

Trials and Temptations (James 1:1-18)

By David Feddes

James starts his letter with some very challenging advice: “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds” (James 1:2). And there are many kinds of trials. Consider it pure joy when the games in the tournament you were all excited about get canceled. Consider it pure joy when all of a sudden you’re worried about a health problem that’s circulating and you wonder what’s going to come of it. Consider it pure joy when your job is in jeopardy. Consider it pure joy when your financial accounts plummet. Consider it pure joy when you’re going through a rough patch in your marriage or strains in other relationships. Consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds.

That’s the opening of the book of James, and we’re going to think about how he explains all that. Let’s begin by listening to the first verses of James:

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

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 should believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

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 the Lord has promised to those who love him.

When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created” (James 1:2-18).

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.” As we think about trials and temptations, I’m going to consider six main pieces in this passage, six main points that James develops:

- Rejoice that trials mature your faith.
- Pray for wisdom without wavering.
- Glory in your God-given position.
- Love God, who crowns loyal love.
- Blame yourself, not God, for evil.
- Prize your Father's gifts, especially rebirth.

Rejoice that trials mature your faith.

So let's begin with this call to rejoice in trials that mature our faith. "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds." Why? Because the testing of your faith develops perseverance, and perseverance helps you to become mature. It helps you grow up. It makes you a more complete person.

What do you want? Do you want to be like Jesus? Do you want to be mature—more and more like Jesus until you're fully like Jesus? We have a lot of different things in our lives that we want. But if we have our minds fixed on one thing—if we're not double-minded but fix our minds on that one thing, maturity and becoming like Jesus—then we can start to consider even the trials of life a reason to rejoice.

There are various suggestions and messages about how to become spiritually fulfilled, spiritually whole, and complete. For some, it's a matter of having a tremendous experience—a really amazing encounter with God or a tremendous experience of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, perhaps resulting in speaking in tongues or some other manifestation of that empowerment, or just a sense that you've had this fantastic experience of the Holy Spirit that lifts you out of being a carnal person into being a spiritual person. Others might say the way to mature is to develop your spiritual disciplines—read your Bible, pray faithfully, fast sometimes, worship in church, and do a variety of things that are known to be ways God uses to build you up and make you more mature.

There are different approaches to how to grow up and be mature, and there may be something—indeed a lot—to be said for some of those approaches. But there's one approach that can't be avoided, that's absolutely essential to growing up and being mature: trials and suffering.

The Bible says even of Jesus himself, "He learned obedience from what he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8). Now Jesus was perfect; he never disobeyed God. But even he, in his human life, grew and became more mature, and his suffering perfected who he was in becoming what God had called him to be.

Many of us would like it to be the case that if we only had this wondrous experience or practiced certain behaviors, then we could avoid the difficulties of life and make it to where God wants us to be and become who God wants us to become. It can't happen. You will mature through trials and suffering. There are other things that can help you, but there's a dimension of you that cannot grow without being tested, that won't become pure unless you're refined.

In the old days—and still today, though with different technologies—you would melt metal and turn up the heat to extreme temperatures so that you could separate the gold or the silver from all the impurities. And so it is with our character. When God as the refiner turns up the heat, the separation occurs between what's worthy in us and what's not, and we become more and more mature and complete.

It may not sound like good news, but it is simply the case that if you want to become like Jesus, you're going to follow a path similar to Jesus. You will not bear all the sins of the world in place of other people as Jesus did, but Jesus himself says you're going to take up your cross and follow him (Luke 9:23). There aren't any shortcuts or end-arounds to avoid the path of trial and hardship if you want to become like the Lord Jesus Christ and fully the person God intends you to be.

Perseverance is keeping on keeping on, and when you go through hard times, you become tougher and stronger. When you first get married, for instance, you may have all kinds of exciting feelings for each other and love each other—and hopefully those exciting feelings continue—but after you've been through some things together, after years and years of facing challenges together, you've been tested and strengthened. If that relationship is healthy, it's grown closer and stronger than ever—not in spite of, but because of, some of the challenges and hard times you've faced.

