

LifeWay Bible Studies for Life Series for November 8: Celebrate your trials

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Every person faces illness, loss, disillusionment, disappointment and death. These life trials are neither easy nor pleasant. Believers can, however, live through such trials with joy and peace knowing God uses such experiences to develop patience (endurance, perseverance) and wisdom. James does not suggest we seek trials but that when we face them, we celebrate the assurance that God will guide us through them to victory. God uses victories over trials in our lives to develop greater wisdom or skills in facing adversity by depending on him.

Finding reasons for celebration (James 1:2-4)

When facing trials, believers do not become downcast, sorrowful, anxious or terrified. Rather, they express the joy of knowing God will deliver them and moreover will use the experiences to produce endurance and steadfastness in them. Our word “trials” better translates the word sometimes translated “temptations.” James speaks of joy in trials rather than enticements to bad behavior. Verse 2 stresses this joy (feeling of well-being) can be active in the face of “all kinds of trials.”

Christians can count trials as occasions for peace, happiness or blessings because they know God will use the experiences to produce perseverance, fortitude or steadfastness. The promise in these verses is not simply that God will deliver from the effects of trials but will through the experience of trial guide us to spiritual maturity. We can rejoice in trials because (v. 3) we know the testing or proving of faith leads to the ability to endure and be

victorious whatever arises. This endurance or fortitude will have its finished or complete result in creating maturity in believers. Believers will become fully developed and perfectly equipped lacking nothing, that is, being in no way deficient.

Receiving divine wisdom in times of trial (James 1:5-11)

One great blessing of experiencing trials comes through our gaining awareness of our deficiencies. The experience of trials shows us our needs for God's aid. We cannot understand all God's workings. We cannot explain why many trials come into our lives. We understand the need for God's wisdom. Wisdom is the capacity to understand better God's ways and live in the assurances of God's purposes and values.

We should ask God for this wisdom that enables us to live with him when we face trials. James promises that God gives liberally and with no reproach or finding fault with the one seeking wisdom. The believer seeking wisdom should approach God with full trust the wisdom will be given. This prayer for wisdom should be sought without any wavering of belief or lack of trust. He who asks in faith receives in abundance.

Believers who have little of the world's riches can claim this wisdom for facing trials. The poor with God's provision can face trial with more endurance than the rich without this wisdom. Believers should ask God for wisdom with no spirit of double-mindedness or indecision (vv. 9-11).

Knowing God's unchanging goodness (James 1:12-18)

Believers are blessed when they endure or persevere in trials. This blessing comes because when the testing is complete and believers are proved to be genuine. They receive the crown of life, the symbol of God's approval. God has promised the capacity for enduring trial.

James teaches that God never tempts any person to do evil; the Lord is never the source or cause of evil. God is unchanging in his nature and is the ultimate source of all that is good. We should never doubt God's goodness when trials come and adversity threatens. We should never excuse our sins, our neglect of God's work or our service for him because of trials. Believers must acknowledge the reason they sin is that they are allured and enticed by their own passions and desires.

Many diseases cause suffering and damage our bodies. James says sin follows a like course. Desire conceives within a person and gives birth to sin that matures and results in spiritual death. In a striking imperative, James states, "Don't be deceived" or "make no mistake about this." Every good and perfect gift comes from God who is the ultimate source of all.

Good and perfect gifts come from the Father, the creator of the Heavenly lights—the sun, the moon and the stars. While these heavenly lights seem to change with the seasons, God is unchangeable. In God, no variation exists or will exist. He does not change like shifting shadows. Followers of other religions often face the fear their deity will change at the last moment and they will not enter Paradise. Christians have confidence and assurance that God never changes.

Christians can be at peace when facing trials and tragedies, knowing God does not change. The one who through his own choice voluntarily brought believers into being by the new birth will care for us. Christians are the first fruits of God's salvation plan and God will faithfully lead believers through trials into the maturity of spiritual living. Knowing God's unchangeable love and goodness assures believers that even in the face of adversity and persecutions, God's people will be able to live in peace and joy, knowing of his care and provision.