

## JAMES 1:2-8

### ACT LIKE MEN! STEADFAST!

“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”<sup>1</sup>

**I**n previous messages in this series, we’ve explored duty and courage, qualities that should mark the child of God. We’ve seen that these qualities should especially mark the lives of men who wish to be identified as followers of the Master. Now, we will consider yet another quality that should characterise the people of God—steadfastness or endurance. The word translated “steadfastness” in our text, is the Greek term *hupomoné*. The word is variously translated throughout this English Standard Version of the Bible by “endurance” or “patience.” This knowledge provides us with a somewhat fuller understanding of what the first readers would have understood James to be saying.

The word *hupomoné* is a favourite of the Apostle Paul; he uses this particular word more frequently than any other writer of Scripture. The word spoke of the capacity to continue to bear up under difficult circumstances.<sup>2</sup> In that respect, it is apparent that the word appealed to Paul, perhaps primarily because of his concept of manly service. Paul frequently compared Christian service to the conduct of a soldier. He spoke of his co-workers as “fellow soldiers,” as he did when speaking of Archippus [**PHILEMON 2**] and Epaphroditus [**PHILIPPIANS 2:25**].

Seeking to encourage a young pastor, Paul invited him to join in suffering—suffering that was comparable to the discomfort and danger a Legionnaire would have been called to endure in the course of completing the duties he would be assigned. To Timothy, the Apostle has written, “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him” [**2 TIMOTHY 2:3, 4**]. No matter the manner in which the word may be translated into our English tongue, the overarching concept that is conveyed is undoubtedly the attitude of fortitude, of endurance, of dependable firmness.

As an aside, we admire those brave men who endure hardship to accomplish a hard task. We admire the man who endures the training to be qualified for duty within the ranks of those identified as Special Forces. We admire the constable who endures hardship pursuing a criminal to bring him to justice. We admire the individual who sacrifices while enduring opposition and hardship in order to bring a company out of financial distress and to ensure solvency. Similarly, we should admire that conscientious follower of the Master who speaks the truth in love, refusing to be turned aside from living a righteous and godly life while eschewing every inducement to do what is wicked. We admire the Christian who stands firm in truth.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>2</sup> See Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, Vol. 1, **Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains**, electronic ed. of the 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (United Bible Societies, New York, NY 1996) 307

**THE CERTAINTY OF TRIALS** — Let me emphasise what is assuredly be a common theme from the messages I have presented: Christians can expect opposition because they are Christians. The cautionary statements have been presented multiple times in messages I have delivered. Nevertheless, it is to the benefit of all who listen to hear some of these statements once again.

First, think of Paul's blunt statement to believers at the conclusion of the first missionary journey. "When [the missionaries] had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" [ACTS 14:21, 22]. Take special note of the "encouragement" given to these new Christians—through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God!

The word translated "tribulations" is the Greek term *thlipsis*. It conveys the idea of trouble involving direct suffering.<sup>3</sup> It is affliction causing pain. In light of this, let's look again at the Apostle's statement. "We must suffer many things to enter God's Kingdom," is one recent translation.<sup>4</sup> Another Bible that I frequently cite renders Paul's warning, "It is necessary to pass through many troubles on our way into the Kingdom of God."<sup>5</sup> Thus, it would appear certain that those early Christians understood that because they were followers of the Master they would face opposition and lives marked by pain.

By no means was this the only time Paul spoke of suffering. In what may have been the earliest letter from the Apostle to have been included in the canon of Scripture, Paul wrote the Thessalonian Christians, "We sent Timothy, our brother and God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know" [1 THESSALONIANS 3:2-4]. In this passage, Paul uses the identical word he used at the conclusion of his first missionary tour. It seems reasonable to conclude that warning of afflictions was a part of the apostolic message. Since this is true, one wonders what a similar warning is not integral to the call to follow Christ today.

Paul was not at all reticent in acknowledging the suffering experienced by believers when he corresponded with them. He spoke of pending judgement for those who were persecuting the Thessalonians, acknowledging that these saints were even then suffering [2 THESSALONIANS 1:5].