So it is in our relationship with God. We persevere, we keep going, and as we keep going, our faith is proven to be genuine, and it gets stronger and stronger. If you want to get stronger physically, you lift weights or do other things that test your muscles, even tear them a little bit, because that's how they actually get bigger and stronger—through those tiny micro-tears that come from challenging your muscles.

So rejoice. Why? Because your trials are going to mature your faith. But it's not automatic. Sometimes trials can just make you bitter. Sometimes trials can just make you confused. Sometimes they just make you wonder what in the world is going on. So when trials come your way, don't assume hardship automatically makes you better. It doesn't. Hardship plus wisdom from God makes you better and more like Jesus.

James says that once you're fully like Jesus—once you've been fully matured—you won't be lacking anything.

Pray for wisdom without wavering.

But meanwhile, we are lacking. So he continues: "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" (James 1:5).

That's a tremendously encouraging statement—that God doesn't find fault with people for asking for wisdom. If you're a person who lacks, don't pretend you don't lack. Just go to God and say, "I lack wisdom. I need help." You don't need to have lots of confidence in yourself; you need to have confidence in God. The Bible doesn't say that God scolds you for lacking wisdom; it says he gives generously to those who ask, without finding fault. He'd rather help than blame.

The Bible says that God answers wholehearted trust. Are you facing a project or challenge that feels like too much for you? That's one form that trials can take. It's not necessarily bad things—sometimes it's good things that still stretch us beyond what we can handle.

God blesses you with a new baby—you're a first-time parent—and you say, "Yikes! This parenting thing! I really never paid much attention to how Mom and Dad did it. It just kind of happened. Now I've got to get all this figured out." Well, if you lack wisdom, ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault.

Or you're in a new job for the first time, and it feels like more than you can handle. Ask God for wisdom. It's a trial. It's a good trial to have a new baby or to take on a new challenge, but it's still a trial that requires wisdom. Sometimes we need wisdom simply because we're facing something that's a bit too much for us.

Maybe you remember the story of Solomon. He was a young man taking over the kingdom from the great King David, who was the picture of what a king of Israel ought to be in so many ways. Now Solomon had to rule at a very young age, and God came to him in a dream and said, "Solomon, I'll give you anything you want." And Solomon said, "What I want is wisdom, because I am not great like my father David, and I'm put in charge of this great and wonderful people, and I am going to blow it unless I have wisdom from you." And God gave it to him—along with many other blessings.

Nehemiah was a man serving the emperor of Persia. He heard that his home city of Jerusalem still lay in ruins and everything was a wreck. It broke his heart that things were so disastrous, so he started praying and asking God, "What do I do? What can I do?" Then one day the emperor asked him what was getting him down. Nehemiah prayed one more time, then spoke—and one thing led to another. Throughout the book of Nehemiah, you read of prayer again and again. He was put in charge of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, which lay in ruins, and God gave him the wisdom and ability to know what to do.

Sometimes we ask for wisdom because it's a big thing that we need to undertake and we're not sure how. Other times, we need to ask for wisdom simply because we have no clue how to do what James says in the first part—"Consider it pure joy when you face trials" (James 1:2). You say, "How in the world am I supposed to find joy when I'm going through a mess, when I'm worried, when my heart is broken? How can that be joyful?"

If you can't see or enter into that, then the first thing to do is simply say, "God, give me wisdom so that I can see what you're doing—at least a little bit more—and trust what you're doing, persevere, and find joy in becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ."

So whether you're facing hardship, sickness, difficulty, or a good challenge that you don't feel able to handle, ask God for wisdom—and he gives it. But you need to ask without wavering. "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. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does" (James 1:6-8).

