

Introduction:

"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds" (**James 1:2**, ESV). "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial" (**James 1:12**, ESV). "Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast" (**James 5:11**, ESV). Rejoice. Remain steadfast. Great words of instruction in the face of trials, temptations, and torments. But how? How can we accomplish that? James, writing as a shepherd to the Jewish Christians who had been scattered from their home in Jerusalem knew his audience was well acquainted with trial and tribulation. They had been forced from their homes to make a new life in other places (**James 1:1**). Many of them were oppressed and dragged into courts while those around them blasphemed the name of their God (**James 2:6-7**). They had been mistreated and defrauded by rich employers who wouldn't pay them appropriate wages (**James 5:1-6**). And James tells them to rejoice. He tells them to remain steadfast. Wow! Can we see anything in James's writing that would help them accomplish this? Can we see anything that will help us accomplish this?

Discussion:

I. Remember the source of your trials and temptations

- A. There is an interesting wordplay in **James 1:12-15**. The word for "trial" in **James 1:12** is the noun form of the word for "tempted" in **James 1:13, 14**. Thus, while we are to remain steadfast under trial, we must understand that our trials do not come from God. This attacks one of the main reasons we find it hard to remain steadfast under trial, let alone do so with rejoicing. When we suffer, at best we wonder why God is allowing this to happen to us, at worst we wonder why God is doing this to us. In the midst of suffering, we are convinced God has either forgotten us or is actively against us. James explains that every good and perfect gift is from God (**James 1:17**). Temptation isn't on that list.
- B. However, we must dig a little deeper to get to the foundation of this point. The fact is in other places the Bible clearly does show God "tempting" people. That is, the same Greek word found in this passage is seen in others with God as the one performing the action. Two easy examples: **Genesis 22:1** and **John 6:6**. In the former, in the Septuagint (LXX; Greek translation of the Old Testament) God tempts/tests Abraham. And in the latter, Jesus tempts/tests Philip. How can James claim God never tempts but these passages show God doing so?
- C. One of the fallacies we often assert is thinking every time we see a Greek word used, it always means the same thing. That isn't true in English, it isn't true in any other language either, not even Greek. For instance, does your neighbor yelling at his pet, saying, "Bad dog!" mean the same thing as Michael Jackson when he sang, "I'm bad"? In fact, did Michael Jackson mean the same thing as the criminal who explains his actions with a simple, "I'm bad"? Words in every language have a range of meaning and can be used to mean different things. That is exactly what is happening with the word for "tempted" in **James 1:12-15**. Don't be surprised by this or think I'm making things up. Consider the word "tempt" in the English language. Do we mean the same thing when we say "He tempted me to lie to my parents" as we do when we say "The book tempted me to stay up and read"? And do either of these mean the same thing as "He tempted fate more than once"?
- D. The term translated "tempted" in **James 1:12-15** is not only used to describe alluring someone to commit a sin. It is also used for testing as in **John 6:6** when Jesus tested Philip to see what he would say. It can have the further meaning of testing in order to prove as in **Genesis 22:1** when God was testing Abraham to demonstrate Abraham's faithfulness. So, James uses a word that can mean to allure to sin and can also mean to put to the test. It is these multiple meanings that makes James's point so powerfully. God does allow us to go through trials and tests. Not only does He allow it, sometimes He is the direct author of it. But His purpose is never to allure us to sin. Consider **Exodus 20:20**. "Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin" (ESV). Here in the LXX we see the exact same term used and we see God's goal for the testing/tempting was to help Israel not sin. God's goals in our trials is to put us to the test so we might be proven faithful and grow thereby. That is exactly the point of **James 1:2-4**. God's purpose in allowing us to undergo testing and suffering is not to get us to sin, but to help us grow so we will be perfect, complete, lacking in nothing.
- E. Sadly, however, the very same trials God uses to test us, Satan uses to tempt us. That is, what God uses to cause us to grow, Satan uses to cause us to fall. What makes God's tests to grow temptations to sin? Our

desires. And this is how the wordplay works in this passage. We do go through trials and testing. Our suffering does test us. But the source of the temptation to sin doesn't come from God. That comes from Satan, and, sadly, from within ourselves.

- F. Lest someone claim this can't be true because surely the forms of this word have just one meaning since they are all here in these same few paragraphs, allow me to return to our English illustration from earlier, using the word "bad." Imagine a movie or tv show, probably some kind of action comedy, in which the bad guy does something amazing and the good guy, probably in some witty repartee says, "Wow, you're awful, but you're amazing. How did you do that?" And the villain says with a smirk, "What can I say? I'm bad when I'm bad." Someone who doesn't understand English well would never get that last sentence. But we, being familiar with the multiple meanings and idioms of the word, see the wordplay. The word is used twice in the same sentence, but doesn't mean the same thing in each case. In fact, what makes the sentence work is the multiple meanings of the word. That is what is happening in **James 1:12-15**.
- G. To wrap up and summarize, if we want to pursue steadfastness in the midst of trial, we need to remember that the source of temptation is not God. He has not abandoned us. He is not against us. His goal is our growth and salvation.

