

June 4, 2017

Single-minded in Adversity, James1:1-12

James' plan for growing a steadfast faith may echo a "no pain, no gain" declaration. It states, we are to rejoice in adversity when we can, and ask God for wisdom when we can't. In between -- we trust that God is good -- believing the very hurt that wounded can bring about a beneficial character it lacked. This brother of Jesus and shepherd of persecuted Christians in Jerusalem, instructs us to practice the discipline of believing a path of adversity leads to a single-minded faith centered on God's goodness and generosity.

1. Rejoice in adversity when you can – the plan.

James wants us to have a "sticky-kind" of faith. In the command that joy will result from "many kinds" of trials, an accounting term is used in the Greek. Thus, despite the type or source of adversity, we are to take "in account" all the factors, and conclude that on the whole...God has our best interest at heart. We practice this mindset to develop a steadfastness, or perseverance in our faith. It is a necessary element of a mature faith, making us more like Jesus, and more compelling to others who need the gospel. God uses adversity to mature...to complete...and even to sweeten...his people.

2. Ask God for wisdom when you can't – the backup plan.

When we can't get to joy on our own, we are to ask God for His perspective. Ask for the wisdom not only to see our trial from His perspective, but to see God for who He is as well -- good and generous! A single-minded faith is one focused only on God's perspective, not shared between His and the world's point of view. So when we ask – be unwavering in our resolve – that God's way (the purpose and plan and path of God) is the very best – even if suffering is involved.

3. Rejoice no matter where you are in life – an example to live it out.

Whether rich or poor... rejoice. As for the poor, the adversity of poverty makes you more open for spiritual blessing as you are less distracted by possessions. As for the rich, you will rejoice when you become aware, in humility, that you are not self-made, nor self-sufficient. No matter the position, may we consider all these things and conclude to live a life with God's kingdom in full view!

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe the difference between "happy" and "joy"? Correlate the important distinction to the "joy in trials" discussion. (Hint: James isn't calling us to emote, but to calculate).
2. Why is adversity essential to the development of one's faith?
(See Romans 5:2-4, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; Isaiah 43:10)
3. Why is it critical to understand God's nature when we are faced with adversity?
(See John 10:14; Psalm 46:1; Psalm. 107:1; Psalm 145:13; Isaiah 41:10)
4. Share a personal experience of adversity that gave you a new understanding or a deepened faith you wouldn't otherwise have without it?
5. Share a current experience perhaps yet without the "totality of understanding?"
6. How can our church community be a resource to help carry each other through times of adversity? (See Rom. 8:35, 37-39 and circle the words "we" and "us").