Now that might sound kind of discouraging, like a downer—saying that unless you’ve got 100% confidence and not even the slightest hesitation or uncertainty, God’s not going to help you at all. Well, I don’t know about you, but I’m sunk in that case. If 97% certainty doesn’t cut it, I’m in trouble. I’m not always running at 100% in the gas tank. I don’t know about your level of confidence and certainty, but is that what James is really saying—that if there’s even the slightest smidge of uncertainty, you’re not going to get what you ask for, so you’d better psych yourself up to 100% or forget it?

It seems that James isn’t talking so much about the degree of perfect certainty you have when you ask, as much as whether you really want what you’re asking for in the first place. The word translated “doubt” is often a word that means arguing with yourself—it means you don’t quite have one mind on it. You’re divided. That’s different from lacking certainty.

In many ways, it’s good to lack certainty—certainty that you already have everything figured out, certainty that your theology is absolutely perfect, and you know everything that needs to be known. In that sense, you might not have much doubt, but that’s not the kind of faith James is talking about here. The kind of faith that’s needed is faith that doesn’t argue with itself or have a divided mind.

He speaks of being a double-minded person who is unstable. When you’re asking for wisdom, will you act on it if God gives it to you? Are you 100% committed to seeking God, to becoming like Jesus? When God shows you something and gives you a path to follow, will you follow it? This is about commitment and desire to receive from God the wisdom he promises, to learn, to persevere, and to become mature and complete like Jesus Christ.

When we want a variety of things—when we’re pulled in different directions—that’s when we waver. That’s the kind of doubt being talked about here. Later on, in James chapter 4, James talks about the bickering that goes on among people, and he says it’s because their selfish desires are clashing with each other. Then he says, “You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (James 4:2-4).

Then he says, “Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:8). That’s the same thing going on in this passage. A heart that’s divided—double-minded—literally means “double-souled.” You’ve got two souls tugging at you. Jesus says nobody can serve two masters. You can’t serve both God and money (Matthew 6:24).

So James isn’t saying you must have 100% confidence and zero uncertainty. He’s saying don’t try to serve God and money equally. Push will come to shove. Your money may plummet and force you to rely on God—or you may have all the money you want and forsake God. But don’t go through life trying to have it both ways. That’s a miserable life—always trying to straddle the world and walk with God. It just doesn’t work.

Don't be like a wave. Waves come and go, all over the place, blown around by every wind of doctrine and every situation. Don't be double-minded when you ask the Lord.

And if you find that you're more double-minded than you want to be, here's what to do: go to God in prayer even before asking for wisdom. Say, "Lord, give me an undivided heart. Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth. Give me an undivided heart" (Psalm 86:11). And what does God say? "I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them" (Ezekiel 11:19). Then they will follow his decrees.

So pray for an undivided heart, and God's Spirit will unite your heart, heal your heart, and focus you on becoming more and more like Jesus. Then, when God gives you his wisdom, you'll be ready to follow it. Because it's a terrible thing to pray for wisdom, receive it, and then ignore it.

Maybe some of you have either asked for advice or given it. You asked for advice, someone gave it, and then you went and did the opposite. That's okay sometimes if it's a flawed human giving the advice. But if you're asking God for wisdom, do so 100% committed to doing what he shows you.

So rejoice that trials mature your faith. Pray for wisdom, without wavering on whether you really want to become more like Jesus or not. And then, glory in your God-given position.

Glory in your God-given position.

"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" (James 1:9-10).

Among the many trials of life is poverty—and another trial is wealth. Both are difficulties. That's why Proverbs says, "Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God" (Proverbs 30:8-9).

Sometimes when you're on the poorer side of things, there are certain trials and temptations. When you're on the richer side, there are also trials and temptations. You might want to hang out in that moderate middle—where you have enough but not too much. And we can pray that way. Jesus even taught us, "Give us today our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11).

Many of us would heartily say, "Give me neither poverty, amen!" But really, poverty and riches both bring certain kinds of temptation.

James guides us here and says sometimes we're going to be poor, sometimes we're going to be rich. What do we do with that? Well, the poor man should take pride in his high position. That's an interesting way to put it. The Bible says elsewhere, "Let the poor say, 'I am rich,' let the weak say, 'I am strong,'" (Joel 3:10). Let the person on their deathbed say, "I'm living forever."

