

Title: “Engage with Trials”

Text: James 1:2-12

Main Idea: Trials are an essential means God uses to perfect Christian character.

Introduction

Chippie the parakeet never saw it coming. One second he was peacefully perched in his cage. The next he was sucked in, washed up, and blown over.

The problems began when Chippie’s owner decided to clean Chippie’s cage with a vacuum cleaner. She removed the attachment from the front end of the hose and stuck it in the cage. The phone rang and she turned to pick it up. She’d barely said “hello” when “ssssopp!” Chippie got sucked in.

The bird owner gasped, put down the phone, turned off the vacuum, and opened the bag. There was Chippie – still alive, but stunned.

Since the bird was covered in dust and soot, she grabbed him and raced to the bathroom, turned on the faucet, and held Chippie under the running water. Then, realizing that Chippie was soaked and shivering, she did what any compassionate bird owner would do...she reached for the hair dryer and blasted the pet with hot air.

Poor Chippie never knew what hit him.

A few days after the trauma, the reporter who’d initially written about the event contacted Chippie’s owner to see how the bird was recovering. “Well,” she replied, “Chippie doesn’t sing much anymore – he just sits and stares.”¹

Chippie was traumatized by his trials. One trial...after another...after another. His day started off great...he had a song in his heart...and then the phone rang and everything changed. He was blindsided by three separate trials with no time in-between to even stop and process what

¹ Max Lucado, “In the Eye of the Storm,” Word Publishing, 1991, p. 11.

just happened. And when one trial came to an end and it looked like there was going to be a respite...boom...another one came and he found himself in a brand new circumstance that he had absolutely no control over. When the trials were over, Chippie was so shocked by his experience that his fear paralyzed him and by his choice he spent the rest of his life sitting and staring.

Trials are never easy, are they? Maybe you experienced one this Thanksgiving by getting together with family. Perhaps, old wounds were stirred up...arguments rehashed...there was tension around the turkey. Trials are always hard, frequently lonely, never quick, full of tears and a wide variety of emotions. Trials are the difficulties in life that may threaten our faithfulness to Christ. Things like physical illness, financial reversal, or the death of a loved one. We know that God uses trials in the lives of those who follow Him. Behind the trials that God allows to take place in your life lies a purpose.

I. Reasons For Trials

John MacArthur says that Scripture gives eight purposes for God's allowing of trials to come into the lives of His people and I want to share some of them with you.

The first reason is **to test the strength of your faith**. God uses trials to show you and me if our faith is strong or if it is weak. If your faith is only an empty confession or based purely on emotion and not rooted in firm, biblical, convictions, then your faith will waver and crumble with each new trial.

Second, God uses trials **to humble us**, to remind us to not let our trust in the Lord turn into presumption and self-satisfaction. The greater our blessings are the more that Satan tempts us to think that we somehow accomplished these blessings or that we are somehow entitled to them resulting in pride and not humility.

Third, God uses trials **to wean us from our dependence on worldly things**. The temptation that happens when we collect things is that we become less dependent on the Lord. These things aren't wrong in themselves but collecting them can become our focus and the basis of our trust.

Fourth, God uses trials **to call us to an eternal and heavenly hope**. The harder our trials become and the longer they last, the more we look forward to eternity with Christ.

Finally, the Lord uses trials **to enable us to better help others in their trials**.²

Clearly, trials play a productive part in the life of the believer. This morning we're going to be in James 1:2-12 and we're going to see that "Trials are an essential means that God uses to perfect and complete Christian character. Let's read James 1:2-12.

II. Context

Before we dive into the specific message of the text we need to understand just a little bit of the context and know the reason why James is writing. The first thing we need to know is that **James is writing to Jewish followers of Jesus Christ** who are most likely meeting in homes outside of Palestine. James tells us in verse one that these believers are dispersed or scattered. These Jewish followers would have been **scattered because of the persecution** they were facing and that persecution was the direct result of their faith in Christ. So, chew on that for a moment. James is writing **to followers of Jesus Christ who, prior to their conversion, had political and religious influence over the culture** in which they once lived but the culture turned against them. They lost that influence and the culture turned hostile toward them once they placed their faith in Christ. So, keep that in the back of your mind as we make our way through James 1.

III. Count it all Joy When You Meet Trials of Various Kinds (v. 2)

² John MacArthur, "The MacArthur New Testament Commentary," Moody Publishing, 1998, p. 17-21.

The first instruction from James to this distraught group of believers is to “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.” That’s how that phrase begins in the ESV, anyway, “Count it all joy...” Other translations use the word “Consider” in place of “Count” and what we need to see here is that **James is issuing an instruction**, a command, a non-negotiable.

