

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
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James 1:2-12

Thank God for My...Trials?

- 1. Trials produce endurance**
- 2. Trials lead us to sanctified prayers**
- 3. Trials result in the crown of life**

**Hymns: 181 – “Borning Cry” –
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All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

James 1:2-12 –

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.⁶ But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.⁷ That man should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.⁸ He is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

⁹ The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position.¹⁰ But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position—because he will pass away like a wild flower.¹¹ For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.

¹² Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

People use words in many ways to make their point:

- Some are simply slick with their words, and win you over with their silver tongue

- Others talk boldly and bluntly. You never need to know how they feel about a given topic.
- Others inject humor into just about every conversation, even if it's not a humorous topic.

The Scriptures often make a point by posing what we might call a “provocative statement.” The statement might be shocking. It might even seem to be contradictory. Its point is to make the reader think hard about the important thing that the Lord is trying to teach. For example:

- The first will be last, and the last will be first.
- Blessed are those who mourn.
- He who spares the rod hates his son...
- If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

In the sermon text for today, we have one of the most provocative, seemingly-contradictory statements in all of Scripture. James tells us, “*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.*” What? Pure joy? The Greek is even more emphatic. Literally, it says “all joy,” and those two words are placed first in the Greek sentence for high emphasis. “All joy, consider it, my brothers, when you fall into many kinds of trials...” How can this be?

It will be good for us to dwell on these words of Scripture for a short time today and see what lessons the Lord would teach us. Let's consider the theme, “**Thank God for my Trials!**” We will learn three reasons why we can do so.

1. They produce endurance

A good question to start with is, “Why are there trials to begin with?” When trouble or evil comes into a person's life, the first reaction is often to blame God. “Why would you create evil, Lord? And why do you want trials in the world in the first place?”

A look back at the beginnings of the world shows us that such questions are looking at things in the wrong way. When God in his

wisdom and power created this world, Genesis tells us that it was “very good,” yes even perfect. It was not God’s intention that evil be present in the world. Yet when God allowed Adam and Eve a test to show their love for him, a risk was involved. If they did not love him enough to obey his command not to eat from the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden, there would be consequences. Such is the nature of a test. God told them, *“You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die”* (Genesis 2:17). The Lord was talking not only about physical death, but also of the spiritual death of a fallen condition and its results of sorrow, sadness, and sin.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s command, he told Adam, *“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you... By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return”* (Genesis 3:17-19).

Trouble and toil were ushered into the world because of what man had done, not because of what God had ordained. Now, because of our personal sinful condition and sins, none of us can shake our fist at God when trials and troubles come and say, “I deserve better!” In fact, if we would tell God to give us what we deserve, we should tremble under his judgment and justice as he would send us to punishment in hell forever. We live out our days in a corrupt condition with a sinful nature. The trials that God now allows serve purposes for us, which we will learn about from James.

What kind of trials can come? James says that trials are “of many kinds.” If we consider his audience, he was writing to Jewish believers who had been scattered from Jerusalem during the early Church’s times after Jesus ascended into heaven. Great persecutions had taken place in Jerusalem, and many Christians were forced to settle elsewhere. Dangerous trials had existed that had threatened their safety and had taken lives. And of course they

suffered the trials that generally have come upon mankind since the Fall – health troubles, emotional troubles, financial troubles, troubles with relationships, grief, injury, accident, crime, uncertainty, and more. For as many people who are here today, we could list a unique set of trials that God has allowed in his wisdom.

What can we learn about joy in our trials? Our text says, *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”* **Trials produce endurance.** This is another interesting Greek word. The word for endurance (HUPOMENE) literally has the picture of “staying under.” It means that something is pressing down on you, but you are withstanding it by resisting and pressing up. More trials lead to more perseverance and a stronger faith.

We might think of the athlete that wants to become stronger. How will he or she do it? An obvious way is by getting in the weight room. If you get under the bench press to pump up ten or twenty reps, you will be stronger for it. If you have an extensive workout two or three times a week, you will be stronger for it. In fact, after two or three months of such workouts you can look in the mirror and see visible results of the trials you have put your arms and chest through. The Lord tells us that this is true for our faith as well when we undergo trials.

Another example might be Graduation Day. Today 20 eighth graders are receiving their diplomas from our grade school. They are not getting their diplomas simply because they are showing up today for the first time. Eight years of study went into receiving their diploma. Daily homework has “pressed” them. Quizzes and tests, very strenuous ones at that, have been administered to them. They have had a long course of study. Today they are the better for it, especially when they have done their work and strained their mind in their studying.

The difficulty, of course, is that such efforts are not pleasant at the time. I don’t know many people who are stretching their limits by

pumping up those 20 reps on the bench press and are saying at that moment, "I love it! This is terrific!" I don't know many students who are studying for a brain-busting algebra exam that you might call up at home and who would tell you, "I'm really enjoying my night! I'm going through algebra equations for my test!" But we all have seen the results of people who have extended themselves in the weight room or the classroom. They are stronger for it.

