

Sometime last Fall, I went to our mailbox to collect the mail. I looked through the flyers and shiny ads to see if there was any personal mail. Then I noticed the brown envelope. It had that familiar federal government look. I turned it over to discover the sender: The Canada Revenue Agency or Tax department.

I quickly opened it up hoping it was just an information bulletin about some credit I might receive or be denied. But it was a somewhat personal letter. It contained the dreaded 5 letter word – AUDIT. They wanted to look more deeply into something on my tax return. They outlined the requested information. Then they concluded with the usual threats if I ignored their letter.

How might you respond to such a letter? I can tell you how I didn't respond in that moment. I didn't praise the Lord for an opportunity to grow in character. I didn't run back home to tell Lori the good news about my tax audit. I didn't relish the opportunity to grow in my trust of the Lord. I probably rolled my eyes and groaned. Then I wondered why they were doing this and if I had the right documents. I also began to calculate how much time this might take. Receiving an audit letter from CRA was not on my bucket list. But I can check it off anyway now. Thankfully, this was resolved in a fairly short time. But it certainly caused some stress, a bit of anxiety and some grumbling.

Such a response is normal for me. My approach trouble is to try to get through them as quickly as possible. There's some good in this approach. There's a willingness to at least face the trouble. But sometimes, I can rush or try to force things. I don't know if I ever approach my troubles initially by accepting them. I don't look at them as opportunities for growth or character strengthening. I have seen troubles as something to avoid as much as possible. But trials and troubles are a fact of life.

I know many of you face or endure trials that cannot be dealt with quickly. You may endure constant physical pain with no cure. You may be going through grief which can take months or even years. You or someone close to you may have some mental health issues that will require serious time to resolve. Or it might be permanent. Maybe you or someone in your family has an incurable condition that apart

from a miracle will be with you for your whole life. You may be walking through a time of job loss or adjusting to retirement or embroiled in a legal process. You may be waiting for some medical treatment or surgery. You may have a child with some health or developmental challenges. Some endure broken relationships that you'd like to reconcile but the other party refuses. Some of you have that difficult person at your workplace or in your class that you deal with every day. Or you live or work in a toxic environment that you regularly have to wade through. Many have loved ones who don't know Christ or have turned away from Christ and your heart aches for them. None of these involve quick resolution.

Recently God impressed upon me that I can place more value on a trial free life than on God Himself. I wrote this in my journal, "Forgive me Lord for wanting *no trouble* more than I want you. I confess that in this place/time of trouble, I have placed my hope and peace in having no trouble. But that is not realistic. Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble – but take heart, I have overcome the world. I now realize that if I didn't have trouble, I wouldn't be driven to you. You are the ultimate source of life, hope, peace and soul silence. So, in a way, trouble has led me to You and a deeper walk with You."

I think that even that letter caused me to pray. It caused me to reach out to the Lord which is always a good thing. Yet that was not the first or last trial I will face in my life. You and I will face trials, trouble and tribulations. They are a fact of life. So can we endure life's trials in a way that glorifies God and may bring good for us?

I'm here today to say **Christ enables us to endure trials and receive God's good for us in them.** We can endure trials and receive God's good for us in them when we rely on Christ and His provisions. Please hear me carefully. I am not saying that the trials are good in themselves. I am not saying that cancer is good, or death is good or some injustice is good. We live in a fallen world. But God is sovereign and can bring good into our lives during and through trials. That's what we will explore today as we begin in a new series from the letter of James.

James was one of Jesus' younger brothers. So he grew up in the home of Joseph and Mary. The Gospels tell us that Jesus' brothers did not initially believe in him. In John 7:5 we read "For not even his brothers believed in him."

But James is eventually converted and convinced by a resurrection visit from his oldest brother Jesus. 1 Corinthians 15:7 says, "Then he appeared to James." This James, the brother of Jesus becomes the leader of the early church in Jerusalem. He writes this letter to Jewish Christians scattered throughout the world who face significant trials.

So I'm going to give you today first some facts about James that will help us read it in a Gospel-centered way. Then we will learn about 3 provisions from Jesus that can help us endure trials in a way that glorifies God and receives good from Him. Finally, we look at how Jesus used these supplies Himself and can empower us to do the same. I pray you will gain strength from the Lord for any trials you face today or in the future.

So please find James 1 in your Bibles or on your devices. You can also follow along in the Bibles here on page 854. We will read verses 1-12.

James 1:1-12 (ESV)

1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.

²Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

⁹Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, ¹⁰and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. ¹¹For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

¹²Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

Five Notes about the Letter of James

1 – James assumes the gospel. There is no mention of the cross or atonement. There is nothing about the blood of Christ or how it cleanses us from unrighteousness. Sharing the gospel is not

James primary concern. He assumes forgiveness, reconciliation with God and justification by faith. He then applies these lessons to the people. This is important to remember because of the second fact about James.

2 – It contains 59 commands in 108 verses. If you've ever read through this letter, you know that the commands can overwhelm you. You can read James and conclude "I've got 59 more items to add to my to do list of being a good Christian." If we forget that James assumes the Gospel, we could read James like a moralistic manifesto. We could conclude that the basic message is try hard to obey all these commands and you will be a good Christian. But that's moralism where we just try to be good moral people in our own strength.

3 – We need the Gospel to live out these commands. There are hints of our need for Christ throughout the letter. In the passage about the tongue, James makes this statement in 3:8. "No human being can tame the tongue." So the implication is we need a savior.

4 – James is deeply steeped in Old Testament Law and Jesus' teaching. He demonstrates strong knowledge of the Law. It seems he paid close attention to the teachers in synagogue and likely his parents. But he also paid close attention to his brother's teaching. Studies have shown that some of his writing shows a dependence on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

5 – James sometimes writes in a Jewish style like Proverbs. Sometimes his thoughts can seem unconnected. They go from one set of commands to the next with no transitional sentence. This is unusual for us but normal for a Jewish audience. If you've ever read the Proverbs, you will see this. Sometimes the verses follow a theme. But other times there are a series of wisdom statements put together in a collection.

We see this especially in the passage we just read. It seems like there's five disconnected paragraphs in this first chapter. But I agree with those who conclude that each one in some way connects to the issue of trials and troubles.

So with these notes in mind let's go to the passage. James identifies himself in 1:1 as the letter's author. But notice what he doesn't do. He doesn't drop names. He doesn't use his relationship with

Jesus to claim authority. He identifies himself as “a servant or slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” He could have said “I’m Jesus’ brother.” Or “I am an apostle.” But he says, “James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” He has come to the place where he recognizes his brother as the fulfillment of Messiah’s hope. He writes to the 12 tribes in the dispersion meaning Jewish Christians scattered all over the world.

Then he plunges into his letter. Verses 2-4 contain the lovely command about joy when you meet trials of many kinds.

What good can God bring to us in trials?

He can use trials to develop our steadfast faith in Him. (1:2-4). James writes this weird command to “Consider or Count it all joy when you face trials of many kinds.” No one is joyful when they face trials of many kinds. However, James is not commanding a feeling. This is a decision. Consider or count it all joy. Why? Through trials our faith gets tested and can grow steadfast. But to consider this joy, we need to see the value of a steadfast faith.

What is so great about a steadfast faith? It’s not so we can gain fame for our strong faith. It is because of the one we put our faith in. God is the source of strength, hope and life. He proves Himself especially when we face life’s greatest challenges. Where else could we turn for hope when a loved one dies? So if our faith in the all-powerful God grows stronger, it is good for us.

Our faith grows in strength mostly through trials of many kinds. Let’s be honest. When life is going well, we don’t cry out to God in desperation. We think we’ve got it under control. We don’t need any help. Life is smooth.

But the moment we face something beyond us, we look for help. So trials can bring us closer to God. Notice what else they accomplish in verse 4. “And let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” This means that God can use trials to grow us in maturity. Trials can be a remedy for spiritual flaws.

Say someone has a problem with anger. They know that they should really work on that. But their family or people around them have adjusted to their proneness to anger. They kind of walk on

eggshells around that person. So there's really no motivation for the person with anger to change. They get their way because they threaten others with an angry outburst. But then someone in their circle has had enough. They won't put up with this anymore. They tell the angry person that if you don't work on this, we're done. That can happen between spouses; or between a child and a parent or at the workplace. So the person prone to anger faces the trial of possibly losing their marriage, their relationship with their kids, their job. Then they have a choice to make. Will they face their anger issues? Will they learn to trust more in Christ to look after the things their angry about? Will they turn to the Lord for healing? Will they repent of their angry outbursts to those they've hurt? If they take this opportunity presented by this trial, a steadfast faith can grow. Relationships can be restored.

So cancer and death and relationship strife are not good. But God can bring good, if we choose to draw near Him in the trial. We can do that when we **Ask Christ for a renewed mind about a purpose of trials. (2-4)**. We can pray, "Jesus, I don't like this trial in my life. But please renew my mind so I can receive whatever good you have for me in it." So one good that the Lord can bring in trials is a more steadfast faith in Him.