## II. Remember you are not alone in trial and temptation

- A. Sometimes we struggle to remain steadfast in the face of trial because we get myopic in the face of suffering. We can't see past our own experience and suffering. We begin to think we are the only ones who have ever gone through something like this. In **James 5:10-11**, he gives us two examples of others who have suffered. We have no need to feel like the Lone Ranger here.
- B. The prophets have gone through the same kinds of sufferings. For most of us, the prophets have gone through much worse. Many statements in James hearken back to what we call the Sermon on the Mount. In **Matthew 5:11-12**, Jesus says we are blessed when we are reviled and persecuted on His account. He explains we can rejoice and be glad because the same thing happened to the prophets. Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and on the list goes. Prophets were mistreated by those to whom they spoke. Yet, their reward before God in heaven is great. We are not alone. Rather, we are walking in the footsteps of the prophets.
- C. Then there is Job. What a story. Job was faithfully serving God, when Satan sets his sights on him. He gains permission and quickly whittles away at everything that is dear to Job. He takes Job's goods and property. He kills Job's children. He turns Job's wife against him. And the final straw, he gets Job's three friends who initially came to support Job to speak what is wrong about him. But how does it all end up? "The Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning" (**Job 42:12**, ESV).
- D. You aren't alone in trials. Don't let Satan delude you into thinking you are experiencing what no one else ever has. Hang on to God. He has gotten others through the trials. He will get you through the trials.

## III. Remember the end of those who try and tempt you

- A. Often, we find it hard to remain steadfast in the face of our trials and suffering, let alone rejoice, because we look at those who are the instruments of our trial and suffering and they seem to be doing well. We become like Asaph of **Psalms 73** who saw the wicked prospering while he suffered. It almost cost him his faith. What brought Asaph back to solid ground? "...then I discerned their end" (**Psalms 73:17**, ESV). And that is exactly what James shows us.
- B. In **James 5:1-6**, James takes head on one of the groups that was the cause of the Christian's trials and suffering. Back in **James 2:6**, James had claimed the rich were the ones who oppressed these Christians and dragged them into court. Here, James utters God's judgment against those rich who were oppressing Christians. No doubt, they seemed on top of the world with their gold, silver, fine clothes, large lands. They basked in luxury and indulged their greatest wants. But James highlights their end. "Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire" (ESV).
- C. Notice what I believe is a double-entendre in **James 5:6**. James doesn't say, "You have condemned and murdered the righteous people." He says, "the righteous person." Some translations say, "the righteous one." In the midst of talking about how the rich were oppressing the righteous Christians, he calls to mind the condemnation and the murder of the Righteous One. This is the same accusation Stephen made against the Jews in **Acts 7:52**. What a powerful connection this makes for us. In **Acts 7:52**, Stephen accuses the Jews and their ancestors of killing the prophets who announced Jesus and then killing Jesus. In a stroke of genius, James demonstrates that the very same people who killed Jesus have gone on oppress, persecute, perhaps even literally kill those who proclaim Jesus.

- D. What is going to happen to these who killed the prophets who announced Jesus, who killed Jesus, who kill the followers who proclaim Jesus? They will be judged. They will be condemned. They will be punished. All their wealth and prosperity will do them no good.

#### IV. Remember the goal of your trials and temptations

- A. Perhaps the big reason we struggle to be steadfast in the face of trial, let alone rejoice, is because we can't see past the trial. In the midst of trial and suffering, it is easy to believe that is all we are ever going to experience. It is never going to get any better. But James demonstrates repeatedly that is not the case. In fact, it has been hard not to step all over this point in the previous three because each of them pointed to this.
- B. In our first point, we learned that the source of temptation was Satan and our own desires. But God used testing to help us grow to salvation. In our second point, we learned about others who suffered for God's sake, but their end was great reward. And in our third point, we saw that those who oppress us and cause our suffering and trial will be judged in the end. All of this points to the goal for our suffering and trial.
- C. In **James 1:2-4**, the testing of our faith produces steadfastness, which, when it has its full effect, makes us perfect, complete, lacking in nothing. **James 1:12** explains that when we remain steadfast under trial God will give us a crown of life. **James 5:7-11** urges us to be patient because the Lord is at hand. He will come in judgment on those who oppress us, but in reward for we who remain steadfast like the prophets and Job.
- D. As James explains in **5:11**, Our Lord is compassionate and merciful. He will not leave us in our suffering forever. He is growing us and proving us, and in the end, He will come for us with a crown of life in His hand and a welcome into His very home.
- E. Why do we know this is true? Because when these enemies of God condemned and murdered the righteous one, all they accomplished was offering the sacrifice by which we who remain steadfast with God will be saved. Praise the Lord!

#### Conclusion:

I hope I haven't made this sound like it is supposed to be easy. If it were easy, I guess we'd never see any of it as a trial or suffering. But if we can keep these four points in mind, we can remain steadfast and even rejoice in our trials. Remember God hasn't abandoned you when you are suffering. He is giving you what you need to grow. You are not alone. Keep in mind, not only have many suffered before you, but you are surrounded by those who would bear your suffering with you. Remember the end of your suffering both for those who cause your suffering and for you. Those who oppress us will be judged, if they don't repent, and we will be rewarded with a crown of life. Hang on to God. Pursue steadfastness. Pursue holiness. Pursue God. The crown of life is waiting.