

# The Promise of Good through Trials

*James Series*

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**Bible Text:** James 1:9-12

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Remain standing and open your Bibles to James one. We will read verses one through 12.

James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings.

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position; and let the rich man glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with a scorching wind, and withers the grass; and its flower falls off, and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away. Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.<sup>1</sup>

Thus far God's holy Word.

You may be seated.

You children know that it is difficult to learn to do things that you have never done before. Spring time and some young boys and girls are starting to play T-ball and softball. And imagine that you have never had a bat in your hand and you have never swung a bat or fielded a ball and so the coach sits you down and says, "Now here is what you do. You get that bat and you hit that ball and you catch the ball in the field..."

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<sup>1</sup> James 1:1-12.

And, oh, it sounds all right, you really don't understand the instructions. No, a good coach stands beside you. He first shows you how to hold the bat, how to place your feet, how to swing. He will show you how to get down in front of a ball and catch it. He then might even stand with you as the ball comes and he will help you swing the bat.

Sometimes we do that at the spring softball game. And that is the way we learn. And all of us learn that way known as the adage that a picture is worth 1000 words and picture there doesn't simply mean something on the all. It is an example, living examples. We don't just learn in the abstract, particularly those things that are difficult.

We have to be shown and walked through those things. That is what the Holy Spirit is doing for us in verses nine through 12 of James chapter one because he has commanded us to do a very difficult thing, a thing that is contrary to our nature. He says, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials."

Now we are to learn to rejoice in the afflictions and persecutions and set backs of life. And we do so because God has designed these things for the proving of our faith to us and to others to demonstrate his genuineness and its powerful reality. And we do so to improve our faith so that we grow in Christian maturity.

Now because it is very difficult, God promises that as we endure that he will give us grace and we will lack nothing. He says, "There is one thing I know you do lack. And that is wisdom."

And regardless of how much wisdom we have, we all lack wisdom and God promises wisdom to us if we pray for it, seek his grace in the midst of the circumstances of trials and persecutions and difficulties.

But that, in itself is difficult. And so he has to warn us that often we are of two minds, that we must pray believing that God will do that which he has promised. Otherwise we are like the surf: up on the beach, back out, driven by the wind, tumultuous. We are full of doubts and uncertainties and at the end of the day we are double minded.

Is God going to help us or not?

And a double minded man is not going to receive wisdom. His double mindedness is the very opposite of wisdom.

So in order to help us understand what it means to be wise in the midst of our trials, to get us anchored so that we are not double minded in the midst of our trials, he now gives us in verses nine through 12, very concrete examples of trials and what they do for us and how we are to respond in them and that, in itself is founded upon a very wonderful promise that he gives to us as well.

And so here the Holy Spirit is teaching us that both the rich and the poor or the poor and the rich may glory in their tribulations, persevere and endure in them because God has promised to work good things in their lives through them.

We are going to consider three things: the counsel to the poor man in his afflictions, the counsel to the rich man or person or Christian in his afflictions and the concluding promise to all Christians in their afflictions.

First, then, the counsel to the poor Christian in the midst of affliction in verse nine.

“But...”

Now you see there is a contrast with the double minded man, the unstable man. In contrast, “Let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position.”<sup>2</sup>

Now this is quite paradoxical, isn't it? Let the lowly glory in his exaltation. Who is this brother of humble circumstances?

Well, here James has in mind the poor in the midst of the disbursed Jewish Christians. Some poor because of persecution. They perhaps had estates in Jerusalem or in surrounding areas in Judea and Galilee and as persecution scattered them, they left behind their estates, their families, whatever possessions they might have had. Just as today many persecuted people flee with the clothing on their back. And they have lost everything.

There was a great deal of poverty in Jerusalem because of persecution. Someone was converted. A family cuts them off. Even today as Muslim and Jewish families cut off, disinherit members who are converted to Christ.

And so a lot of these people were impoverished because of persecution. Persecution was the particular trial that they were suffering and that persecution brought them into greater than low condition.

But also we know, as we read the records of the early Church, that not many mighty, not many noble, not many rich were being converted.

Now within covenant succession as people observed biblical principles later by the grace of God those family estates often improved, but often that first generation of Christian is quite impoverished. And it was so in the early Church. Some were slaves. Many were just by the chances of life and God's providence poor. And poverty itself brings its own set of trials, hunger, cold, depravation, being outcast in the society, living from hand to mouth, living with pain, not able to get medicine or medical treatment.

