

**PRACTICAL CONVICTIONS FOR HARD TIMES**  
**JAMES 1:2-4**

**INTRODUCTION:**

Have you had any bad days recently? Sometime ago Henry Dempsey, the pilot on a commuter flight from Portland, Maine, to Boston, had a horrendous day. During the flight he heard an unusual noise near the rear of his small aircraft. He turned the controls over to his co-pilot and went back to check it out.

As he reached the tail section, the plane hit an air pocket and Dempsey was tossed against the rear door. He quickly discovered the source of the mysterious noise. The rear door had not been properly latched prior to takeoff and it flew open. Dempsey was instantly sucked out of the jet.

The co-pilot, seeing the red light that indicated an open door, radioed the nearest airport, requesting permission to make an emergency landing. He reported that the pilot had fallen out of the plane and he requested a helicopter search of that area of the ocean.

After the plane landed, they found Henry Dempsey-holding on to the outdoor ladder of the aircraft. Some how he caught the ladder and held on for ten minutes as the plane flew two hundred miles per hour at an altitude of 4,000 feet.

Then, at the landing, he had kept his head from hitting the runway, which was a mere 12 inches away. It took airport personnel several minutes to pry Dempsey's fingers from the ladder. Maybe your difficult situations have not been quite so dramatic, but they have been very real in your life.

As James begins this little letter on practical Christianity, he gives us a practical approach to dealing with hard times at the very beginning. He knows that how we handle our troubles will mean the difference between being shallow and bitter, or being mature and joyful.

As we consider this passage of scripture, we will discover two things for sure about our trials.

First, they are inevitable. James does not say, "If you face trials of many kinds," but rather "when ever your face trials of many kinds." It is the inspired judgment of James that trials are inevitable. They are common to man.

Second, all such trials are purposeful. James presents a view of these trials that includes the purpose of a sovereign and good God. The things that happen to us are not just accidents, but they are rather purposeful events.

As we look at this paragraph, we will find three practical convictions that will help hold you and guide you when the hard times come. These convictions need to become a part of the way you look at everything that happens to you in life.

## **I. SPIRITUAL MATURITY IS GOD'S GOAL FOR US.**

What I want us to do is to look at this passage backwards. Instead of starting out with "consider it pure joy," I want us to look at the closing statement in verse 4 - "So that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." These words of James gives us what God has as his ultimate goal or purpose in the things that happen to us.

They are really summed up in those three terms by which he describes the mature end of life.

### 1. God's goal is maturity.

The word translated "mature" in our text is translated "perfect" in the older version. The word perfect bothered us because it gave off implications of sinless perfection. Mature is the better translation. Something is mature when it has developed out to its logical end.

This is what God has as a goal for your life. His goal is to guide you and work with you in such a way that the life of His son which he has placed in you will work its way out to its logical end - maturity.

When ever hard times begin to envelope your life, there is great encouragement in realizing that a sovereign God has as His ultimate goal in your life your spiritual maturity.

2. God's goal is our completeness.

The second word that James uses is "complete." The idea in this word is that none of the parts are missing. Everything needed for the thing is present. A life is mature when each part of the life has developed into a healthy whole.

Many of us would confess that there are still things still missing in our Christian lives, but God works through the things that happens to us to move us toward this ultimate goal of maturity, completeness in our lives.

3. God's goal is that we lack nothing.

The last expression "not lacking anything," could be a summary of the other two. It is the logical end of the other two. When a life is mature or complete, it does not lack anything.

The idea in this word is that the character has developed o such a point that there is nothing missing in the character. All of those qualities that God values so highly are found present in the character of that person.

It is helpful to keep in mind what God has a goal.

In "A View From A Zoo," Gary Richman tells about the birth of a giraffe: "The first thing to emerge are the baby giraffe's front hooves and head. A few minutes later the plucky new born calf is hurled forth and falls ten feet and lands on its back. Within seconds, he rolls to an upright position with his legs tucked under his body. From this position he considers the world for the first time.

The mother giraffe lowers her head long enough to take a look, then she positions herself directly over the calf. She waits for about a minute then she does the most unreasonable thing. She swings her long pendulous leg outward and kicks her baby so that is sent sprawling head over heels.

When it doesn't get up the violent process is repeated over and over and over again. The struggle to rise is momentous. As the baby calf grows tired, the mother kicks it again to stimulate its effort.

Finally, the calf stands for the first time on its wobbly legs. Then the mother giraffe does the most remarkable thing. She kicks it off of its feet again. Why? She wants it to remember how to get up.

In the wild, the baby giraffes must be able to get up as quickly as possible in order to stay with the herd where there is safety. Lions, hyenas, leopards, and wild hunting dogs all enjoy the young giraffes and they would get it too, if the mother didn't teach her calf to get up quickly and to get with it.

This parable from nature speaks to us about the purpose of God in the hard times in our lives. We may sometimes feel like God is treating us like the mother giraffe treats her calf, but like the mother giraffe He knows that is ahead for us. So, He is very carefully moving us toward the goal of maturity, self-sufficiency in Him, where we will not be dependent upon ourselves or the circumstances of our lives.

## **II. GOD WORKS THROUGH THE THINGS THAT HAPPENS TO US TO MOVE US TOWARD MATURITY.**

This is the second practical conviction for those of us facing hard times. Once we know what God's goal is for our lives, then we can begin to look for his activity in our lives. His activity in our lives will always be consistent with the good and loving goal that he has established for us. This is what James is saying to us in this passage, "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." There is an obvious sequence in this.

