

Faith Under Attack

James 1:2-8, *"My brethren, consider it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."*

If you are living by **faith** (as stated in Hebrews 10:38) your faith is likely to come under attack - it will be tested! Note, the faith I am referring to is not your religious beliefs, as in being a Christian, but the **faith** described in **Hebrews 11:1** *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."* James tells us quite candidly that our faith will be put to the test. I like James because he doesn't pull his punches; he says it as it is! James seems to have a knack of cutting straight through to what really matters. We are all aware that life has its tests and trials, and that life isn't just plain sailing. However, in this instance it is God Himself who allows our faith to be put to the test. These are tests and trials that are divinely permitted or sent (with a beneficial purpose or effect).

This is confirmed in **1 Peter 1:6-7**, *"You should be exceedingly glad on this account, though now for a little while you may be distressed by trials and suffer temptations, so that the genuineness of your faith may be tested. That is, your faith which is infinitely more precious than the perishable gold which is tested and purified by fire. This proving of your faith is intended to redound to your praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One) is revealed"* - Amplified.

James starts off by echoing the same sentiments. In verse 2 he says, *"My brethren, consider it all joy when you fall into various trials."* I want to point out here that there's a difference between 'falling' into difficulties and 'walking' into them. I'm sure you will agree that many of our difficulties in life are self-inflicted. But there are those that come upon us suddenly (they sneak up on us). You're chugging along nicely, and through no fault of your own, all kinds of problems invade your life.

Let me give you a good example: Before David became king of Israel; he used to serve King Saul. But Saul was tormented by a spirit, so to try and give him relief, David would play his harp. And one day, David was playing his harp before King Saul when Saul suddenly picked up a spear and threw it at David, hoping to pin him to the wall (**1 Samuel 18:10-11**). David had done nothing wrong, yet without warning he's in serious danger and experiencing one of life's great trials. He didn't walk into that trial, he fell into it!

Then there are trials that we 'walk' into (that are self-afflicted). These kinds of trials don't come by chance or without warning; we bring them upon ourselves. When David replaced Saul as ruler of Israel, he was older and should have been wiser, but this was not the case. When his army was off to war, David decided to take a little stroll on the roof of his house. In that part of the world, it was common for them to have flat roofs that they could walk on. David looked out over the balcony and there was beautiful woman taking a bath on the roof of the adjoining house. He should have immediately walked away, but he liked what he had seen. So David finds out who she is. Her name is Bathsheba, and that she's married to a man named Uriah. Then, king David sends for her and sleeps with her. You probably know the rest of the story. Bathsheba becomes pregnant and David now has a massive problem. How can he cover up his sin?

David calls for Uriah and sends him home along with a gift of food. David was hoping that Uriah would sleep with his wife and nobody would be any the wiser. However, Uriah is an honourable man. All he can think about is that the rest of the army is toughing it out in tents. So how could he rightfully partake of the normal pleasures of life? He decides to sleep at the door of the king's house. When David finds out, he sends Uriah back to the battlefield along with a note for Joab the commander of the army. Joab is told to put Uriah right at the front where the battle is most dangerous, and then, at a strategic time, the troops are to withdraw and leave Uriah to be killed (**2 Samuel 11:1-24**).

David hired a hit-man to do his dirty business. But the person who hires the hit-man is just as guilty as the man who pulls the trigger. David has committed adultery and murder, and God's judgment has come upon him. Consequently, his life takes a sudden turn for the worse. David didn't 'fall' into that trial; he brought it upon himself. Had he not deliberately 'walked' into this unrighteous situation, God would have exercised His grace and mercy. And, even though David was a man of God own heart, God was unable to deliver him. Did God forgive David? Yes, I'm sure He did (just read the Palms). However, sin when fully grown has severe consequences. *"When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters"* (**James 1:13-16**).