This is the class of Christian that James has in mind when he speaks of the brother who is in low circumstances. The impoverished and the persecuted.

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<sup>2</sup> James 1:9.

And here is the paradox, you see. Let such a one glory in his high position.

I mentioned a couple of weeks ago that James has numerous allusions to the Sermon on the Mount. The first one had to do with prayer. This one has to do with the very paradox that our Savior mentions with respect to the blessedness of persecution, Matthew five beginning with verse 10.

Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.<sup>3</sup>

You hear the echoes of that instruction here, don't you?

Let the brother of low circumstance, exalt, glory, boast in his high position.

What is this high position? Well, it is found in the form of description.

I skipped over that deliberately.

Let the brother of low circumstance.

Remember, as well, I said the some 18 times, either directly or indirectly, James addresses these Christians in this filial term, brethren. Here he describes the Christian as the brother or the sister in Christ Jesus. This is the high position, you see. For everyone who is in Christ is a brother of the Lord Jesus Christ. Everyone who is in Christ is a child of God and an heir, a joint heir with the Lord Jesus Christ. Everyone who is in Christ belongs to this family and we all together are brothers and sisters.

And, you see, the family does not depend upon anything that is material or earthly. It is a family that has been put together by God's grace. And the high position, then, regardless of how poor someone is, how they have been disinherited and scattered, theirs is the greatest inheritance of all. For all things belong to them in Christ Jesus as children of God. And heaven itself is their inheritance. This is the high position. This is the glory and nobility of every one of you who is in Christ Jesus.

What a position. You know that you have been chosen of God by an eternal love from eternity. You have been redeemed through the perfect work and the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. You have been regenerated. You have been justified. You have been adopted. The Spirit of Christ lives in you as the seal and guarantee and as the sanctifier. And you have the reality, the surety of heaven.

No wonder we can boast.

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 5:10-12.

The word he uses here for boast is stronger than simply count it all joy. There is... this is the most excessive kind of boasting and glorying that one can do. And there is a wrong kind of boasting as Paul quotes Jeremiah.

Let not him who boasts, boasts in himself, in his attainments, in his wisdom, in his wealth. Human pride boasts in the things of this life and that is a sin. But there is a boasting, there is a boasting, says Paul, in Jehovah. There is a boasting in his greatness and glory that is manifested in our exalted high position.

But Paul also teaches us there is a boasting in grace and in suffering because of the relationship of the two. And in Romans five speaking of our justification in Christ and our standing he says, "...in which we stand," verse two, "and we exult," this is our same word. We boast, we glory, "in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult," we boast, we glory, "in our tribulations, "knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character."<sup>4</sup>

This is what James now is repeating, this glorious concept.

Because we are the saved children of God, we brothers, sisters in Christ Jesus regardless of our estate. We are the princes and princesses of the kingdom of God and we glory in that.

And, you see, here is the key to true human worth.

There are those people who are impoverished and they seek to find their worth in past nobility, impoverished nobility living in rags on the shreds of the reputation of nobility. You remember the British comedy keeping up appearances.

There are many people that find their worth in the fact that their ancestors came over on the *Mayflower* or they were some important family in colonial America. Now, it is great to rejoice in our heritage. But that is not where our worth is found, you see. No, our worth is found only in Christ Jesus. But when you measure your worth by that, then that can never be taken from you. Anything else in this life can and at death will be stripped away. You may have much now and one day because of persecution you will have nothing. You might be stripped of everything. You might be impoverished. You might be imprisoned. You might be put to death.

If you are measuring your worth by your reputation or your acceptance or your possessions or your appearance or whatever, all these things will be stripped away, you see. And what the Spirit is showing us here is that our true worth can never be taken from us because it is a spiritual nature. We are glorying in who we are in Christ Jesus. And so you might not be as smart as some of your classmates, but you are in now way inferior to them in your standing in the sight of God. Your worth is found in Christ, not in

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<sup>4</sup> Romans 5:2-4.

your intellect. Your worth is found in Christ, not in your handsomeness or your beauty. Your worth is found in Christ, not in your reputation or honor or wealth.