When I face a dilemma I have people in my life who I can approach and I know they will give me advice to consider to help me through the dilemma. I’m sure you have the same thing in your life whether it’s people in your growth group...by the way if you’re not in a growth group you can jump online at edgewoodbaptist.net and sign-up for one. Maybe you turn to employees at work, or people who have faced similar dilemmas. So, we get the various answers those people give and we sort through them and consider the best route to take through the dilemma. That’s how we typically interact with this word “consider.”

“Which way should I go?”

“Well, I could consider going this path or I could consider going down that path.”

The way the Bible uses the word here is as a command. It’s not optional. The word is an imperative. Which means that what God is saying to us through James is this: As Christians, we don’t walk through a trial and consider (or ponder) how we’re going to respond. The instruction to followers of Jesus Christ is to “Count it all joy” which means that no matter the pain or the sorrow or hurt that comes from a trial there is a unique, pure, unmixed, complete, total, sheer, fullness of joy that the Lord graciously provides His children when they willingly and uncomplainingly endure troubles while trusting in Him—regardless of the cause, type, or severity of the distress.

It’s important that we note that the Bible is not saying that during a trial you’re not allowed to acknowledge the pain and the sorrow of that trial. The Bible isn’t saying that during a

trial you have to stuff, you have to bury, every emotion that isn't happiness. The Bible is saying that in the midst of your trial, whether it is a little headache or a lot of heart-ache, God is at work. He is doing something. He is using this trial to do something in you and you just need to know that in the middle of your trial there is joy that is available to you if you choose it.

So **where does the joy come from?** It comes from two places. First, it comes from **pressing into the Lord**. As we draw closer to Jesus we learn that He is the source of all joy and by becoming more sensitive to His presence, His goodness, His love, and His grace we should then see our prayer life increase, and an increase in our interest in and study of the Word, and then an increase of joy.

Second, joy comes by **looking beyond the trial**. Hebrews 12:2 says of Jesus, "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." Jesus looked beyond the trial to the joy that He knew would be His when the trial was over and it had accomplished the glorious work it was divinely ordained to accomplish.³

So, we first need to note that the follower of Jesus Christ is to count it all joy when they meet trials of various kinds.

IV. Know that the Testing of Your Faith Produces Steadfastness (v. 3)

Next, we need to see that trials have a particular outcome for the believer. James writes in verse three, "for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness."

Do you remember how old you were when you learned how to ride a bike? I think I was four-years-old when I first started riding a bike with training wheels. When I turned five it was time for the training wheels to come off. I remember it was a Saturday morning and I was with

³ MacArthur, 22

my Grandpa in the alley behind his house in Moline on 13th Avenue. I remember he put me on my bike at his house, which was on one end of the alley near 27th Street. And he started me at a spot that if I went backward, I was going to go down a hill and into 27th Street so the only option was to go forward.

So, Gramps gets me positioned and tells me to start pedaling. As I pedal he runs alongside me, holding onto the seat and keeping me level. But eventually, he lets go and it's just me and the bike. I bet I lasted about ten seconds and that might be generous but here's what happened. Gramps let go of the bike and I'm cruising along until I realize that I'm nearing the end of the alley and headed for 28th Street. Now, when I had training wheels on and needed to stop I just push backward on my pedals, the brakes would engage and I would come to a stop. But I had never stopped a bike without training wheels before and all I knew was 28th Street was coming faster than I wanted it to. So, two houses before the end of the block, I saw a long driveway off to my right that I was certain I could turn around in. I steered my bike toward this driveway but angled too wide and end up crashing into a garage door.

That could've been the end of my bike riding days. The story could've ended, "And Jason got hurt and out of fear for his personal safety he never got on a bike again." But that crash was just the beginning of my bike riding days and as time went on I would have fewer crashes and become a better, more proficient, bike rider. Now, before my Grandpa took the training wheels off he could've sat me down and showed me a safety video. We could've gone over some bike riding literature but in the end, really, the only way I was going to learn how to ride a bike was to actually ride a bike. That knowledge wasn't going to come about any other way. If I was to become a bike rider I had to go through that. You might feel like you're still going through some training and you have the scrapes and bruised egos to prove it.

In verse three of James 1, the Bible says, “for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.” That’s what that word **“know” means. It means that the knowledge that comes about from the trial is experiential.** You can’t read about it in a book. You can’t learn about it from the life of another. You have to go through this for yourself.

Have you noticed that trials are immensely personal? This week was a very trying week at the Crosby home. Monday was supposed to be a birthday party for my one-year-old daughter, Maddie but during the overnight hours from Sunday to Monday, Maddie got a stomach bug, an ear infection, and pink-eye. Late Tuesday night, Maddie passed the stomach bug to Brynleigh. From 9pm-midnight on Tuesday, Bryn was hunched over the toilet 10 different times. Things eventually calmed down for her at 4am. She slept almost all day on Wednesday. And now the kids are pretty much back to normal. For us this was an immensely personal experience. Nobody else could have walked through this for us and there were certainly no shortcuts to be taken.