Notice, when you fall into the tests and trials of life, James suggests a very unusual response; he says, rejoice! *"My brethren, consider it all joy when you fall into various trials."*

James says, **"Consider it all joy."** How do you consider? With your mind. Not with your feelings, but with your thought processes. Trials will come, and they may even damage your life due to the gloomy thoughts that follow. James is not saying, "Feel joyful," rather, learn to think joyfully in your trials. I believe this is one of the most difficult things to do, and that it takes **faith**. It's easy to rejoice when everything is going well - when all the good things in life are coming your way. It doesn't take much faith to "rejoice" when life is easy. Your thoughts are always "up" because you feel confident and satisfied. However, when times are tough, when everything seems to be going wrong, it takes faith to see beyond your natural circumstances and think in line with God's word. It takes **faith** to hold every negative thought captive and trust God enough to **rejoice**.

James 1:3-4, *"Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."* Through these divinely permitted trials, God wants to produce "patience" in our lives. The Greek word translated "patience" doesn't mean what you may think it means. When we talk about a person being impatient, we think of a person who's in a hurry. Someone who can't wait to get wherever it is they want to go. That being the case, a patient person is simply someone who's not in a hurry. Yet the Greek word means a lot more than that. This word is talking about **endurance** and **perseverance**. In other words, God is the business of building tough, mature people. He wants people who can endure hardship. This is the quality God wants to develop in us. He doesn't want us to be weak, wimpy Christians. And the reason is that we're in a race, and the race is a marathon (not a sprint). If you're going to get the prize, you must to be able to last the distance. Jesus said, **"But he who endures to the end shall be saved."** (**Matthew 24:13**) It's easy to start, but God wants you to stay the full distance!

James 1:5, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him." What's going on here? James starts talking about the trials of life, and now he's talking about **wisdom**. What's wisdom got to do with anything? Well, we need wisdom so that we can know how to respond to the trials we're going through. Wisdom is an important asset for us to have if we are going to deal with our trials correctly. However, this isn't just any wisdom, and it's definitely not man's wisdom.

If you were to read **Proverbs 1-9**, you would find a list of qualities that are associated with this kind of **wisdom** - *understanding, instruction, prudence, discretion, learning, knowledge and discernment*. These are all great qualities, and we need them when we go through life's trials. So how do we get this kind of wisdom? **James 1:6-8**, "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double minded man, unstable in all his ways." James says that to get the wisdom of God, all we need to do is ask Him for it. But we must ask in **faith**.

James also says, "No doubting," and that the person who doubts is being *double-minded*. That word literally means "two-souled." Let's think about this for a moment. Humans are tripartite beings, which means that we have three parts: *Spirit, soul and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23)*. The body has five senses: *Taste, touch, sight, hearing, and smell*. On the other hand, the spirit (that's the human spirit), has three faculties: *Conscience, intuition, and communion*. And the soul also has three faculties: *The mind, the will, and the emotions*. James is not implying that we literally has two souls when we doubt. But if we doubt, it's just like having two souls. One mind thinking one bunch of thoughts, and the other one thinking the exact opposite.

One set of emotions pulling one way, and the other set of emotions pulling the other way. One will make a choice to believe God, but the other will choosing not to believe. No wonder James refers to that person as being "*unstable in all his ways!*"

In every trial of life God wants us to have His wisdom, and the way to get it is through single-minded faith. Here we see two great qualities: Wisdom and Faith. Without wisdom, we do not know how to respond during the trials of life. And without faith, how can we face the storm and **rejoice** in it? God has a plan and a purpose for every one of us - even in difficult times. When our faith is under attack, God has a purpose for every season. Therefore, whatever it is you are going through today, be rest assured that God was a beneficial outcome already prepared. He will never leave you wanting - He is your heavenly Father.

To end, let's go back to the reason why God permits trails to come upon us. "*But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*" The NIV says, "*Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*" I like the 'not lacking anything' part of this verse of scripture. However, such a truly prosperous state can only be established after we have allowed *perseverance* to finish its work (complete its course); and only after we have grown in faith (matured). So remember this, the reward for hanging in and exercising faith is "not lacking anything." When we keep our eyes on the reward, it's a lot easier to "**consider it all joy!**"

God wants us to patiently endure the trials of life, so that our **faith** (when tested) is proved genuine. And He loves us enough to bring us to a place of true prosperity - spirit, soul and body. *“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things (not lacking anything) and be in health, just as your soul prospers.”* (3 John 1:2)