Writing Timothy, Paul even quoted a hymn that was likely sung among the faithful. "The saying is trustworthy, for:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;  
if we endure, we will also reign with him;  
if we deny him, he also will deny us;  
if we are faithless, he remains faithful—

for he cannot deny himself" [2 TIMOTHY 2:11-13]. Note the second strophe: "If we endure, we will also reign with Him." The Apostle sought to encourage Timothy, and those over whom Timothy was appointed to exercise oversight, by insisting that endurance, or steadfastness, was expected of those who wish to reign with the Master!

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<sup>3</sup> Louw-Nida, op. cit., 242

<sup>4</sup> **The Everyday Bible: New Century Version** (Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN 2005)

<sup>5</sup> **The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version** (Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN 2009)

I invite you to think of one final statement Paul wrote to Timothy. He reflects on his own service and suffering, inviting Timothy to consider the cost of following the Master. “You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me.” Now, take special note of this final statement Paul included for Timothy’s consideration. “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived” [2 TIMOTHY 3:10-13].

Nor should anyone imagine that Paul was alone in warning believers of persecution. Peter, especially, presents the necessity of anticipating difficult times to those who would pursue the Master. Listen to his warning to those who would serve as he draws his first letter to a close. “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” [1 PETER 5:6-10].

His admonition to the overseers of the flock flows out of an earlier, dismaying statement. “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And

‘If the righteous is scarcely saved,  
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?’

“Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good” [1 PETER 4:12-19].

As he opened the Book that would become known as The Apocalypse, the Apostle of Love spoke of his relationship to other believers. Listen to his description of his situation in REVELATION 1:9. “I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” John was banished to Patmos “on account of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” Therefore, he was a “partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus.” He was sharing in the *thlipsis* that all Christians were then experiencing.

The idea that those who follow the Master would suffer on their own was not some novel invention of the Apostles—they received this teaching from Jesus Himself. Jesus told Ananias as he was dispatched to instruct Saul of Tarsus, “I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of My Name” [ACTS 9:16]. What a call! “Paul, come follow Me! Oh, by the way, you are going to suffer terribly just to be my disciple!” Who would follow such a Master today?

Preparing the Apostles for His exodus, Jesus spoke of the suffering they could anticipate, “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” [JOHN 16:33]. This statement followed His stern warning that I have often cited; it is found in John 15:18-16:4. On another occasion, Jesus spoke of the difficulties that will arise because one is His disciple. “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.” This was undoubtedly unsettling for these disciples. However, the final statement must surely have demonstrated the serious nature of what was said. “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master” [MATTHEW 10:16-24]. Did you notice that Jesus said, “When they persecute you,” rather than saying “If they persecute you?” He anticipated that those who follow Him will be persecuted; they will experience trials.

On another occasion, the disciples had witnessed a man of wealth turn away because Jesus would not make it easy to follow Him. When Jesus explained the difficulties entailed in following Him, Peter nearly exploded, “See, we have left everything and followed you.” Clearly, he was angling to get at least a compliment, though it seems he was hoping for assurance that following the Master would be rewarded. What he got in answer to his effort was what he had hoped for, but it included a disturbing and unanticipated addition. “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first” [MARK 10:29-31]. Did you catch that? The disciples would receive rich rewards for following Christ; however, attending those rewards are persecutions. Undoubtedly, the answer Jesus gave these men was disquieting. We want to imagine that we will be rewarded for what we deem to be sacrifice. We do not, however, expect that something as innocuous as being identified as a follower of Jesus should invite opposition or persecution. We should not experience pain or loss because we become Christians, in popular thought as disseminated from many modern pulpits.