We had to go through it. Trials require personal experience. You have to walk through this because the result applies directly to you. The result is steadfastness, endurance, perseverance.

If, in your lifetime, you decided that you wanted to set the world record for weightlifting and beat the men’s world record, you would have to train to be able to lift 441 pounds if you were going to do this via the snatch method (which is where you lift the bar and put it over your head in one motion). Or you’d have to be able to lift 580 pounds if you were going to do this via the clean and jerk which is where you lift the bar to your neck and then lift it over your head. Now, in that training, there is no way you would start out lifting 441 pounds (unless you’re _____). You’d hurt yourself. You’d start much less than that and, gradually, over time work toward 441 pounds.

So, you'd start low and train the muscles in your body to lift 100 pounds because if you're ever going to reach 200 pounds your muscles need to be able to endure under 100 pounds. And after 200 if you're ever going to reach 300 pounds, your muscles need to be able to endure under 200 pounds. And, ultimately, if you're ever going to endure under 441 pounds, your muscles need to be able to endure under that same weight. If a muscle is going to endure it has to be developed...it has to be strengthened...it has to be utilized and tested under trial. Why? Because muscles grow by being torn apart. A muscle has to be broken down before it will build back up. If that doesn't happen the muscle will not pass the trial and it has to pass the first strength test in order to get to the next...it has to endure under the first trial or it won't be ready or able to endure under the second trial and there IS another trial coming and the muscle is going to need all of the strength and perseverance from the previous trials if it's going to bear up and remain strong under the next trial. That muscle is going to need everything it has learned—it's called muscle memory. After repeated actions, our muscles remember what to do. It's why basketball players practice free throws and jump shots. It's why baseball players take batting practice. So that when their bodies are faced with situations where they have to take the shot and make it or have to swing at the ball and hit it their bodies will know exactly what to do and how to execute the shot or the swing. A muscle needs everything it has learned from previous trials if it's going to get through the next trial.

Now, when James says that the testing of your faith produces **steadfastness the picture is of a person successfully carrying a heavy load for a long time**. Like a muscle that becomes strong when it faces resistance, so Christians learn to remain faithful to God over the long haul

only when they face difficulty.⁴ Steadfastness is a permanent inner quality of strength that increases every time a trial is patiently and trustingly endured. Listen, the knowledge that comes from the testing of your faith and the steadfastness that is produced from that testing are very important to you as a follower of Christ. Why? Because another trial is coming. And in the midst of that trial you're going to need the endurance, the strength, from the previous trials to get through the present one and all future trials.

Remember, just because there's a trial doesn't mean that all hope is lost. There's a purpose to them.

V. Perfect and Complete, lacking in Nothing (v. 4)

Notice that not only do trials produce steadfastness but, according to verse 4, when steadfastness has its full effect, you will be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Did you notice the first two words of verse 4? "And let..." Here we have our second instruction in our text. The first, you'll remember, was to count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds. The second is to let steadfastness have its full effect. This tells us something. It tells us that when our faith is tested the benefits of that testing comes only to believers who respond to the test in the right way. "And let steadfastness have its full effect." Christians must allow endurance to do its intended work. The only way out of a trial is through it. Did you catch that? The only way out of a trial is through it. **The Lord does not promise a workaround. His promise is that He will see His people through the trial.** When we learn to rejoice in our trials and come to understand that our gracious heavenly Father uses them not to harm us but to strengthen and perfect us, we are motivated to embrace them as beneficial.⁵ Listen to the words

⁴ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2000), 55.

⁵ MacArthur, 32.

of Job's friend Eliphaz in Job 5:8-11, "As for me, I would seek God, and to God would I commit my cause, ⁹ who does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number: ¹⁰ he gives rain on the earth and sends waters on the fields; ¹¹ he sets on high those who are lowly, and those who mourn are lifted to safety."

Back to our text, James says that when steadfastness has its full effect we are perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. We need to note that when James uses the word "**perfect**" here **he does not mean moral or spiritual perfection or even sinlessness. Rather, he is describing something that is fully developed.** It's mature. It refers to a spiritual maturity that is fulfilled in Christlikeness which, of course, is the goal of steadfastness.

"Complete" carries the idea of being whole or entire. The word "holograph" comes from part of this Greek word. It means to have a 360-degree, three-dimensional view of something.

And finally, he adds the words, **"lacking in nothing." The end result of trials is completeness, maturity, not lacking in anything of spiritual importance or value.** 1 Peter 5:10 reads, "And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you."