### **1. Trials of many kinds is anything that test our faith in God.**

The language of James is broad enough to include what ever may be befalling us. "Trials" is a word that has two possible meanings in the New Testament. Sometimes the word involves a temptation to do wrong. James will use the word in this manner later in this first chapter. Other times it is used in the sense of God arranging circumstances so that we are put to the test. God has an infinite number of ways that He can put us to the test, to allow us to discover the genuiness of our faith. "Many kinds" in the text refers to the

variety of ways that God may allow hard times to come against us. Sometimes these hard times will involve finances. Sometimes they may involve health. Sometimes they involve relationships. Sometimes they may involve persecution. In this context, it may well have included all of those. James addresses this letter to those twelve tribes scattered among the nations. This is a reminder to us of that statement in the book of Acts about the scattering of Christians out of Jerusalem because of the persecutions that were befalling them. James was addressing this letter originally to Christians that have been scattered by the adversity of persecution. But whatever the trial may be, God will be at work in that trial, moving us toward maturity. He is at work in all things for our good.

## 2. The testing of faith develops perseverance.

We need to look carefully at the language used by James. When he refers to the "testing of your faith" he is using a term that refers to proving the genuineness of something. For instance those who work with precious metal could prove their genuineness by placing them in the fire. The fire separates the dross from the genuine gold or silver. So God is at work in our lives putting our faith to the test to see if it is the genuine article.

The point that James makes is that this testing process actually works to bring about the result of perseverance in our lives. The word translated "perseverance" is the familiar Greek word that has in it the idea of bearing up under. Our capacity to bear up under the adversities of life is developed as God takes us through the process of testing our faith. There can never be the ability to bear up under if there has never been any adversities.

Many of us would prefer that our Christian lives be allowed to develop in a hothouse environment. We rather have immunity to the storms and adversities that might come against us. We had rather have that constant 72-degree temperature 365 days a year. But when God wants to develop a resilient plant, He does not put it in the hothouse; rather He puts it out in the field. Out there it is subjected to the wind and sun, rains and thunder. It is through the exposure to the elements that resilience is developed in that plant or that tree. So it is with the character of our lives. God develops that ability to bear up under, to be steadfast, to be unrelenting in our commitment to Him by taking us through the test, the trials, the adversities of life.

### 3. Patience can work out into maturity.

It is obvious that James sees that ability to bear up under as one of the key elements of spiritual maturity. He describes it this way in the text when he says, "Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete." In other words there must be the full development of this endurance, perseverance, or steadfastness in us or there could never be real, real, genuine spiritual maturity.

The underlying truth, the conviction that we need to hold on to is that God is at work in everything that happens to us moving us toward His goal of spiritual maturity.

## **III. WE SHOULD JOYFULLY WELCOME ANYTHING THAT WILL MOVE US TO MATURITY.**

This brings us at last to the beginning of our text. The text opens with the admonition, "Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds."

1. How we respond to hard situations is a choice.

James assumes that you do have a choice. You do not have choice about what will happen to you, but you do have a choice about how you will respond to what happens to you. In the ultimate sense what happens to us is up to God. I know we could talk about secondary causes but to the Christian there is really just one ultimate cause. The Christian approaches life with a conviction that God is sovereign and is in charge. They see what ever comes into their lives as coming by divine will. So how will we respond to those things that happen to us? We do have a choice!

2. God's purpose is accomplished as we choose to rejoice by faith in the good that will come from it.

This is the part that catches our attention. We are not naturally inclined to welcome adversities. Our natural inclination will be to lock the door. Our natural inclination is to hide from them, to try to escape from them. James says that the wise approach, the practical approach, is to open your arms and to embrace the adversities as a friend.

This embracing of the adversities will not take the pain out of the adversities. Paul's thorn in the flesh will still hurt, even though he embraces it as something that God will bring

good out of. We rejoice not that we are suffering, but we rejoice in our confidence in God that he will bring good out of our suffering.

Can you rejoice in what is going on in your life right now? Are you confident that our God can bring good out of the circumstances in which you find yourself? Doug Goins, one of the pastors of the Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California, tells about a woman he met when he was in Junior High School. She lived about four doors down on his street in Seattle, Washington. Let me just read you his report:

"Her name was Helen Hayworth Lemmel. She was in her nineties. She had been born and raised in wealth in England and was well known as a songwriter. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Lemmel probably wrote 70 or 80 Christian hymns and gospel songs that were popular in the 1920's through the early 1950's. Mrs. Lemmel had married into nobility; her husband was an English Lord, but she was stricken with blindness as a very young woman and her husband divorced her because he did not want to be married to a blind woman. I do not know all the circumstances, but some how she ended up destitute in Seattle, Washington, a ward of King County living in a tiny room in a home where the rent was paid by the county. Every time we would visit her or she would come to our home, we would ask her how she was doing, and she would always say, "I am fine in the things that count." That's a godly person's response to things that could be embarrassing or humiliating.

One final thing about Helen Lemmel: she had in her room a little plastic organ on a table. It was like a child's cord organ. She would play that organ and cry and sing. She had this vision of getting to heaven and having a mighty, thundering pipe organ to play. She did not see the little plastic organ as a disadvantage. It was just a foretaste of glory. This was a down payment on what God was going to do for her, and she counted on that. Another of her sayings was, "I can hardly wait!" You probably know the most famous song that Mrs. Lemmel wrote:

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus.  
Look full into His wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim  
In the light of glory and grace."

Going through hard times doesn't have to give us hard hearts. If we will embrace the hard things that come our way with joyful anticipation of what God is going to do through them, God will faithfully move us toward his ultimate goal of spiritual maturity. He will work through those things to prepare us for a place of honor and glory in His eternal kingdom.

Isn't that practical? Adversities are going to come! When they come these three practical convictions will help you - - -

First, God has as His goal for us spiritual maturity.

Second, God works through the things that happen to us to move us toward spiritual maturity.

Third, we cooperate with God in what He is doing when we joyfully welcome the adversities that come our way.