Because when you are in the lowest of low positions, if you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, you have it all. You are filled with God's Holy Spirit. You are going to live forever. You are going to reign with him. So if you're poor, if people look down on you, don't sweat it—you hold a high position.

James was writing at a time when Christians were harassed, persecuted, and looked down upon—many of them had a hard time getting jobs or getting paid. They were people in low positions. James says if you're in that low position, take pride in how high God has lifted you.

And what is his word for those who are rich and healthy? He says, take pride in your low position. What's that mean? It means realizing that your health is very fragile, your wealth is very fragile. You don't know what sort of bug or accident could kill you. You don't know what will happen to the markets. Those who boast, saying, "The markets will always be wonderful—and I get the credit for it!"—well, one little thing can send them all crashing.

Jesus said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal" (Matthew 6:19). Wealth has a way, as Proverbs says, of "sprouting wings and flying away" (Proverbs 23:5).

So if you're rich, say, "It's kind of nice that I have money, but it might sprout wings at any moment. Moth and rust might eat it away. The markets might crash. My wealth is not something to put confidence in. I'm in a pretty low condition if all I've got is my money."

It's nice to be healthy right now, but health is fragile too—you just never know. So don't put your confidence in your health or your wealth.

And not only that, but I deliberately choose a lower position. I say, I like it that I can't guarantee my own future, because if I could, I would forget God. I would not see my sin or my need for a Savior. I'd be so comfortable that, even though in my mind I know I'm going to die someday, I'd never really pay attention to it—because I've always got food, the best medical care, and plenty of money. I could cruise through life until eighty-five or ninety, and only then maybe think about my fragility.

But if you're a rich person who's in tune with God, you say, "I'm fragile. I have weakness. But at the same time, I deliberately choose to identify with a Savior who was mocked and crucified. I'm going to take that low position. I'm going to identify with the lonely of society—the least of these—and I'm going to care about them and realize that I'm not better, more worthwhile, or more important than they are. I'm going to take pride in the low position I have before God, which levels everybody, and I'm going to identify with Christ."

You see that even when we think about Jesus' passion and suffering. There were some people who secretly liked Jesus and followed him in their hearts and minds. One of those was Nicodemus. When he wanted to talk with Jesus, he came to him at night because he didn't want anyone to see him. Joseph of Arimathea was a wealthy man who sat on the council along with Nicodemus. They were secret followers of Jesus. When he was arrested and then killed, they decided to take pride in their low position. When it was very dangerous to be associated with

Jesus—and when he had in fact been murdered—they went and asked for his body and took care of it at great risk to themselves.

These rich men knew that following Jesus in the face of trouble was better than hanging out with the rich, powerful men who were murderers. They identified with the low position of Jesus, and in doing so, they found eternal life.

James says, “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” (James 1:10-11).

Later on, James adds, “Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (James 4:13-14).

A lot of us have had plans for the week—plans that didn’t go as expected. After this service, I was supposed to hop in the car and head for the national basketball tournament for homeschoolers—canceled, like just about everything else that’s been canceled because of this pandemic. Many people had big plans last week, and suddenly those plans changed. James reminds us that we should be saying all along, not “I’m going to do this next week or next year and accomplish all this,” but “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that” (James 4:15). If it’s the Lord’s will, we’ll still be alive next week. If it’s the Lord’s will, we’ll accomplish some things. If not, that’s the Lord’s will, and we’ll live with that.

So the rich man takes pride in his low position and realizes that even his big plans—where he’s going to travel, what business he’s going to do, what money he’s going to make—can all change in a moment.

Love God who crowns loyal love.

The next thing James says is that we should love the God who crowns loyal love. “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 1:12).

There are two great things about trials. One is that your trials mature you and develop you in this life. The other is that your trials put you on a path toward a crown—the crown that God has promised, the crown of life that he gives to those who love him.