VI. The Crown of Life

That's a good transition spot for us to jump down to verse 12. The verses in-between 4 and 12 are also about trials but we don't have enough time to dive into them so we're going to pass over them and head to verse 12 where James writes, "Blessed 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."

That has a Beatitudes feel to it doesn't it? Remember that from Matthew 5, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." James would have been at the Sermon on the Mount so it makes sense that verse 12 of chapter 1 has a Beatitudes feel to it.

No doubt many of you were around friend and family this Thanksgiving and for most of us we would say that the time together was a blessing in that being together made us happy and that's one application of blessed. But it also means much more than that. **To be blessed is to have profound inner joy and satisfaction.** It is to have a joy that God gives to those who, for His sake and in His power, faithfully and patiently endure and conquer trials. That person...the one who remains steadfast under trial, is blessed. Why? Because that person will have stood the test and receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

Now you might say, "Jason, that sounds like you're preaching a works based salvation. It sounds like my salvation can be lost. Is that what you're saying?" Well let's dig into this just a little bit further and see if we can bring a little more clarity.

"Crown" is an athletic term, not a royal one. It's the wreath that is placed on the winner's head in an athletic event and symbolized persevering triumph. So, **a more literal translation could be, "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown which is life, that is, eternal life."**

When we boil this all down here's the biblical principle from God to us through James: **Steadfastness does not result in salvation and eternal life, but is itself the result and evidence of salvation and eternal life.**⁶ The one who is steadfast in their trial is only able to be

⁶ MacArthur, 42.

steadfast in their trial because of their salvation. And, that my friends, is why you can count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds. Because God is all over your trial. He allowed it. He is outside of it in that He knows it's coming. He sees that it's coming from a distance before it even gets to you. He is not blindsided by it as we often are. Then, when the trial arrives in your life, God is smack dab in the middle of it and He is using it to do something in your life...to refine something, to wean you off of something, to draw you closer to Him, to remind you of how temporal this world is, to strengthen your faith, to give you a heavenly hope. He is doing something in you through your trial. And you, friend, can remain steadfast, you can be joyful when you meet trials of various kinds because your salvation is in the Lord.

But, my friend, if you've never placed your faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins you will never find joy when you meet trials. Trials will be met with despair and hopelessness and doubt and you will be like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind...unstable in all your ways. It doesn't have to be that way. Today can be the day that you confess to being a sinner. That your sin is against a holy God who expects you to be righteous all of the time. And that there is nothing that you can do (no trial that you can will your way through) that will place you in right standing with God. The good news is that Jesus Christ lived the sinless life you could not live, died the death on the cross that you should have died, was buried, and rose again and that act atoned for your sins making it possible for you to be made right with Him. You can place your faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sin and be made right with God. You can change the way you meet trials and you can finish the trial steadfast and receive the crown of life.

Conclusion

Horatio Spafford was a wealthy Chicago lawyer with a thriving legal practice, a beautiful home, a wife, four daughters, and a son. He was also a devout Christian and faithful student of the Scriptures whose circle of friends included Dwight L. Moody, Ira Sankey and other well-known Christians of the day.

At the height of Spafford's financial and professional success, he and his wife, Anna, suffered the tragic loss of their young son at the age of 2. Shortly after that, on October 8th, 1871, the Great Chicago Fire destroyed almost every real estate investment that Spafford had. His business interests were further hit by the economic downturn of 1873.

That same year, Spafford scheduled a boat trip to Europe in order to give his wife and four daughters a much-needed vacation and time to recover from the tragedy. He also wanted to join Moody and Sankey on an evangelistic campaign in England. Wanting to take care of some unexpected last-minute business, Spafford sent his wife and daughters ahead of him on a steamship to Europe. While crossing the Atlantic, the ship collided with a wooden vessel and sank in 12-minutes. Spafford received a cable from his wife that read, "Saved alone..." His four daughters perished in the accident. I have two daughter's and a wife and I cannot imagine what this kind of pain and loss is like.

With a heavy heart, Spafford boarded a boat that would take him to his grieving wife, Anna, in England.⁷ As he was crossing the Atlantic it's believed Spafford penned these words,

When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to know
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

⁷ <http://www.sharefaith.com/guide/Christian-Music/hymns-the-songs-and-the-stories/it-is-well-with-my-soul-the-song-and-the-story.html>

Remember Chippie? Our parakeet friend? Chippie was blindsided by three separate trials one right after another. In the end, Chippie went from having a song in his heart to spending the rest of his life sitting and staring. That doesn't have to be your story too. Knowing and applying the truths we've learned today will help you to not just sit and stare but to actually sing again. It will not be easy but with the help of the Holy Spirit, you can do it. Let's pray.

(Personal Note: Be sure to hit: anger, bitterness, salvation, repentance in your prayer.)