Suffering because one is a Christian should not surprise anyone. Jesus warned His disciples that they would face trials—suffering, opposition, pain and pressure. That warning was echoed by Peter and by Paul; such persecution was assuredly experienced by each of the Apostles. Life as an Apostle of Jesus was hard. Early writers assert that Peter was crucified head downward. James the Son of Zebedee was beheaded by Herod Agrippa [ACTS 12:1, 2]. John was exiled to Patmos, and is said to have died sometime after his exile. Tradition says Andrew was crucified in Achaia and Thomas was killed by lancers either in Persia or in India. James, son of Alphaeus, was thrown from the Temple by the scribes and the Pharisees before being stoned and beaten to death with a fuller’s club. Jude was martyred in what is today Iran.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> “How did the 12 apostles die?”, Amazing Bible Timeline, [http://agards-bible-timeline.com/q6\\_apostles\\_die.html](http://agards-bible-timeline.com/q6_apostles_die.html), accessed 3 May 2012

Late traditions state that Bartholomew, also known as Nathanael, met his death by being flayed, or skinned alive before being beheaded.<sup>7</sup> Tradition states that Matthew, identified as Levi in the Gospels, was stabbed to death in Ethiopia. Likewise, tradition says that Matthias was burned to death in Syria. Philip was said to have been arrested and executed with great cruelty in Carthage. Simon the Zealot was killed in Persia because he refused to sacrifice to the Persian sun god.<sup>8</sup> Paul is said to have been beheaded in Rome. His last letter to Timothy indicates his anticipate of and readiness for this fate [2 TIMOTHY 4:6-8]. There is no question but that it was risky to be known as a follower of the Master in those early days; and there is still a terrible cost attached to being identified as a Christian in many places! If the reticence of professing Christians to identify openly as followers of the Master is any indication, it is becoming increasingly hazardous to be identified as a Christian in our modern world.

**THE CONSEQUENCE OF TRIALS** — James urges readers to rejoice when undergoing trials. The reason for such joy is our anticipation of what results from the trials we are called to face. “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” [JAMES 1:2-4].

James’ statement anticipates the opening words Peter would use when writing to believers of the Diaspora. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls” [1 PETER 1:3-9].

Trials— pain, suffering and difficulties because you are a Christian—is not wasted. Especially is this true if you understand that God uses such painful times to the praise of His glory. Peter says that what is being exposed with increasing clarity through every trial is the genuineness of the believer’s faith. Moreover, as we pass through the various trials we encounter, we are being prepared for eternity. The prospect of heaven becomes more precious and the hold this world has on us is increasingly relaxed. No one enjoys the pain we experience when we are tested; but it can be a source of comfort if we understand that our Master has permitted such trials to come for a purpose. I have often comforted my soul with the knowledge that we serve a God who is too good to needlessly hurt His child and too wise to make a mistake.

Christ made a precious promise that is easy for us to overlook. When He commissioned us to advance His cause, He appended a precious promise. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” [MATTHEW 28:19, 20].

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<sup>7</sup> Christian Classics Ethereal Library, “Fate of the Apostles,” <http://www.ccel.org/bible/phillips/CN500APOSTLES%20FATE.htm>, accessed 3 May 2012

<sup>8</sup> Prayer Foundation, “How the Apostles Died,” [http://www.prayerfoundation.org/how\\_apostles\\_died.htm](http://www.prayerfoundation.org/how_apostles_died.htm), accessed 3 May 2012

When I read those words, I remember the promise that Isaiah penned. Though the words were specifically spoken to Israel, there is no question but that they apply to God's people today.

“Now thus says the LORD,  
he who created you, O Jacob,  
he who formed you, O Israel:  
‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name, you are mine.  
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;  
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you.’”

[ISAIAH 43:1, 2]

John Rippon seized upon these words when writing one of the best loved hymns of the Faith.

When through the deep waters I call thee to go,  
The rivers of woe shall not thee overflow;  
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,  
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.

When through fiery trials thy pathways shall lie,  
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;  
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design  
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

Even down to old age all My people shall prove  
My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love;  
And when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn,  
Like lambs they shall still in My bosom be borne.

The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,  
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;  
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,  
I'll never, no never, no never forsake.<sup>9</sup>

God has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” [HEBREWS 13:5].