It is important that you children understand this. Children can tend to be cruelly cliquish. It is part of a manifestation of a child's sinful nature. We have our groups. And the outsider comes in and they are not like us. Maybe they are quite poor or they are different and we exclude them. We can say cruel things about them. You know, children can act like Nellie Olsen, right, *Little House on the Prairie*, little rich snobby kid. And that is a tendency if we in any way feel ourselves superior. And what Christ wants you to understand, you are to treat all people on the basis of the gospel and you are not to judge others by your... from a position of your superiority, but the fact that all are made in God's image and covenant children have the special privileges of being part of the brethren of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As pastors you will need to keep this in mind. You will have folks in your congregation that are going to make judgments and decisions on the basis of how long the person has lived here or what do they look like or what is the color of their skin or what is their position in society? People need to understand and James will come back to this in chapter two, that when someone walks through the doors of the church building it matters not whether they are rich or poor, the employer or the employee, the educated or the ignorant, you walk through those doors, if we are in Christ, we are on equal standing. For in Christ there is no male or female, no slave or free, no Jew or Gentile.

And many congregations of God's people still have to learn this lesson that we cannot create, we cannot operate the church on the artificial distinctions of the world.

Now, the wisdom in this for the poor person in trials and afflictions is to realize what I have just said, that my worth is in my inheritance from God and that these circumstances do not define me and although I am impoverished in the eyes of the world, I am rich in the eyes of God and from God.

Then there is wisdom of how to live through the circumstances of the persecution or the poverty.

And, furthermore, it is a testimony of love, though that is a hard one to put together. But if you have suffered because of persecution, if you are suffering because of persecution, if you in God's providence have little of this world's possessions, it is God's fatherly good pleasure and whatever trials are attached to that are but proof of your inheritance.

Isn't that what the writer to the Hebrews says? If you don't suffer trials and discipline you are a bastard, that the discipline of God is proof of inheritance and you must realize that when you suffer the deprivations that God has appointed for you in this life.

So you see how he fleshes out wisdom for us.

We look at the second person and this is God's counsel to the rich Christian in his afflictions. Verses 10 and 11.

Let the rich man glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with a scorching wind, and withers the grass; and its flower falls off, and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.<sup>5</sup>

Now, some take this as the unconverted rich man, but the grammar is pointing to a parallel.

“Let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position.”<sup>6</sup>

This is an ellipsis. One word is left out, the verb.

“Let the rich man ... in his humiliation...”<sup>7</sup>

But the word to be supplied is glory.

Now part of the key to this is that there is a play on words going on here. The word “humiliation” is from the same word as “low position.” The humble afflicted position is.... this is now the position in which the rich man should glory. He should glory in humiliation.

So now James is addressing the wealthy, the upper class members of the congregation and he is telling them what they are to do with their afflictions. Their afflictions are to remind them of the reality of who they are. What is this low position? What is this humiliation in which the rich man glories?

Well, again, we have now our third allusion to the Sermon on the Mount.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.<sup>8</sup>

Here James is reminding us that regardless of what one has in this life, there is only one door into the kingdom of God. And that is a door of repentance. But it is a door of humiliation. It is not just a narrow door through which one may not bring the baggage of sin. It is a very low door. We must come through on our faces at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>5</sup> James 1:10-11.

<sup>6</sup> James 1:9.

<sup>7</sup> James 1:10.

<sup>8</sup> Mathew 5:3-4.

And so he says to the rich Christian, “Your afflictions are to remind you of your basic corrupt nature. Your afflictions are to remind you that you brought nothing into this world and you will leave this world with nothing. Your afflictions are to remind you that you are a sinner saved by grace, to remind you that it was only as you were broken and impoverished of Spirit and mourning over your sins that the Spirit leads you into the kingdom of God. So glory, glory in God’s acts of humiliation.”

Glory in the reminder of your sin and corruption.

One of the things that you men are going to encounter in the average congregation is you are going to hear people ...

“Don’t talk so much about sin. I want to leave Church feeling good about myself.”

Well, I would rather leave church feeling good about Christ Jesus for there is nothing good about me.

And, see, the extension of what James is saying here is that part of your role as pastor is to bring your wealthy and middle class and comfortable congregation to the regular reminder of who and what they are apart from the grace of Go, a reminder of our sin and that from which we have been saved.

Now, we don’t do so in a negativism. We do so in the context that we are saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is good for us to be reminded that we are sinners and what our sins are, that we live a life of constant conversion, of repentance, of renewed faith in Christ Jesus.

So hold before your people the mirror of God’s Word and hold it before yourselves in self examination. The mirror of God’s Word that you will know who you are and who you are isn’t that pretty face or those titles and degrees or your bank account or your reputation or your honor. You are a sinner saved by the grace of God.

