

Day 6: February 6, 2017

Being Church: Why Just Doing Church Is Not Enough

Attitude in Trials

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials.

James 1:2 (NASB)

For many Christians and citizens around this country, this has been a difficult period in our country's history. For some, the difficulty has rooted from the tragic deaths of unarmed black men in different parts of the country. For others, there is difficulty in the deaths of five police officers in Dallas. Still for someone else, there is a sense of hopelessness, due to the perceived lack of justice and overall humanity. Still for someone else, you're facing financial hardships. Bills are due and you're struggling to make ends meet. Still for someone else, there are relational challenges in your life whether personal or professional. You may be a married couple and your marriage is facing difficulty. Still for someone else, you're facing health issues. There is never a shortage of problems. Someone is saying, "Why God am I facing this?" "God I believe in you, I pray to you, I am a believer why am I going through this." "Why is the world this way and why are the problems never ending." But the question is not will or won't we have test, trials or temptations. The question is, as Christians, how does God want us to respond to the tests and the trials that we will face here on earth. After all, it is God who we represent and not we ourselves.

James pointed out the *value* of trials to encourage his readers to adopt a positive attitude toward these experiences, to endure them, and to view them as God's tools to shape believers into people who will glorify Him. In verse two, James makes it clear that when going through our trials we must maintain a clear spiritual perspective. What kinds of trials was James talking about? Did he mean troubles such as running out of money, or failing a test in school, or having to stay up all night with a sick child: everyday troubles? Yes. The Greek word translated "trials" (*peirasmois*) means a "proving," specifically, "the trial of a man's fidelity, integrity, virtue, constancy . . . also an enticement to sin, temptation. James was speaking of the different kinds of trials in which we experience temptation to sin, rather than remaining faithful to the Savior. He was not distinguishing between internal and external temptations. James told the Jewish Christians, and we Christians today, to "Consider it all." The word "consider" in the original language means "to think over, think through think from top to bottom, discern, weigh out"; and in all cases adjusts your attitude. There is an old saying that, "attitude determines altitude."

In other words, reconsider the purpose of your trials and believe that God is using them to develop in you a deeper sense of the spiritual life and perspective. He is the anchor that holds you when you're tossed around spiritually, by the waves of life.

Hebrews 12:2 challenges us to consider what the Author and Perfecter of our faith faced, in the ultimate trial on our behalf. When we consider Jesus and what He went through, in paying the penalty of our sins, our trials pale in comparison.

Remember that tough times don't last, but faithful Christians do!

– Chris Johnson

Day 7: February 7, 2017

Being Church: Why Just Doing Church Is Not Enough

Advantage of Trials

³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

James 1:3-4 (NASB)

There is little to no argument that trials come into all our lives. Usually, when trials come, we are often propelled into feelings of despair, heartache, fear, and a host of other adverse emotions that can nearly debilitate us. When trials come, many times those who experience those trials believe they come because of something they have done. They see trials as payback for sins they committed or “reaping what they have sown.” Jesus disciples seemed to express this same perspective as seen in the Gospel of John. In John 9:1-3 it says, “As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. ² And His disciples asked Him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?” ³ Jesus answered, “It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him. Jesus’ disciples believed that this man’s blindness (his trial) was a consequence of some sin that someone had done. Jesus gave His disciples a different way to look at this man’s blindness...not as a burden, but as a blessing.

In the opening section of his letter, James, the half-brother of our Lord Jesus Christ, established a very different perspective for trials. While it is true that sometimes bad things are a result of bad things done, James wants his audience to know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. There is an advantage in trials. It is only through the testing or the trying of your faith that you can know that your faith can endure. King Solomon wrote in Proverbs 24:10 (NASB), “If you are slack in the day of distress, your strength is limited.”

James continues his letter with the encouragement, James 1:4, “And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” Endurance brings out of us that which is not perfect and leaves that which is perfect and complete. When hardships and trials come, just as gold is purified by enduring the fire in the smelting process, we are purified or perfected through enduring trials. In Joseph’s account of what his brothers sought to do to him, Genesis 50:20a (NASB) ²⁰ “As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good...” Although no one can be excited about the testing of their faith, by knowing that those trials will help develop us to be more perfect and complete, we should patiently endure those trials.

When your faith is tested, ask the Holy Spirit for His comfort as you patiently endure and develop into a more perfect child of God.

When your faith is tested, recognize that through endurance, we are being developed into perfection.

– Michael Dickens

Day 8: February 8, 2017

Being Church: Why Just Doing Church Is Not Enough

Will God Give You More Than You Can Handle?

⁵ *If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking.* ⁶ *But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind.* ⁷ *Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.* ⁸ *Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do.*

James 1:5-8 (NLT)

Have you heard the saying “*God won’t give you more than you can handle*”? This saying and others such as, “*God helps those that help themselves,*” and the classic, “*Cleanliness is next to Godliness,*” are attributed to the Bible but their genesis is more folk tale, gifted storytelling and ancient mythology. The Bible is probably the most revered book in America and usually the most misquoted. You will hear politicians, coaches, motivational speakers, and even Christians misquote Scripture with some of these sayings. They are pithy statements that sound good and make a lot of worldly sense. The problem comes when the saying is given biblical credence and becomes a reality to believers and non-believers.

The saying, “*God won’t give you more than you can handle*” is often used by people to offer comfort and encouragement in times of trials. When we are going through various trials, we have wants and needs. No one wants to go through a trial, I don’t believe we will find that on a bucket list. When trials come, we do have needs, often times we might not know what we need. What do you need when life goes sideways? What do you need when there are more rainy days instead of sunshine?