So those are two great things about trials: you’re becoming more and more like Jesus when you live by God’s wisdom through those trials, and if you follow Jesus on the path of trials, you can anticipate the crown of life.

The Bible says that Jesus, “for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven” (Hebrews 12:2). He received the crown of

life, and those who follow him also receive the crown of life. Loving God is the meaning of this life, and loving God is the path to eternal life.

Because again, it's not that trials automatically make everything better for you—but for those who love God, the trials do. For those who love God, the trials lead to the crown. So love God, and rejoice that there's a crown waiting for everyone who loves him and trusts in the Lord Jesus.

Jesus himself says to a church, "I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:9-10). The same phrase James uses—the crown of life—is what God promises to those going through affliction, poverty, and persecution who remain faithful and love God.

So rejoice that trials mature your faith. Pray for wisdom without wavering. Glory in your God-given position. Love the God who crowns loyal love. And when you find yourself failing the test—failing in the midst of trials—blame yourself, not God, for evil.

Blame yourself, not God, for evil.

It's very easy when you're going through trials for things to turn out badly. Every trial has the possibility of developing your maturity, but every trial also has the potential to reveal that your faith is phony—that you're a fake, that you blow it. When that happens, you have a couple of options. You can say, "Well, if that's the way God is, I don't want him. My life didn't turn out the way I hoped. My plans have been crushed. God is to blame."

Or when you fall into sin, you might say, "God should have kept the temptation from coming my way." Every trial that comes your way is, in a sense, also a temptation. But it's not intended by God to cause you to stumble and fall. "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone" (James 1:13). God never wants evil to happen. So when he does send something into your life, his purpose is never that it would produce evil or sin.

Then why are we tempted? "Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed" (James 1:14). Trials can raise doubts about God's goodness, and James says, whatever happens in the middle of a trial, don't let this thought get a hold of you—"God is bad. God wants to wreck me. God wants to cast me down into sin and evil." James says God is so far from sin and evil that he's never even tempted by it, and he can't wish for anyone to stumble and fall. So if you're tempted by evil, look in the mirror.

Think of it this way: what happens is that you have this evil desire, and it drags you along and entices you. It's like a fishhook—there's bait on it, and you get a desire for it. Then you go "chomp" and find out that the bait wasn't the only thing involved in that sin. There was a hook, and now you're being dragged.

Or, for those of you who are *Star Wars* fans, remember *Return of the Jedi*. There's something hanging down from a tree, and the little band of people—along with the mighty Chewbacca—is

walking along. That thing hanging down from the tree is a chunk of meat. Chewbacca decides that he's hungry, so he walks up to it and grabs it—and *boom!* There's a big net that catches all of them and yanks them up into the air. He got his desire, but once he gave in to that desire, they were all dragged away and trapped.

The Bible says that when that happens, you need to look at your own desire, not at God's. God never, ever, ever desires to ruin you or cast you into sin. Then James explains: "After desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. Don't be deceived, my dear brothers" (James 1:15-16).

So when you get a desire, that's the first step. It's kind of like in Proverbs, where it talks about the woman Folly—Floozy Folly—the temptress who makes it seem like you're going to have a good time, but her ways lead to death (Proverbs 9:13-18). When you go along with Folly and enter into wickedness, something conceives, and after a while it gives birth. What your evil desire gives birth to is sin—sinful action. Then your little baby sin grows up and becomes death. That's what James is saying. It may seem like just an innocent desire, but that little brat you've conceived will grow up into a villain who kills you.

Now, that's not intended to be gloomy. When I say, "When you fail a test or when something goes wrong in a trial, blame yourself, not God," you might think, "What a downer—blame myself?" But here's the thing: when you take responsibility, even when you fail, God can still use that for your good. He didn't send the trial to make you fail, but if you learn from that trial, it can still be turned for your good and for your wisdom.

