

***James 1:2-12. <sup>2</sup> Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, <sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. <sup>4</sup> Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; <sup>8</sup> he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does. <sup>9</sup> The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. <sup>10</sup> But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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.***

### **James challenges us to change our thinking...**

1. About our trials.
2. About getting into God's Word.
3. About how we pray to God.
4. About what is truly rewarding.

If you were to describe to me what pure joy is, what would you say? Thoughts of family pop into my head. Perhaps for you it's a quiet place, a friendly face, a child's smile, perhaps a favorite location, maybe even a favorite meal comes to mind. Whatever it was that you just had in mind I doubt that your idea of pure joy would sound much like the description that James gives. ***Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, <sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.***

James, here, uses a verbal technique to catch our attention. It is one that his teacher and Savior Jesus himself used often. Jesus often seized people's attention with challenging and seemingly contradictory statements, such as **"The last shall be first"** or **"Blessed are those who weep."** James certainly catches our attention with this shocking statement. ***"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds."***

When troubles come into our life pure joy is generally not our first emotion. When trials come into our lives, when times are difficult, when our faith is challenged, when we are reeling from loss, or some unexpected roadblock or difficult detour in life comes

our way our first response is not bow our heads and fold our hands and praise our Lord for this opportunity to grow. No, that's not what we as human beings are trained to do. Instead we ball up our hands in frustration, we hang our heads in despair and with emotions mixed with some combination of tears, sorrow, helplessness, and or anger, we cry, *"I don't get it. This is too hard. I don't have time for this Lord."*

It is the knee jerk reaction of a human nature that wants everything to be easy. It is the child in us that pouts when something is not simply handed to us in the exact way that we want it. James, however, challenges the believer - he challenges us - to grow up spiritually, to mature in our faith. And so he seizes our attention with this shocking statement. ***Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.***

It seems ridiculous. It seems outrageous. But then we stop and actually think about it. Where would you be in life and in your faith if life was perfect and easy and everything was just handed to you? It might seem nice for a while, but you would be ill equipped when trouble or difficulty came. And trouble and difficulty will come in this sinful world. You are the man or woman you are today because you had to mature and take on responsibility. You are the person you are today because you had to work through things and you had to overcome obstacles. Trials and challenges, as difficult as they are at the time, they build character. Such trouble and hardship develops perseverance and determination in our lives and in our faith life.

Consider what would your faith be without trials and testing? What would your relationship with God look like if everything came so easy that you never had to lean on God? Again we can compare this to the human condition, namely the strong human relationships that you build in your lives. A friendship is built and strengthened when one is asked to depend on the other and that friend comes through in the clutch. A marriage is forged and strengthened when troubles and trials bring the couple closer together and they have to depend on one another. In these moments trust is built. A bond is formed and deepened. The relationship is strengthened and tested and sealed. In the same ways trials and problems teach us to look to God. Such things train us to look to the one who is bigger than we are. As we go through difficult times we remember to call on God, and our relationship is strengthened to the point where we realize that we need God not only in difficult times or just for big problems but we need him every day and for every little thing. When we understand this James' words are suddenly not so shocking, suddenly they are not so ridiculous. ***Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,<sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.<sup>4</sup> Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*** James challenges us to **change our thinking about our trials as we mature in our faith.**

As suffering leads us to mature in our faith, this process leads us to put aside our pride and admit that we need his help. And we look to God and as we learn to lean on him we would do well not only to call out to him but we must also listen to him. James gives us another piece of advice. ***<sup>5</sup>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.*** The Lord gives wisdom generously through His Holy Word; for there we find his promises, there we find his comfort and hope and encouragement. There and there alone does God speak to us and comfort, console and counsel us. We find strength in the pages of Scripture. We find knowledge and understanding. We find examples of faith to which we can relate. We find examples of faith that lift us up and that can build up our faith. God wants us to grow in the wisdom and the knowledge of the Lord. God wants us to **change our thinking about getting into his word.**

