

LIFE AFTER FAITH
A STUDY THROUGH THE BOOK OF JAMES

LESSON 2 – SMILE IN THE FACE OF A TRIAL – JAMES 1:2-4

While it is not natural to enjoy or even appreciate adversity, for God's people, the things which try us and test us are the things that make us spiritually strong...and eventually form us into the people we should be. It's with this end result in mind that James makes what appears to be just an absurd statement in verse 2. He says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds..."

Now...that word "trials" refers to any experience in life that tests us and tries us. James insists that we should consider it pure joy when we face those testing experiences. Usually, we only rejoice about trials when they're over. However, through James, the Spirit of God wants to teach us to look at trials in such a way that we can rejoice, even in the midst of our difficulties. In this lesson, we're reminded that some of the greatest graces of the Christian life can only be obtained through the trying of our faith. These few verses of James 1 teach us how we can smile even in the face of a trial.

The Perspective Required For Our Trials

I think we'd all agree that looking at the presence of a trial in our life as joy requires a unique perspective. Now...James is not telling us to smile in spite of our trials and act like they don't exist. Instead, he is encouraging us to have a different perspective on our trials, and to find joy in them. Notice a couple of things here that James points out about the perspective required for our trials...

How varied trials can be – James talks about "trials of many kinds." He's reminding us that our faith can...and will be tested by all sorts of different life experiences. Sometimes we are tested by the death of a loved one; sometimes we're tested by things like lust and jealousy and envy; and at other times by depression or anxiety.

How valuable trials can be – It's important here that we understand that James is not saying that trials are enjoyable. They absolutely are not! What James is saying is that we can look at them with joy, based on what we understand about them.

In other words, we can rejoice when a trial comes into our life because we can look ahead to the end result of that trial and what it will produce in our lives. The point James is making here is that trials and tests are actually a productive part of the Christian experience. As we'll see, they produce things in us that we can't get any other way.

James Draper said, "Testing is not meant to make me fall, but to make me fly; not to make me stumble, but to make me stand; not to defeat me, but to cause me to rise victoriously. The goal of God's testing is to strengthen, to give victory rather than defeat."

When we find ourselves surrounded by a testing, trying situation, we must view it with the right perspective...one that sees the ultimate value of the test.

The Patience Received Through Our Trials

James continues...and in verse 3 tells us that the testing of our faith produces perseverance...or patience. Now...in our vocabulary, patience typically means the ability to wait. But when James uses it, he means much more than that.

James tells us that we can be glad when a trial comes because its end result will be the development of endurance...or patience...in our lives. We will be better able to stand victorious against the future trials of life because we've already gone through other trials before. James teaches us a couple of things about the patience we get through trials...

Why we should desire patience – When a problem comes into our lives...whatever shape it may take...it's an opportunity for God to test us and to authenticate our faith in Him. The truth is...it's really easy to proclaim your love for God and faith in Him when things are good. True faith is not proven in the good times. It's proven in the stress of a crisis! None of us enjoy the stress of a trial, but all of us should desire to prove the authenticity of our faith.

Where we can develop patience – If patience is what we desire, then James reminds us that it is only developed through the testing and trying of our faith. Unfortunately, there are no shortcuts to developing the patience we need for the Christian life. Without the experience of trials, we can't have the strength of perseverance.

The Progress Resulting From Our Trials

So far, James has instructed us on how we should look at trials and what we should learn from our trials. In verse 4, he tells us how we should live in our trials. Let's look at the advice he gives us...

Don't fight the process of a trial – James says, "Let perseverance finish its work..." The idea here is that rather than resisting and resenting the presence of trials in our lives, we should let the situation fulfill its God-given purpose in our lives. Our temptation is to fight the trial and beg God to make it go away. But enduring the trial is more valuable to us than escaping the trial.

In other words, rather than facing your trial saying, "Lord, take me out of this." James says we should face our trial saying, "Lord, teach me through this." Don't fight against the process of a trial because it's through the trial God develops something good in your life.

Don't forget the profit of a trial – Verse 4 tells us that when the process of a trial is finished, we can be mature and complete...not lacking anything.

God has an idea of what He wants you and me to be. Through the process of tests and trials, God takes from us what we don't need and gives us what we do need in order to become all that He wants us to become. It's through our trials that God develops us and matures us. James says, "Don't lose sight of the profit...of the victory...that can be gained at the end of the testing of your faith."

When James challenges us to "consider it pure joy" when we face trials and tests, he is not simply telling us to grin and bear it. The idea is that we are to view our trials with a bigger and better perspective than that which only sees the problem...and not the virtue the problem can and will produce.

When we understand what the Lord is doing with us...and through us...rather than facing our trials with gritted teeth and anxiousness, we can face our trials with a genuine smile.