Know the reality, that wealth hinders entrance into the kingdom of God and living the Christian life and, thus, not many wealthy are saved. In the eyes of the world, you and I, you know, we are in that wealthy class. We are so blessed and God then must humble us.

So we have the pains of trials of difficulties of life to bring us back to the roots of who we are in Christ Jesus. That is why you have these unexpected medical expenses, why the appliance or the vacuum cleaner breaks, the car has to be repaired. You see, God is dealing with each one of us to keep bringing us back to him so that we live in dependence upon him.

We don’t live in dependence upon what we have got in the checking account or the savings account. We live in dependence upon God. We are not going to live in dependence one, “Well, I have got a job and so everything is ok.” No, we live in dependence upon God. God uses those means. We are to pursue those means, but our

trust is in him and our trials and our afflictions drive us back into him in the reality that apart from him we are nothing.

And that is what James goes on now to reinforce with this illustration. It would have been so familiar to the Palestinian Christians.

... like flowering grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with a scorching wind, and withers the grass; and its flower falls off, and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.<sup>9</sup>

A picture of beautiful meadows of wild flowers in Palestine in February, little cyclamens, white and purple and red and aniline clovers and these lilies of the valley. And you stand and you look over this beautiful flowery carpet and you marvel at the beauty and splendor.

And on the one hand the Savior teaches you from that carpet that he is going to clothe you. But in May when the sirocco winds come out of the southeast, a wind that is like a furnace the buds, petals fall off of the flowers. They literally, in a matter of moment wither and die.

I was in Israel in 2004 and I was beside this very shady, air conditioned house and I went out on the porch. I thought I was going to sit and read and relax. And I opened the door and it was like stepping into a furnace. The first of the winds had come.

Immediately there were wild fires breaking out all over the place. You live in California. You know the same experience when those winds come out of the desert. There is no moisture in them. They are hot and they destroy all that is before them. That is the picture, a picture that all the Palestinian Christians would have been quite familiar with.

James says, "That is what all of your wealth is like."

And all of the trinkets that you trust in, you see, it is all going to be stripped away the same way that grass and flower withers and fades away.

So it is the course of life. He says there in the pursuit... and some Bibles have a different word there, but I think the best text is that in the course of life, in the midst of your pursuits, all fades away. All that a man trusts in, life itself will be snatched away.

Thus, is wisdom, you see. We glory in our low estate. Not in our riches. They will be taken away from us, not in who or what we are in the world's eyes, but there is wisdom that we glory in the circumstances of our trials and we can then count it all joy when we encounter them.

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<sup>9</sup> James 1:10-11.

Well, after giving this counsel to the poor, to the rich, James concludes now with a final promise kind of ties everything together, picks up the themes of verses four and five and anticipates verse 13 and following.

“Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”<sup>10</sup>

He reminds us, again, that there is a blessedness, again, reiterating the words of the Savior. Blessed are the poor. Blessed are those that mourn. Blessed are those that suffer and are persecuted and reproached and ridiculed. There is a blessedness to the man who perseveres under trial. And James here is reflecting what he taught earlier that the trials are for the proving of our faith, that this is the Word that he uses then for once he has been approved. There is this trial that tests us and it takes us through the assaying of our faith and our faith is proven to be genuine as we go through trials. That leads in this life, he says in verse five, to Christian maturity.

But her the blessing is even greater because this is God’s appointed entrance into heaven. The one who perseveres will be approved and receive the crown of life.

The crown of life, a figure of the... of both the wreath that Paul says is placed on the head of the victorious athlete probably uses this concept here. He just talked about the flowers that fade and we know that even the earthly laurels, crowns, fade. But there is a crown, there is a wreath that one gets at the end of the race that is unfading because it is the crown of life.

Now Paul will use the expression in 2 Timothy 4:8 as the crown of righteousness. It is the same thing. It is simply God by grace awarding us the final part of the inheritance, bringing us into that heavenly glory that he has prepared for us, that we shall receive at death and one day all together enter in through the inheritance at the return of Christ and the resurrection of our bodies.

But God has appointed that entrance through our trials. This is what Paul so carefully instructed the early Church in, for example, in Acts 14:22 as he goes back through, “strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.’”<sup>11</sup>

Now you know it is not the tribulations earn heaven for us. Christ has earned heaven for us and he, alone. But God in his wisdom has said that we are going to enter into heaven only through perseverance, only as we endure through the trials. That is the way that God has appointed.