There's another good God can bring to us in trials in verses 5-9. **God is ready to give His wisdom generously, without finding fault.** Verse 5 - "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." This is one of those examples where it seems like this paragraph has nothing to do with what's come before. But I agree with those who conclude that James counsels us to seek God's wisdom for the trials we face.

Notice God's posture towards those who lack wisdom. He's willing to give generously to us. He gives without reproach. That means He gives without mocking or coming down on us. He doesn't say, "I can't believe you're asking that question. You should know better." He gives generously without finding fault." When you face trials, ask for God's wisdom. He's waiting to give it to you generously without looking down on you.

It's true that James follows this with a warning about doubt. But this does not mean that our asking for wisdom must be done with 100% faith and 0% doubt or God will not answer us. It's about

trusting God more than trusting ourselves or something in the world. He provides a couple of images to show us. First you have the waves on the sea that are driven and tossed by the wind. So imagine the ocean on a windy day. Then you watch a specific part of the ocean. You see a wave form up and then it goes down. Maybe another wave comes through. The the surface flattens. It's always changing. It portrays someone who trusts in God one day and then trusts in something else the next. They have no fixed belief or trust in God.

The phrase double-minded adds to this picture. They are of two minds. I will trust God but I will also cover my bases in case he doesn't come through. So I will also look to my horoscope for wisdom and I will look to the stars and I will get some crystals for positive energy and I will knock on wood to add that little bit of protection. I think that's a double minded approach.

The Lord says "you don't have to do that. I am waiting here and want to generously give you my wisdom. I understand that you might be scared and shaky. But I'm not going to condemn you. I want to help you. I love you." Life's troubles may cause our faith to shake. But we still exhibit trust in God through our uncertainty. **Ask God for His wisdom to endure trials. (5-8).** Ask Him to intervene. Ask Him to show you what to do or give you the words to say.

He is waiting to give generously without reproach.

So what good can God bring us trials? He can use trials to develop our steadfast faith in Him. He's ready to give His wisdom generously without finding fault. The last one we'll look at today is found in verses 9-11 which also seems like a disconnected paragraph. It's the one about poverty and wealth.

Yet each one can be a trial. So another good that God brings to help us in trials is **An eternal perspective on wealth.** It's possible that many of James' readers experienced poverty with its many challenges. But James writes, "Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation." It doesn't matter how the world defines you. God sees and values everyone as a human being regardless of their wealth. Jesus spent most of his time living in poverty and ministering to the poor. They were much more aware of their needs than the wealthy. Jesus came to preach good news to the poor. God had not forgotten them. God treasured them. James repeats this message in verse 9.

Then he talks to the wealthy – those with an abundance of money and possessions. Wealth in itself can be a trial for our faith. Wealth distracts from God. It can deceive us into thinking that we really don't need God. So James reminds the wealthy person that like flower and grass, eventually our lives pass away. Our wealth can't prevent that. Death is the great equalizer. We need an eternal perspective on this.

The New Testament is full of teaching on an eternal perspective towards wealth and possessions. It's ultimately not ours. It's his and we are just managers of it during our time on earth. So, if we have this perspective and then go through the trial of losing some of our wealth, it's not the end of the world. Remember last week in the Hebrews 10:34? Those people had their property plundered from them. Yet they were not crushed because they had an eternal perspective. They remembered that they still had the greatest treasure – Christ himself. We can endure the trials of poverty and wealth if we receive God's good of His teaching on it. So we need to **9-11 – Ask Christ for a renewed mind on wealth.** Help us discern Your perspective God. Help us to resist the world's message that it's all about accumulating and getting more stuff and having more money. Instead, help us to see wealth as yours.

God can bring us the good of a steadfast faith, generous wisdom and an eternal perspective on wealth in our trials. With these in mind, James pronounces a blessing in verse 12. "Blessed is the man or woman who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he or she will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him." But remember this is not about us doing this in our own strength.

We need the Gospel to live out these commands. We need Jesus. Think about how Jesus lived this life as He faced similar trials. We're commanded to count it joy when we meet trials of various kinds. What did Jesus do when facing the cross? Hebrews 12:2 – Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of God." So Jesus endured the cross by looking beyond to the joy that would come out it.

Then we're commanded to ask God for wisdom when we face trials. Jesus got up very early in the morning to pray and receive wisdom from His Father. We're commanded to learn God's eternal perspective on poverty and wealth. What did Jesus do? 2 Corinthians 8:9. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."

So we need to come to Jesus today with our trials. We need to come and ask for a renewed mind. We ask for His wisdom. We ask for His strength and comfort and help. So let's do that now as we pray.