So James tells us that the trials we experience redound to God's glory and to our good. Specifically, the brother of our Lord says that when we are tested we witness God at work instilling steadfastness into our lives. If we will but permit the steadfastness to produce its full effect, we will be made perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. When we intervene to deliver young believers from the pressures of life, many times we short circuit the maturation process. We need to be sensitive to the work of God in each life, permitting His Spirit to bring to completion what He intends rather than attempting to deflect every trial. Of this we may be assured, God is at work in every situation bringing glory to His Name through us.

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<sup>9</sup> John Rippon, “How Firm a Foundation,”

This is the import of Paul's assessment of the trials believers experience. "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

"The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified" [ROMANS 8:18-30].

All things! Not some things. All things! Not just the pleasant things. All things work together for good! To reflect the character of the Master we will need endurance. And though if He desired to do so, God could simply give us the endurance we need to be conformed to the image of His Son, it pleased Him to use the trials of life to instill in us the steadfastness, the endurance, the perseverance that marks the saints who transform the world in which they live.

I was deeply grieved this week past when I read of the son of a great preacher who appears to be turning from the vigorous pursuit of righteousness. The man of whom the report was given is in his own right a notable preacher. However, he is surrendering his steadfastness. He joins a growing list of big names that once stood in opposition to wickedness and who are now willing to surrender their secure position. He once preached the transforming grace of the True and Living God, though he seems no longer to wish to appear hostile to the growing evil of this fallen world. It is as though he forgot the warning that James penned, "You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" [JAMES 4:4].

You see, when you are assaulted because of your adherence to the Faith, the Master says there is a blessing that those assailing you can never understand. Here is the Master's statement. "[Jesus] lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said:

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

"Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.

"Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.

"Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets" [LUKE 6:20-23].

Among the Beatitudes are recorded these final blessings. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" [MATTHEW 5:10-12].

Dear people, I cannot stress too much that your trials, and trials shall come, your trials are not superfluous, they are not gratuitous. God is at work, watching the refining process to ensure that through the fires that burn he will bring forth pure gold from that which is base and of no value in eternity. God is even now stamping His character indelibly on your life. The work He has begun in you will be complete at the return of Christ the Lord. When He comes, His glorious work will be seen as perfect, and your character shall be perfected. If we could but see one another as we shall be when He returns, we would undoubtedly fall down in awe, praising God who even now is carrying out this glorious work. “I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” [PHILIPPIANS 1:6].

**CONFRONTING OUR TRIALS** — “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

The context is the trials through which we pass. The completed process will result in praise to God who oversees the process. At the present time, we are called to face up to the trials we will encounter, embracing God’s work in the trials so that we may obtain endurance, so that we may become steadfast. We do this because we know that when the process is complete, we will be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. Take a moment to note a truth over which we may elide if incautious. Note that James does not tell us that he is revealing a secret that he has discovered; James says, “You know!” The truth that he gives here is not mere theory; the source of godly endurance is experientially known to each one who is a Christian.

The mature Christian does not register surprise when trials come, crying out, “Why did this happen to me?” The mature Christ accepts that God has permitted the trial to come and that God will also be with her in the midst of the trial. The mature saint is confident that the Master will supply strength and wisdom; he needs but ask in order to receive the wisdom God supplies. James is teaching us to be realists when it comes to trials in life.

Let me say that the great Christian, the one exhibiting outstanding character and maturity, is the mother who has lost a child, and yet is able to say to God, “You gave; You took away. Blessed be your Name.”

It is the single mother who despite feeling rejected by her friends who think her a threat, continues to serve God because He is worthy of her best service that shows maturity.

The man who is able to provide sound counsel in the midst of life’s storms is that man who despite having laboured for the benefit of a company for long years is laid off. Then, when he goes home that evening after being dismissed by the firm, says to his wife and children, “Let’s take time to thank God for the opportunity to trust Him. I don’t know how this will turn out, but I know that God will not make a mistake.”

The young man, determined that he will be pure though his friends insist that everyone is doing it, is the one who reveals the understanding of God’s perfect work.