And so there is a struggle that is taking place.

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<sup>10</sup> James 1:12.

<sup>11</sup> Acts 14:22.

Now, as I said, verse 12 is anticipating the discussion of 13 and following on the temptation to sin. You see, endurance means I am in the trial. I have set my mind on God, what he is accomplishing for me as a poor man or rich man, a Christian person in this trial. And yet I am double minded because here is Satan coming with all of his temptations in the midst of the same trials we noticed when we first started the series.

Grumble, complain, doubt God. Do it in your own strength. Walk away from him. Endurance is learning in the trial to say no to the suggestions of Satan and yes to the purposes of God. That is how our faith is trained. That is simply saying, "Well, God sent this so I will endure it." No, that is part of it. But it is an active wrestling. You see, it is not really a trial if it doesn't bring with it temptation in it.

That is why we sometimes look at each other's experience and I say, "My, I just... I couldn't do what you do. And I just haven't been tried like that and you look at me and you say the same thing."

It is because of how we are. God designs our trials and with the trial, then, comes the temptations. And God's wisdom, Satan and the flesh and the world are at work and persevering, enduring perseverance is the wrestling with the temptations and saying yes to God and no to temptations.

Faith, then, is strengthened. That is how endurance produces proven character and proven character hope.

And so it is a way that is appointed, the way for all Christians, the poor and the rich that we endure and persevere under trial. Through that we are approved. We are documented. And we enter into this eternal inheritance that will not fade, cannot be taken away.

But notice the final promise.

"Which the Lord," supplied, but obviously that is who he is speaking of here. "...has promised to those who love Him."<sup>12</sup>

Who stands behind the promise? The one who sent the trials, the one who has designed them for your life. He who does not change, he who cannot lie, he is the one who promises to all those who love him. This is their heritage, designed by God through trials.

Now what if he described the Christian here as those that love God. He will do that again. Because love is the chief grace of the one who has been justified. So Paul shows in Galatians chapter five faith then works through love. The faith that takes hold of Christ through regeneration that comes in a union with Christ is responding, then, to the love of God who first loved us with a love.

To say I believe is not much of a mark of reality of Christian experience, is it? But to love God, that is a genuine mark of a Christian, to love him because he has first loved

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<sup>12</sup> James 1:12.

me. To love him, I then keep his commandments. To love him I then obey through the midst of my trials and my difficulties. To love him, Christ tells me in John 14, that he and the Father come and uphold me and commune with me. That is why we are described here in the promise addressed to those who love God, the same thing that Paul does in Romans chapter eight that all things work together for those who are called according to God's purpose and love.

Do you love him? Keep his commandments. If you love him, you know, he will keep you. If you love him, you then will serve him through the midst of your trials. So you see the wisdom that you need in the midst of trials to know that they teach you who you are in Christ Jesus. They direct your thoughts from your poverty to your glory. They prepare you for that glory. They humble you and keep bringing you back to God and the need that you have which is his grace. All else fades away and perishes. But God's promise does not fail and God's eternal inheritance will never fade away or perish. Your wisdom is to know that God has designed this pathway for you into heaven. And God has designed that you wrestle with your particular trials and the temptations that come with them that you might be approved and receive that crown of life.

And so, dear friends, brethren, persevere. Hang tough. Realize that everything that comes into your life is coming from the hand of your loving Father who gives you grace. And remember the fountain of that grace is the Lord Jesus Christ. Cling to him. Because he is the one who has purchased the crown of life and has guaranteed your reception of it. It is by his perfect obedience and death and resurrection and ascension, he now is preparing this place for us. And he has sent us his Spirit as the guarantor and pledge that we shall enter into that place. His resurrection and sitting there in heaven is the guarantee of our resurrection and sitting with him in heaven.

But he is also the example as we are taught in 1 Peter 2:21 that he entered into his glory by his sufferings. He persevered. He endured. That is the pathway. He has walked it. He shows us what is going to be. But then because he has purchased grace for us, he is the one that enables us to follow him in that pathway knowing that every sinful failure in the midst of our trials is pardoned. We come back to Christ for the grace of pardon, but for new grace in Christ that we will persevere. It is in Christ that we will be approved. It is in Christ that we shall then inherit this perfectly promised crown of life.

Amen.