

Living Patience
James 1:1-12
February 22, 2015

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings. 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 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. 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 God has promised to those who love him.

Do you know how the Chinese bamboo tree grows? The Chinese plant the seed; they water and fertilize it, but the first year nothing happens. The second year they water and fertilize it, and still nothing happens. The third and fourth years they water and fertilize it, and nothing happens. Then the fifth year they water and fertilize it, and sometime during the course of the fifth year, in a period of approximately six weeks, the Chinese bamboo tree grows roughly ninety feet.

What do you think? Did the bamboo tree grow ninety feet in six weeks or did it grow ninety feet in five years? The answer is that it grew ninety feet in five years, because if it had not been watered and fertilized every year there would have been no Chinese bamboo tree.

All of us have “Chinese bamboo tree” experiences in our lives. Some people have more than others.

Today, we are going to look at what James, the brother of Jesus, has to say about patience. What should you do in the midst of life’s trials? What should you do in the midst of life’s pains? In our reading, James reasons that patience is a matter of being content as you endure the things that God has allowed to come into your life.

In the book of Isaiah, God tells us: *My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts* (Is 55:8-9 NIV). God allows different trials to come into different people’s lives for different reasons – but there is always a reason.

Unfortunately, sometimes we become impatient. When we try to rush through the unpleasant things in life, we often miss out on the blessing God had in mind for us to find at the other end of our trouble.

Americans are particularly guilty of trying to skip past life's difficulties. We have a consumer mentality: "I want it now! I want it fast! And if I don't get it from you, I will go to someone else who will serve me now and fast!" The rock group Queen condensed our consumer mentality down to nine words, "I want it all and I want it now!"

Because this is our mindset, we lack the ability, and therefore the desire, to be content as we endure life's trials, troubles, sorrows, and disappointments. However, because God is all-wise, he knows what is best for us. That's why we don't get everything we want. And the blessings we do receive come in his time.

With this in mind, let's take a look at some thoughts about the trials of this life.

To begin with, life is not easy. I'm sure none of you found that statement to be a startling revelation. Life isn't easy or kind. Listen, once again, to what James had to say: *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds* (Jam 1:2 NIV). Notice, James didn't say if you encounter various trials in life. He said whenever.

We are sinful people living in a sinful world. Problems aren't a maybe, they're a guarantee. No one's life goes exactly as they might plan. The only human life that went exactly as planned was Jesus' life, and his life wasn't without its share of problems.

Furthermore, being a Christian doesn't make life's problems go away. In fact, the closer you follow Jesus, the harder the devil will fight to get you back. That's the down side. The up side of Christianity is that as a Christian you have God and a family of believers to help you through whatever comes your way.

Our trials have a purpose. The word "testing" in verse three of the reading, is always used in the Bible to describe a challenge or trial that provides the opportunity for the one who is tested to prove or improve himself. This word "testing" is always spoken of as a positive thing that happens to us.

Through the prophet Zechariah, God speaks about the testing that goes on in the lives of his people and how it proves their worth and improves their character: *I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God'* (Zech 13:9 NIV).

The testing we experience serves to improve our value as God's people, just as refining gold and silver improve their value. If we exercise Godly patience, the trials that God allows into our lives drive the impurities from our lives.

It's comforting to know that as we endure life's adversities we don't have to worry. Worry only attacks one group of people – those who have no hope for the future. There shouldn't be any Christians in that group. We know the end of the story. We know that God is in control of all situations.

James tells us to count it all joy when trouble comes our way. As outrageous as that sounds, we can do that because we know that God is with us. Jesus told his disciples: *In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world* (Jn 16:33 NIV). The world can't defeat us because Jesus has already defeated the world.

Another comfort is the fact that we can count on God. James tells us that God has a purpose for everything we encounter and he will bring us through it. What we see as negative will always bring about something for our good, or someone else's good, or both.

The secret for getting through this life is to put your hand in God's hand and keep putting one foot in front of the other. We follow a God who has never broken a promise. We can put all of our worrying aside because the God who has never broken a promise said: *Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age* (Mt 28:20 NIV).

All of this practiced patience brings certain blessings here and now. In verse four of our reading James says: *Let [patience] have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing* (Jam 1:4 ESV).

Patience perfects us. The word "perfect," as it is used here, means to be mature in one's behavior. In other words, to be an adult. Impatience is a childish trait. It shouldn't be part of an adult's character. Listen to some advice from Paul and, as you listen, think about the idea of patience: *When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me* (1 Cor 13:11 NIV).

Patience can become a tutor on how to live life with peace of mind. If we practice patience, we will learn to enjoy life no matter what life brings.

Patience completes us. In the Greek, the word we translate as "complete" means to be whole, well, physical or spiritual well-being. Quite often, you will find this word used when Jesus healed someone. Most of these healings made someone physically whole. However, there is also the matter of being spiritually whole or complete.

In verse twelve of the reading, James speaks about the day when our patience is complete and we will be rewarded for patiently trusting in God: *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* (Jam 1:12 NIV).

Patience also prepares us. The phrase "lacking in nothing" means we will not be deficient with regard to spiritual strength. Every trial we successfully endure makes us that much stronger so we can face whatever is next.

In chapter five of his epistle, James used Job as an example of patience and how God rewards those whose trust is in him: *Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider*

blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy" (Jam 5:10-11 NIV).

What trials are you facing today? Whether you're having trouble with bills, employment, your marriage, your kids, your parents, friends, school, or just having trouble finding your place in life, know that what you are going through is not meaningless. Trust God to have a purpose for everything that happens. Memorize Paul's words of comfort and repeat them often to yourself: *We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose"* (Ro 8:28 NIV).

Trust Jesus to be the rock and anchor of your life. Put yourself completely in his hands and you will see that all the blessings of eternal life will be yours.