You blew it. And if you're a Christian, you realize fairly quickly that you blew it—and that it has disastrous consequences. So what do you do? Say, "Woe is me, all is lost"? No. You say, "Boy, I didn't know that about myself. I didn't know that when it came down to a pinch, that's the kind of person I still am at times."

There's still something in us that needs to be changed and refined. We're all nice and friendly when there's no pressure. But when we think there's going to be a shortage, suddenly we want eighty-five thousand rolls of toilet paper—and you get none! Store shelves are empty, and we fight over it. When there's pressure, we discover that we're a lot more angry, irritable, and mean than we thought we could be.

You know what? It was there all along. You might say, "Oh, that wasn't really me." Yes, it was. The sooner you realize that, the better. It was your own evil desire. There's something in you still needing to be changed and refined, and the trial brought it out. You can be sad about that, and you should be—repent of it, ask for forgiveness—and then say, "Lord, thank you that I've learned that about myself. Now I see how ugly sin is."

Instead of blaming God for it, hate the sin. His testing brings your misguided desires to the surface. So don't be deceived—face the fact that evil desire was still within you, and ask God to keep cleansing and purifying it.

Then James focuses again on the goodness of God: “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17).

You shouldn’t say, “God is tempting me,” because God can’t be tempted by evil. In fact, the opposite is true—every good thing comes from him. Every perfect thing comes from him.

Prize Father’s gifts, especially rebirth.

The apostle John says, “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). The God who is light, in whom there is no darkness, is the one who gives every gift worth having. He is the Creator of the sun, the moon, and the stars. There were people back then—and there still are today—who think that the stars, planets, and their movements, the zodiac, and all of that determine how life turns out. But James says, God made the heavenly lights. He sends the gifts. Don’t worry about the heavenly lights.

When you think of the heavenly lights, remember—they move around. The sun rises and sets. Shadows shift. Light changes to darkness and back again. All that changes in creation. But God does not change like shifting shadows. Yesterday, God was light, and in him there was no darkness at all. Before the world was ever made, God was light, and in him there was no darkness at all. Tomorrow, no matter what comes, God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.

"Every good and perfect gift comes from above, from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." This, by the way, is where we get the words from the hymn *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*:

Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father,
there is no shadow of turning with thee.
Thou changest not, thy compassions they fail not;
As thou hast been, thou forever wilt be.

God doesn’t change. He’s always good—the giver of every good and perfect gift. And the best of all his gifts is that “he chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created” (James 1:18).

God is the giver of every good and perfect gift—but what gift is best of all? The fact that you are reborn through faith in the word of the gospel, the word of Jesus Christ. Notice the contrast: a few verses earlier, James said sin gives birth to death. But the Word of God gives birth to life—and to a whole new creation, not just for you and me, but for all that God has made.

There’s coming a day when there will be no more sickness, no more mourning, no more crying, no more pain—because the old order of things will have passed away (Revelation 21:4). But already that new order has been launched in the hearts of God’s people through the announcement of the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit. The Word gives birth to life, and so we thank God for that. He gives every good and perfect gift—and especially this gift.

That brings the whole passage together. Why can we rejoice in our trials? Because we've been born again. We have the life of God in us. We might just be spiritual babies yet, but he wants us to grow up. He gave us new birth, and he will arrange our lives so that trials will come along. His intent in sending those trials is the same as his intent in causing us to be born again in the first place—to give us eternal life in Jesus Christ.

“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6). He started by giving you new birth through the gospel Word of Jesus. He continues his work in you through various means—including the trials that come into your life—and he will make you part of that brand-new creation where you will receive the crown of life.

Perfectly good God

- God leads toward mature wholeness.
- God gives wisdom when asked.
- God lifts the lowly, not the worldly.
- God crowns those who love him.
- God never sins nor causes sin.
- God gives everything worth having.

When we read Scripture, we should always ask, “What is this saying to me about God?” Above all, listen to this passage. God leads toward mature wholeness. God gives wisdom when asked, without finding fault. God lifts the lowly, not the worldly. God crowns those who love him. God never sins nor causes sin. God gives everything worth having.

