



EQSAINTS

Enduring Trials

Bible verses: James 1:2-6, 12-13

Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. And let perseverance be perfect, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and he will be given it. But he should ask in faith, not doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed about by the wind.

Blessed is the man who perseveres in temptation, for when he has been proved he will receive the crown of life that he promised to those who love him. No one experiencing temptation should say, "I am being tempted by God"; for God is not subject to temptation to evil, and he himself tempts no one.

Ask everyone in the group to have their Bibles with them. Ask one person to read the passage out loud. Encourage them to have their pens and to underline things that strike them, especially later in the Bible when you go through the key words and phrases. Also, encourage them to make notes.

After the reading of the passage is complete, explain the context.

Context:

Tradition says that James, who was a relative of Jesus, was the author of this letter and he was also the leader of the Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem. There was a reason Jesus was killed in Jerusalem. At the time, Jerusalem and the other areas where the Jews lived were taken over by Romans and had become part of the Roman Empire. Obviously, the Jewish people did not like that, and many were plotting for a way to overthrow the Romans to push them out. They wanted to govern themselves, not be governed by foreigners. The Romans perceived Jesus to be just another political figure who was trying to get a mob together to drive them out of Jerusalem. Because they saw him as a threat, the Romans executed Jesus.

After his death, the tensions between the Jews and the Romans did not end. Instead, things got more complicated as a new group emerged, Jews who became followers of Jesus even after his death. For the next 40 years, the Romans, the Jews, and the Jewish Christians were at odds with each other until the Romans destroyed the Jewish Temple in the year 70 AD. While it was hard to be a Jew during these years, the Jewish Christian faced persecution from both the Romans and the Jewish leaders.

The persecution from the Romans happened in this way. Every Sunday after Jesus rose from the dead, the Christians in Jerusalem would go to Jesus's tomb and have the Eucharist. The Romans kept trying to put a stop to them coming there until the year 60, when they leveled the tomb to the ground and built a pagan temple on top of the spot.

The persecution from the Jews happened in this way as an example. Even after the tomb of Jesus was destroyed and a pagan temple was built on top of it, the Jewish Christians continued to worship together in homes and in other places. The Jews perceived the existence of Jews who were following Jesus as a threat to what they saw as the correct way to worship and honor God. In the year 62 AD, James, the leader of the Christians in Jerusalem and the believed author of this letter, was stoned to death by the Jews.

When James is writing to address people undergoing trials, he was writing from his experiences as the leader of Christians who felt the heat of persecution from two sides: first, from the ruthless Romans and, second, from Jewish establishment. Both of these groups viewed the Christian community as a threat to their existence.

After explaining the context, ask some to read the passage to the group again. When the reader has finished, go back through and highlight the key words and phrases found below.

Key New Testament Words and Phrases:

- *Joy*: Found in verse 2, the Greek word "chara" (KAH-rah) is the root of the English word "cheerful."
- *Trials, Temptation and Tempted*: Found in verses 2, 12, and 13, each of these words has the same root in Greek, "peirazo" (pi-RAHD-zoh). It means to have one's hidden reality come to light through adversity or difficulty.
- *Perseverance*: Found in verses 3, 4, and 12, the Greek root word is "hypomono" (hoo-poh-MEHN-oh). It means to cheerfully endure.
- *Perfect and Complete*: Found in verse 4, the Greek root word is "teleos" (TEL-ee-ohs). It means to reach the intended goal.
- *Faith*: Found in verse 6, the Greek word is "pistis" (PEES-tees). It is the kind of faith that shows complete trust or confidence.
- *Doubting or Doubts*: Found in verse 6, the Greek root word is "diakrínō" (dee-ah-KREE-noh). It means to be separated from.

Now you may provide the following interpretation.

Interpretation:

We may not be persecuted in the same way as the early Christians of the ancient Mideast, but each of us face difficulties and adversity. It would be wrong to think that God is the source of these difficulties; nonetheless, God can use these difficulties.

God has a vision of what we are to become. When we reach that goal and fulfill his vision for our lives, then we have become complete, or as it is often interpreted, we have become perfected.

The adversity and difficulties that we face should not be a source of dread. Instead, we should face these with a cheerful confidence. While God did not send these things to us to afflict us, God can use these to reveal things about us that we would not know otherwise. The things that we have to go through can be very revealing. They can reveal our character and show us how we are progressing along the road to being the person that God has envisioned us to be.

In order to be cheerful during these times, we need to have trust in God. We need to draw more closely to him and not separate ourselves from him. This is not just a blind faith or generic belief that a God exists somewhere "out there." Instead, our belief in God is a belief in his goodness. He did not send us these difficulties, but our faith is the belief that he is using everything and has the ability to use anything to bring about his work in our lives.

Application to Real Life:

- What are some of the difficulties that you are going through right now? How is social distancing affecting you?
- Have found yourself blaming God or getting angry with God about what we're going through?
- On a scale from 1 - 10, with 1 being absolute misery and 10 being the height of ecstasy, how cheerful are you right now?
- What do you think you are learning about yourself during this time?
- What do you think God is doing inside of you? How do you think you can cooperate with what he is doing inside of you?

Closing Prayer:

Ask someone else to read James 1:2-6, 12-13 for a final time and then pray the following prayer.

God our Father, we place our trust in the work that you are doing inside of us through adversity. We believe that nothing can stop you from creating us into the people you envision us to be. War, financial hardship, and even disease cannot stop you. We place our confidence in this fact, and we trust you with our lives. We offer this prayer to you Father, through your Son, Jesus, and in communion with the Holy Spirit. Amen.