In fact, James says something even more provocative: "*Perseverance must finish its work.*" Literally it says, "Let perseverance finish its work." Let it run its course. Bring on the trials so that I'm better for it. What a mature thought from James! What a different thought from shaking your fist at God in your trials. **This is the first reason we can thank God for our trials. He is sending them for our strengthening and our perseverance. And we are becoming strong as we go through them!**

2. They lead us to sanctified prayers

Our reading continues with a second lesson: "*If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. He is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.*" What if you are really struggling in your trial? What if you are not understanding what is happening? What if you need wisdom? James tells us the answer: Ask God! Go to God and he will grant your request of wisdom! We see a second reason for joy. **Our trials lead us to sanctified prayers.** They lead us to God for help and wisdom. They lead us to pray.

Some of you have a special gift from God. It is the gift of constant prayer. In some believer's lives they are in constant communication with their Lord because they love to pray. They do not forget. They do not get weary. They talk to God constantly. Many believers, however, do not naturally have that gift. Life gets busy. Priorities get confused. Many feel like they

have nothing they need to pray about. Mealtime prayers, bedtime prayers, and spending an hour in prayer go by the wayside because of other less-important things in life. But what happens when trials come? It leads them to God in a way that they have not experienced for a while.

We see the same tendency in our children. When the day is going well, a parent may not hear much from them. They're merrily having a fun time with their friends or they're amusing themselves in their room with a closed door. But just about every parent here knows what is coming when suddenly their child shows up and says, "Hi Mom! How are you doing?" "Hi Dad! How is your day going?" A parent knows that a need is going to be expressed. They need money. Or a ride. Or permission to do something. Or food. The need has led them to come to their parent.

A biblical example I think of is the story of Jacob wrestling with God in prayer. If you remember that Bible account in Genesis, you'll recall that Jacob was facing a dire situation. He was returning home twenty years after ripping off his brother Esau, stealing his birthright as the oldest son. As he approached home with all his family members and the wealth he had accumulated, his scouts come back with the report that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men! What did Jacob do? Some practical things. He divided up his family and belongings, in case an attack was coming. He sent a generous gift ahead for Esau. And then he sent all his belongings off so he could be alone. And then we have the remarkable account of Jacob wrestling with God in prayer. Genesis 32 tells us that God even appeared in the form of a man and wrestled physically with him – Astonishing! And they wrestled all night. God welcomed that wrestling match, and he continues to welcome it when his children come to him in such prayer. Trials can lead us to such wrestling matches.

What kind of God will we find when we are led to him? James tells us that it is a God who "gives generously." He is the One who loves you and is ready and willing to help! It is not an evil landlord or an unsympathetic dictator you come to. It is

your generous Father in heaven. Don't think that this will lead to a "magic wand answer" necessarily, in answering your prayer. Perhaps there is a thorn in the flesh that God knows is good for you. Perhaps there is something he has taken away because of the bigger picture. But that does not mean he is not working for your good with your eternal interests in mind!

This is also the God who gives to all "without finding fault." Isn't that a comfort? God does not give a scolding or rebuke when you come to him! Why not? Because you are not being punished for your sins. Trials in a Christian's life are never punishment for sin. That punishment has already taken place, put on your Savior when he suffered and died for your sins. Jesus has endured your punishment and hell. It is finished! The world will tell you that God has forgotten you. It will say that he is beating you down for kicks. Or that he is punishing you. Don't believe it for a minute, for Christ has borne the punishment for your sin!

Therefore, James tells us to have confidence when we pray. Don't doubt. Don't waver. Don't be like a wave of the sea that is blown around and mastered. Know your God. Trust in him. And come with a faith that knows he will answer in the best way for your benefit!

3. They result in the crown of life

James teaches us one more lesson about our joy in trials. Our reading concludes with these words: *"The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position—because he will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business. Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him."*

This third lesson has to do with our future, not our present. Do you see where a Christian's thoughts should naturally drift when trials come upon him? Not only to persevering under his

current trial, but also **the crown of life that will be his one day.**

You know what a crown stands for. A victory that has been won! And because of the victory that Jesus Christ has won for us over sin, death, and the devil we will wear a crown along with him in heaven. Crowns also symbolize royalty. As sons and daughters of the King of kings we will wear a crown like his one day. This crown will be given to those who persevere in the faith. It's reminiscent of the more familiar verse from Revelation 2: *"Be faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life."*

No matter how much earthly wealth you possess, James writes, it will pass away. The beauty and strength that the rich man might have thought would last forever will fade and be gone. But not the crown of life!

What does this mean? One day, we will be in a place where there are no more trials:

- One day... that back pain you now experience will be gone forever
- One day... those reading glasses that are such a hassle will be no more
- One day... the stressful issues at work will be a distant memory
- One day... your laptop crashes will be no more
- One day... your failing memory will fail no longer
- One day... that car accident's effects will be over
- One day... the financial struggles and setbacks will be gone
- One day... your carpal tunnel syndrome will afflict you no more
- One day... the conflict you have with your relative will be gone

This world might seem to be a place that we should get accustomed to staying in and loving as our final destination. The trials that God allows help us to anticipate the real crown, the crown of life that God has for his believers in our final home in heaven!

JOY? Can we have joy in trials? James says it is so. After all:

- 1. Our trials produce endurance**
- 2. Our trials lead us to sanctified prayer**

3. Our trials will result in the crown of life

Those are all things that we can truly REJOICE
in! Amen.