In our text James the brother of Jesus gives some practical guidance and comfort for believers who face various trials on this pilgrim journey. He tells believers if you lack wisdom, which is spiritual understanding, all you have to do is ask God. The wisdom he talks about comes from God it is a superior knowledge. It comes from the supreme God, who is all-knowing. The God who knows what we need to make it through the various trials of life. He knows more than we do. He knows more than doctors, best friends, Pastors, big mama and paw-paw.

James says to ask God and He will freely give you what you need. Why would God be so gracious to us? In spite of everything, we must never forget He loves us. I used to believe the saying “*God won’t give you more than you can handle.*” It was comfort to me as I watched my mother’s health deteriorate in the last days of her life. However, these words did not help much as I ministered to families that are suffering with the sudden loss of a loved one or the agony of making a life and death decision. I’ve learned it is too much to handle and the only answer to

the question is yes, He will give us more than we can handle. He gives us more so that we will trust Him more. James tells us that having unwavering faith, in the only true living God, will help us endure the various trials we face in this life. This old saying sounds good but the psalmist tells us something better. David declares that, "God is our refuge and strength a very present help in the time of trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

If you are going through a trial today lean on God to give you the assistance you need. Loved ones have a finite understanding but God has infinite understanding and power He wants you to trust Him to help you endure

***Trust in Him who will not leave you, whatsoever years may bring...
Hold to God's unchanging hand***

– Ronald Bell

Day 9: February 9, 2017

Being Church: Why Just Doing Church Is Not Enough

Source of Temptation

¹³ *Whenever you feel tempted to do something bad, you should not say, "God is tempting me." Evil cannot tempt God, and God himself does not tempt anyone.*¹⁴ *You are tempted by the evil things you want. Your own desire leads you away and traps you.*

James 1:13-14 (ERV)

Have you ever been to a holiday party where the atmosphere was so welcoming, the food so appealing, the music just right, and the mix of people the perfect ages and backgrounds that as you departed for the evening, you excitedly exclaimed to the host that you couldn't wait to do it all over again next year? It's in situations like these—the "perfect" social event or a resort vacation—that our desires are met. Sadly, this is when I find myself being least like the church. You see, every year since my mother's death a week before Christmas 10 years ago, I host a big "holiday" party and take a vacation. For some, this may seem like a positive diversion from the sadness associated with losing a loved one around the holidays. However, I believe that my desire for the "comfort" of a party, or the "get away" of a vacation was not the response God wanted me to have after the test of losing my mother to a sudden illness.

In the beginning of James chapter 1, he is clear—we will have trials. Our response to these trials can result in an endurance that leads to stronger faith or can result in us falling to temptation.

James explains in verses 13-14 of chapter 1 that temptation, as a result of trials, does not come from God. When faced with trials, we have a choice—we can respond in faith or we can give in to the temptations that lead to sin.

As much as I love to think that I desire to serve the Lord, and to be a good wife and mother, I would hesitate to admit that I desire things that keep me from being the church that God calls me to be. When my mother died, I was not seeking to draw closer to God, my children or my husband. My desire was escape. Instead of focusing on a party or vacation to ease the pain of losing my mother, I should focus on the birth of Christ, the one who saved my mother and gave her eternal life.

What about you? When faced with trials, what do you focus on? How do you respond?

Sometimes when you wonder why you can't hear God's voice during your trials, remember the teacher is always quiet during the test. Kelly Hemingway

– Misha Burkins

Day 10: February 10, 2017

Being Church: Why Just Doing Church Is Not Enough

No Hidden Figures

Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.

James 1:15-16 ESV

“Hidden Figures” is 2017’s box office hit! I sat in theater in amazement as an African American lead actress solved mathematical equations for math that did not even exist yet. She figured out how to shoot and land rockets with human beings inside. It was captivating to see an African American woman in the struggle, during civil rights era overcome racism, sexism, and prejudice. I realized it could not have been me. I know what you are thinking, “This generation is weak.” I’m not talking about the racism. I am a black man in corporate America, and I deal with that every other day. I am talking about the math.

I hate math! I was always good at arithmetic, but, when it got to the x's, the pie, and the hidden figures I was lost. I appreciate simple arithmetic equations. It was easy when there was no x's or hidden figure to try to solve.

In our focus passage today the writer James gives us a simple equation that always has one outcome, a simple equation with no hidden figures:

- DESIRE + SIN = DEATH

We all have desires, but when sinful desires are given a home and a place to grow they always leads to sin! We have all heard or read Psalms 37:4 verse that says if we:

Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. (Psalms 37:4 ESV)

Sounds good right? If I love the Lord then I can get all the stuff I want. Amen! Hallelujah! The only bad thing is that our hearts are wicked. When you delight in the Lord His desires become yours, and God gives you a new heart. When your desires grab hold of you there is no controlling them. They lead to a full term pregnancy of sin.

Sin can simply be explained as disobedience to God. When you disobey God, it leads to the same thing the first sin did in the Bible.....death.

Until Jesus, death was the undefeated killing champion. The worst thing about death from sin is not the physical death that sin brings, but, the separation that it causes between us and God.

How do we as a desire driven and sin filled people prevent ourselves into death’s equation?

In verse 16, the word of God tells us to not be deceived my bothers. We do not like to admit we struggle with our desires. Why? We do not want to look at ourselves as weak. But, when your flesh is weak, Christ is strong. When temptation and trials come, you do not have to stand in the face of the desire. God has given you a Spirit of a sound mind, so you can realize your weakness. Call on God for your help through all desires. God gave us Jesus Christ when we did not even know we needed help. How much more will He give to those who ask and call upon Jesus' name.

This week make an effort to assess your sinful desires and ask Jesus to take them away from you, so you want ever have to solve James no hidden figures equation.

Desires + Sin = Death < Jesus

– Dennis Campbell, Jr.