

Trials

Our ideas of what the bible means by trials and when the bible actually means by trials can be pretty different. The really big things like serious illness, death or a break-up of a family life are quick to spring to mind, but James doesn't limit trials to this sort of giant event. He includes in his idea of testing our everyday issues and anything that might present us with a choice of whether to follow God or not, a temptation that we may face is equally a test of our faith according to James as something we might consider as a way bigger deal.

The people who received James letter were Christians who had come from a Jewish context. Because they had turned away from Judaism, their social and economic ties with Jewish people had been cut, also it is thought that, as James tells us that they are "scattered among the nations" that they have fled Jerusalem because of persecution of the early church there. This posed all sorts of big scale problems for them; poverty, persecution, exploitation at work, legal action taken against them. But also their faith was being put to the test by more in built things, for example; pride, favouritism, fighting and inaction.

At times it is really easy to react negatively to these tests, and it makes sense that no-one wants to have to go through the things that sometimes face us in life. It's deadly easy to get sucked into complaining and self-pity, or trying to find our own solutions to our problems or even stopping at just finding something to take our minds off things. It's also deadly easy to blame God for the difficult circumstance we're in, and to get angry at him. Even if we don't get angry at him, it is deadly easy to think he doesn't have things under control and to panic and try and fix things ourselves.

This isn't just deadly easy, James tells us it is actually, factually deadly. Look at **1:15** when our evil desires suck us in we sin and sin leads to death. As much as physical death is the result of sin, James isn't saying that the minute we grumble about having a rough day we going to drop dead, he's is telling us there will be pretty big consequences to our rejection of God in the middle of the times when we need him most. The death James is talking about could be the break-up of a relationship or the break down of a friendship, but if we turn our backs on God James issues a blunt warning that the results won't be pretty.

Perseverance

James says we should have an attitude of patience, of perseverance and ultimately of joy. It sounds pretty crazy that we should be joyful in the middle of what feels like a catastrophe, but what James says shouldn't be too radical. The advice James gives the people who he is writing to is to mourn their sin and put it off (sound familiar?), to be patient throughout their suffering and to look past the actual circumstance and trust God that he use it to bring them closer to maturity and completeness. Obviously, in the heat of the moment that is easier said than done, and it is much more natural thanks to our fallen nature not to react in this way, that's why it is vital for us to pray for wisdom.

In 5:11 James advises this reader to look to Job as an example of patience and perseverance during suffering. When we look at Job we can see that he did struggle a lot about what was happening to him, and who wouldn't? He had a lot of questions for God, but he never doubted God's character, instead after seeking God with his questions he came out having faith in God and trusting in him. James isn't saying that hard times will be automatically easy for Christians, and I'm sure his readers knew that all too well, but he is saying we should be joyful know that he have a God we can trust who is able to use difficulty to produce good in his children.

Having a Godly attitude towards suffering and testing circumstances will produce in us maturity and completeness that we might not lack anything, and also there is the promise of the crown of life to those who persevere under trial. These results can seem like they are all very much future rewards that we won't see this side of Heaven, but we will see impact in our lives now as we focus on a loving God and repent of our sin.