The teenager that is growing toward maturity is the young woman or the young man who, seated in a great lecture hall and hearing a speaker curse the Faith and ridicule anyone who has faith, stands and purposefully walks out despite catcalls and mockery. That young person who purposes in her heart, or in his heart, “I will not sacrifice my standards for momentary respite. Though my peers may shun me, I will do what is right.” She, or he, is the mature one.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See Charles R. Swindoll, **Insights on James and 1 & 2 Peter** (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 2010) 29



If we boldly face our trials, we do so knowing that we are co-operating with God. He permitted us to enter into the trials; He will be with us in the trials. We are called to face them boldly, not shrinking from difficulty. Moreover, we must not circumvent the process. This is the intent of James' statement that steadfastness must "have its full effect." The perfecting and completing that must take place requires us to continue boldly in the midst of the trial.

As we mature in Christ, we understand that life consists of trials of various kinds; none of us are exempted. The mushroom springs up overnight, and just as quickly rots. The oak, however, grows but a few inches each year; the oak endures and gives its shade for long years. All who seek to grow up in Christ will take a long view of what is happening, and the mature Christian will seek wisdom to honour Him who directs our lives.

Our world seeks happiness, and does not know where to look. The mature Christian seeks wisdom, realising that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found in Him who is our Master [see **COLOSSIANS 2:2,3**]. If we understand what James is teaching, we must jettison all contemporary notions of wisdom, which are intimately tied to immediate gratification in order to realise that we are promised that which is eternal and that even now we are being fitted for that which has been promised. We are not called to some morbid fascination with tragedy; rather, we are called to seek God's face when life seems darkest. We are called to seek and discover God Himself standing with us in the midst of our trial.

May I summarise the message by making two powerful assertions? ***Trials make the Christian spiritually tough.*** "You know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness." If we have no trials, we quickly become flaccid, flabby, undependable, incapable of enduring under pressure. ***Spiritual toughness lays the foundation for dynamic maturity in the child of God.*** "Let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." Let the Christian boldly face the trials that come, seeking the presence of the Master in the trial. In doing this, the believer is made mature and enabled to build up others.

The hour is almost gone. It is necessary for us to conclude. And yet, I know that for some who listen, the difficult trial begins anew when you leave this place. Perhaps it will be a challenge arising as your family disintegrates. Perhaps it will be a constant temptation from which there seems to be no respite. Perhaps it will be to return to a painful condition that you are called to endure. It is even possible that you will face fears that would surprise those who know you; and yet, those fears are disturbingly real. What I know is that just as it is true for each one that "The heart knows its own bitterness" [**PROVERBS 14:10**], so it is also true that God assures us that "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning" [**PROVERBS 30:5**].

An anonymous poet has written:

When God wants to drill a man  
And thrill a man  
And skill a man,  
When God wants to mold a man  
To play the noblest part;

When He yearns with all His heart  
To create so great and bold a man  
That all the world shall be amazed,  
Watch His methods, watch His ways!

How He ruthlessly perfects  
Whom He royally elects!  
How He hammers him and hurts him,  
And with mighty blows converts him

Into trial shapes of clay which  
Only God understands;  
While his tortured heart is crying  
And he lifts beseeching hands!

How He bends but never breaks  
When his good He undertakes;  
How He uses whom He chooses  
And with every purpose fuses him;  
By every act induces him  
To try His splendor out—  
God knows what He's about!<sup>11</sup>

In closing, I suggest a prayer suitable for each believer. Learn it well, for if you are not now undergoing a trial, it is a virtual certainty that you will shortly enter into a time of trial. "Lord, I don't ask for trials, because I know they will come as part of my daily walk. I do ask for a joyful attitude when I encounter trials. Help me to grow through trials into maturity. Amen." Amen, indeed.

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<sup>11</sup> Anonymous, "When God Wants to Drill a Man," <https://thetruthrenaissance.wordpress.com/2010/09/14/poetry-when-god-wants-to-drill-a-man/>, accessed 3 May 2012