

**'JAMES: THE FAITH BUILDER'**  
***(Building Up the Body of Christ God's Way)***  
**Studies in James**

**Weakness Leaving the Body**

Once upon a time while I agonized over a physically draining competition, my son interrupted my complaint with an unsympathetic, "pain is just weakness leaving the body, Dad!" His tough-guy proverb gave a sort of nobility to how exhausted I felt and silenced my one-man pity party. It really is true that when physical exercise pushes your body to work hard, it also builds strength and stamina. Muscle replaces flab, perseverance replaces weariness, astuteness replaces mental dullness, and vitality replaces fatigue. The same principle holds true in spiritual matters – when God stretches our faith by allowing the stress and pressures of life into our life, spiritual weakness leaves the body in the believer personally, and in the church family corporately. God wants strong, *strong bodies of Christ*. not weaklings.

When James wrote to the believers of the early church they had lots of trouble and little New Testament scripture to help them, but God wasn't interested in excuses – bad times equal the best times for spiritual growth in grace. He is always sympathetic to our pain (*Hebrews 4:14-16*) but His eternal objective of Christ's likeness in us is not going to be thwarted by our desire for temporal comfort and convenience. It was essential that the first century generations of Christians be exceptionally strong and courageous for Christ (*Hebrews 10:32-39*). Those were the foundational days of the Church Age (*Ephesians 2:20-22*) in which the New Testament scriptures were being written and the model for steadfastness under testing and persecution would be demonstrated (*Hebrews 12:1-4*). Those were difficult days God let happen to our forefathers in the faith, but their strength of commitment and character have inspired successive eras of Christian disciples ever since (*Revelation 12:10-11*).

The spiritual fitness manual for understanding God's rigorous training regimen is throughout the New Testament, but *James* is particularly insightful on how God targets each part of us with different tests designed to strengthen us in specific areas:

- Chapter One – the ears (hear and obey the Word of God);
- Chapter Two – the eyes (don't judge people by appearances);
- Chapter Three – the mouth (bless with it or 'button it');
- Chapter Four – the heart (keep it content, humble and gracious); and
- Chapter Five – the feet (don't let your 'walk' stumble but rather save others).

From head to toe in the body of Christ, God wants disciplined and spiritually strong believers to show the way for those who come after us. Training these various parts of our person is sometimes rather painful but remember that 'it's just weakness leaving the body' – you or the church fellowship of which you are a part or both!

**'Get the Most Out of Your Suffering'**  
***(Wisdom from above: Trials are friends in disguise)***  
**James 1:9-21**

**Synopsis:** James was the spiritual leader of the early church. Following a persecution that drove Christians from Israel to neighboring Gentile regions, James wrote a letter that was copied and distributed to them wherever they relocated. The Christians, who were also Jewish in the early days before Christianity spread to Gentiles, lost everything including family connections as they ran to unfamiliar places. In their exile they took the gospel message to non-Jews but they were not treated well because of their faith and ethnic identity. James writes to encourage them and help them understand God's purposes in allowing trials and suffering in believers' lives. Chapter One even told them to '*count it all joy when different trials come upon them*'! The Holy Spirit through James explained that through trials God causes us to grow up in the faith, building our faith, endurance, patience, prayer life, and biblical wisdom, while replacing spiritual immaturity and instability with Christlikeness.

## **Trials: God's Equalizers** (All learn to 'abase and abound')

*"Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So, the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits."* **1:9-11**

Trials, suffering and persecution come to all Christians (*Philippians 1:29*) regardless of social or economic status. Both poor ('lowly') and rich need to experience hard times because of the spiritual growth hard times bring (*1:3-4*).

- Talk about the command to poor believers to 'glory in their exaltation' / What does that mean, and how do trials provide an opportunity to do that?
- Also, talk about the command to a 'rich' believer to '(glory) in his or her humiliation' / What does that mean, and how do trials provide an opportunity to do that? Should this 'glorifying' (feeling honored or privileged to undergo trials for the grace and growth they bring), be private or public or both? (explain your thoughts)
- How can trials bring unity, fellowship and understanding to a church where both poor and rich worship and serve together? (example of the early church in *Acts 4:32-25*)

## **Trials = Gaining Endurance** (All learn to 'abstain from sin')

*"Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then when desire has conceived it gives birth to sin and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."* **1:12-15**

Temptation (solicitation to indulge self and disobey God) came to Jesus and will also come to every one of His followers (*1 Corinthians 10:13*).

- Discuss *endurance* of temptation – the word suggests some length of duration the enticement goes on before it subsides. If you are tempted what should you do while you *endure*? *Approved* suggests that you successfully resisted sin and did not yield to carrying out who or whatever enticed you.
- The reward for passing the temptation test is *the crown of life* which may mean either a victorious, noble Christian lifestyle or a literal *crown* reward for *self-denial* (*taking up the cross and dying to self for righteousness sake*) (*Revelation 2:10b*), or both. Why is the prize not worth it to some Christians who continually yield to sin and their own flesh?
- If you yield to sin, you obviously don't get the *crown of life*, whatever it is. What then can you expect instead of the *crown of life* if you *cave in* to sin continually?
- Talk about how yielding to sin is like flirting, physical contact, getting pregnant, and having an illegitimate, wicked child who grows up to hurt and kill (*vs 14-15*). What would you do about a relationship in which you KNEW that would be the outcome? Would you continue that relationship even if the other person was attractive to you? (Discuss the parallels between enticement to sin and romantic attraction)

## **Trials = Good Gift Evaluation** (All learn to wait for 'the excellent')

*"Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights, with Whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the Word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls."* **1:16-21**

We studied the first part of this passage during the Christmas break, but not the last three verses (*vs 19-21*). God's gifts, whether material things or a personal relationship, are easy to identify – they are morally and spiritually good for you and you do not need to manipulate or disobey any Scripture to have them. Furthermore, God's gifts always contribute somehow to the Lord's development of you into Christ's image and you will have the same positive sanctifying influence as God's gift to them.

But, sometimes the lure of something or someone is so strong a believer may tend to dismiss God's Word, godly counsel, and even the Holy Spirit within. **Verses 19-21** call for calm, teachable discipline under testing that reasons with our rebellious mind to do the right thing *meekly* even if you don't want to obey.

- Discuss this inner struggle between our flesh and the Holy Spirit (*Galatians 5:16-18*). Why is *meekness* the key to doing the right thing in the end?