This James was probably the brother of Jesus and one of the leaders in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15; Galatians 2:9). The 12 tribes referenced in verse 1 probably indicates the original recipients were Jewish Christians scattered in various geographical locations outside Palestine-although geographical identity is not critical here.



James' injunction to these brothers in Christ was that they should react to the “trials” they faced with “joy.” These trials might be defined as those times of the testing of their faith brought about by the hardships and adversities facing them because of their faith in Christ. For these Christians, this testing or trial probably included oppression or persecution they were forced to endure because of their commitment to Christ.

The reason these brothers in Christ could face the trials with an attitude of joy is because of the anticipated result. Even as a long-distance runner builds endurance for the race by facing the rigors of increased running distances and more demanding routes, these followers of Christ could build a stronger and enduring Christian character as they stood up to these trials through the presence and strength of God.

It is not that these trials were sought in some masochistic manner, but that they served to shape the character of these Jewish believers in a positive way as they learned to “trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5).

Ask God for wisdom

The type of wisdom needed during these trials—practical and internal insight as to how to endure these difficulties with victory—is not a native possession of mankind. Because of that, James's prescription is simple and straightforward: “Ask God, who gives generously to all” (1:5).

James mentions two aspects of God's type of giving in verse 5. First, God gives “generously,” or in a spontaneous, unreserved manner. That is our

Lord's natural and wonderful response in dealing with his children. Second, God gives "to all without finding fault." The sense here might be that God gives gifts to his children not with a begrudging attitude, but with a graciousness well attested in Scripture (Jeremiah 29:11-13; Matthew 7:7-12).

Concerning the Christian's response to God's offer and assistance, two issues were critical to James. First, the believer always is to ask for wisdom with an attitude of calm assurance and steadfast belief—he or she is to "believe and not doubt" (1:6). James employed a maritime metaphor to indicate that one who doubts is as unstable and insecure as a ship tossed about by unpredictable, stormy seas. His or her decisions and moral character are apt to be distracted or derailed from the wise path pointed out by the Lord.

Second, James sought to encourage the believer who suffered persecution and poverty due to his stand for Christ. In a reversal of the world's concept, in God's economy this Christian's position is actually very high and honorable. On the other hand, the individual relying on his wealth had best realize the transitory nature of that wealth and the status it brings—it is as fleeting as the life of the wildflower is short (1:9-11).

Resist temptation

James addressed in 1:13-18 another possible or perhaps actual situation that faced these people. The author's readers might have been inclined to blame God for the trials or "temptations" they now faced in their walk with Christ.

Some interpreters maintain verse 13 contains the actual statement of one of these persecuted brothers in Christ—a statement of which James had become aware. On the other hand, the statement "God is tempting me" might have been a construction by James in anticipation of the possible

response by one of these Christians. In either case, James provided a theodicy as he noted this aspect of God's character: "God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone" (1:13). As a matter of fact, God actually is the giver of "every good and perfect gift" (1:17) available to and enjoyed by every Christian.

In a most instructive portion of the passage, James identified the real source of temptation-within the individual. We all share the inevitable propensity to become prey to "his own evil desire" (1:14).

This does not discount the reality of the Enemy. James noted in 4:7 the seriousness of our spiritual battle with Satan and the promise of relief from his attacks: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you" (see also John 8:44; Ephesians 6:13-18). It was the opportunity, however, for the author to assign appropriate responsibility. Each person is responsible for the sequence of devolution into the disaster endangering all mankind-desire, sin and then death.

Questions for discussion

- ♦ In what obvious ways are Christians "persecuted" today? Do we attempt to blame God for this oppression? How would you answer one attempting to blame God?

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