Think about those things. Meditate on those wondrous realities about God. That's how God has always been, how God is right now, and how God will always be. Because he is perfectly good all the time, even the trials that come into our lives can be sent from his hand. We must resist the temptation that comes with those trials and instead let them refine us.

Rejoice that your trials mature your faith. Pray for wisdom without wavering. Glory in your God-given position. Love God, who crowns loyal love. Blame yourself, not God, for evil. And prize your Father's gifts—especially rebirth.

Sometimes people go through pain and hardship at the hands of some very cruel people—called physical therapists. If you've ever had a physical therapist, it may have been after knee surgery, a joint replacement, or heart trouble. Those people are mean! Within a day—or less than a day—after surgery, they want you on your feet. It hurts like crazy to get up and move, and it's extremely difficult. Over time, as you go through your rehab, these seem like some of the meanest people in the world. You say, “I'm so tired, I can't take another step.” And they say, “Yes, you can—now get going!” Maybe they say it more nicely—or maybe not.

A physical therapist is trained to know how much you can take—and to push you farther than you think you can go. Otherwise, you wouldn't even need them. They could just send you home with exercises. But one reason you need them is that they push you farther than you believe you

can go, and they do it for your full health and restoration—so that you’ll be as strong as before, or even better.

If they said, “Oh, you don’t feel like doing it? Poor thing—just rest,” and that’s all they ever said, you would never regain your strength. You’d never recover or become who you were before.

And if that’s true of a physical therapist—when we can get really grumpy at them and say, “I can’t take one more step”—how much more true is it of God? We think we’re being pushed well beyond our limits. And yes, we are being pushed beyond what we *want* to endure—but not beyond what God knows we *can* endure and what he will use to strengthen us, mature us, and make us more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

So trust him. Trust that he is the giver of every good and perfect gift—the gift of new life and new birth, and also the wondrous gift of maturity. And with that gift, there are no shortcuts.

Prayer

Father, give us your gifts of new life, that we may trust you and know the wonder of eternal life living within us through faith in Jesus, crucified and risen. We pray, Lord, for wisdom—that through times of trial, your wisdom will guide us toward becoming more and more like our Savior, Jesus Christ. Instead of grumbling about trials or trying to avoid them at all costs, help us to walk the narrow and difficult path that leads to life and maturity. May we grow more like Christ even as we carry the cross that you send to us.

Father, we pray that we may again recognize how much we need you—that when we feel healthy and wealthy, we will not put our confidence in those things but in the eternal life that comes only from you. Help us remember how fragile our lives are, how fleeting our wealth is, and yet how eternal is the life you give and how unending are the riches you provide—every good and perfect gift.

So we pray again for courage in times of difficulty, for love and compassion toward those who are struggling, and for faith in you—that we may grow closer to you and become more like you. For Jesus’ sake, Amen.

Trials and Temptations (James 1:1-18)

By David Feddes

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Trial and temptations

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- Pray for wisdom without wavering.
- Glory in your God-given position.
- Love God who crowns loyal love.
- Blame yourself, not God, for evil.
- Prize Father's gifts, especially rebirth.

Rejoice amid trials

² Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Pray for wisdom...

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.

- God gives wisdom when asked.
- God would rather help than blame.
- God answers wholehearted trust.

...without wavering

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. ⁷ That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

Undivided heart

Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart. (Psalm 86:11)

I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them... Then they will follow my decrees. (Ezekiel 11:19)

Glory in your God-given position

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.

Wealthy wither

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.

Love God who crowns loyal love

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.

Crown of life

I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer... Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Rev 2:9-10)

Trial and temptations

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Blame yourself, not God, for evil.

¹³ When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

Desire => sin => death

¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. ¹⁶ Don't be deceived, my dear brothers.

Prize Father's gifts

¹⁷ Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

...especially rebirth

¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

- Sin gives birth to death, but Word gives birth to life and re-creation.

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