But this too can be difficult. The same questions we use when troubles come into our lives are the same questions that we go to when we take on the blessed task of getting into his word. Instead of finding it to be pure joy, sometimes we say, *"I don't get it. It's too complicated. This is too hard. I don't have time for this Lord."*

Perhaps there is also a part of us that feels foolish to ask questions about God's Word. *"I should probably know this already. This is too hard to read on my own. I don't get it and I don't want to go to Bible class and ask questions and sound stupid or foolish when I don't answer a question right."* James encourages us to do away with such thinking and he challenges us to ask for help. God will give you the understanding that you need. He will help you grow in his word. He gives generously without finding fault. As a forgiven child of God, the Lord has no interest in judging you and your level of knowledge he simply wants you to grow and mature in your faith.

So get into the Word. In the summer read from the Mediation booklets and follow the suggested readings. Make time for daily devotions. Take time to read the Forward in Christ magazine. Check out a devotional book in the library. Read through the People's Bible and get understanding and explanation of God's Word. Find a partner and read through and talk about Scripture together. Get into God's Word this summer anyway that you can and then in the fall come to Bible Class.

God will help you in this effort. God wants you to grow in your faith so that you will grow in your relationship with Him. As we mature in the faith, as we grow closer to God, one of the things the Lord teaches us to do is to pray with confidence and boldness. **And so here James teaches us to change our thinking about how we pray to him.** God wants us to pray with believing hearts, hearts that pray and know that he hears us. And so God teaches us through the apostle's words that when you look to the Lord, when you go to your God in prayer be bold in prayer. Do not doubt, but hold him to his promises as you lean on his word. He says he cares about you. He says that he will be with you. He says he will give you strength and understanding. He will give you comfort. He will give you forgiveness and peace, help and relief, hope and joy. So pray with confidence. Pray knowing and trusting and expecting that your powerful God will hear and will answer you. This is the same God that created the heavens and the earth out of nothing. This is the same God who tore down the walls of Jericho for his people. This is the same God who made the sun stand still in the sky for his servant Joshua. Pray to God and expect answers. Do not doubt, but trust in him. Again James uses some shocking words to teach us this lesson. ***6 But when he asks, he must believe and not***

**doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; <sup>8</sup> he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.** In other words, if you pray for God do something that is according to his gracious will - expect an answer. As the old saying goes, *"If you pray for rain, make sure to bring an umbrella."*

God wants us to grow and mature in our faith. He wants us to change our thinking about trials, to change our thinking about getting into his word, to change our thinking about prayer. After all this is exactly what we need to grow. To know God's Word, to know his promises, to know his love, this is what we need to endure this difficult life and reach our home in heaven. His word is living water that leads us to grow and spares us from the scorching heat of trial and trouble in this world.

Sometimes we forget that however, and we revert back to wanting things handed to us. We are tempted to think that our problems would all be solved if we won the lottery, hit it big at the casino, or got our hands on some money or some property some way, somehow. But the apostle once again uses a seemingly contradictory statement as he challenges us to change the way that we look at such things. James writes, **<sup>9</sup> The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. <sup>10</sup> But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. <sup>11</sup> 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.**

Again it is another one of these statements that makes you think. James is challenging us to change our thinking **about what is truly rewarding in this life.** Those who look like they have it all, those who we may even wish or pray we could be like, may in fact be easily distracted from what is truly important. However, the man who does not have much, but has the love of Jesus and has faith in the LORD he will persevere and he will be blessed. In short if you have many blessings you must be careful that they do not become a distraction. If you do not have much know that there is great reward for those who cling to God and his promises, despite the earthly challenges.

There is so much packed in these first paragraphs of the book of James! In just the first few verses of his letter James challenges his readers - he challenges us - to look at several important things very differently. He uses some eye opening and thought provoking statements to encourage us to think differently especially about the trials and troubles we endure. James then leaves us with this one last thought that should catch our attention. **<sup>12</sup> 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.** May the Lord daily change our thinking so that strengthened through his word and guided through prayer we may rejoice even in our sufferings and one day enjoy the crown of life that Jesus has won for us. For that will be the start of an eternity of pure joy. Now that is something to think about. Amen.