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# BIBLE TEACHINGS

## TURNING DIFFICULTIES Into Advantages

James 1:1-12

*“When life hands you  
a lemon, make  
lemonade!”*



DR. EVERTON I. ANDERSON

## **Turning Difficulties into Advantages**

(James 1:1-12)

### **INTRODUCTION**

Printed slogan (witticism), etc., are permitted in the majority of democratic countries. Some are cleverly amusing others do not provoke a smile. Perhaps you have seen the bumper sticker that reads, *"When life hands you a lemon, make lemonade!"* It is easier to smile at the statement than to practice it, but the basic philosophy is sound. In fact, it is biblical. Throughout the Bible are people who turned defeat into victory and trial into triumph. Instead of being victims, they became victors. James tells us that we can have this experience today. No matter what the trials may be on the outside (1:1-12) or the temptations on the inside (1:13-27), through faith in Christ we can experience victory. The result of this victory is spiritual maturity.

If we are going to turn sufferings into success, we must obey four imperatives: **count** (1:2), **know** (1:3), **let** (1:4 and 9-11), and **ask** (1:5-8). Or, to put it another way, there are four essentials for victory in trials: a joyful attitude, an understanding mind, a surrendered will, and a heart that wants to believe. These basic responses will frame our outline.

### **Study Outline:**

- I. Count – *a Joyful Attitude.*
- II. Know – *an Understanding Mind.*
- III. Let – *a Surrendered Will.*
- IV. Ask – *a Heart that wants to Believe.*

**Supplementary Passage:** Psalm 13.

### **I. Count – A Joyful Attitude (1:2)**

#### **A. Outlook determines outcome, and attitude determines action.**

God tell us to expect trials. It is not *"if you fall into various testing"* but *"when you fall into various testing."* The believer who expects his/her Christian life to be easy is in for a shock. Jesus warned His disciples, *"In the world ye shall have tribulation"* (John 16:33). Paul told his converts that *"we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God"* (Acts 14:22). Because we are God's *'scattered people'* and not God's *'sheltered people;'* we must experience

trials. Some trials come simply because we are human – sickness, accidents, disappointments, even seeming tragedies. Other trials come because we are Christians. Satan fights us, the world opposes us, and this makes for a life of battle.

The phrase *'fall into'* does not suggest a stupid accident. In the Greek the words are translated *'encounter, come across.'* A Christian certainly should not manufacture trials. The Greek word translated *'divers'* means *'various, varicolored.'*

Peter uses the same word in 1 Peter 1:6

*"Ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations."*

*The trials of life are not alike; they are like variegated  
yarn that the weaver uses to make a beautiful rug.  
God arranges and mixes the colors and experiences  
of life. The final product is a beautiful thing for His glory.*

The key terminology for a right understanding of the text is the word *'count.'* It is a financial term, and it means *'to evaluate.'* Paul used it several times in Philippians 3. When Paul became a Christian, he evaluated his life and set new goals and priorities. Things that were once important to him became *'dung'* KJV, (v. 8) or *'rubbish'* in the Greek in the light of his experience with Christ.

*When we face the trials of life, we must evaluate them  
In the light of what God is doing for us. This explain why  
the dedicated Christian can have joy in the midst of trials:  
He lives for the things that matters.*

Even our Lord was able to endure the Cross because of *"the joy that was set before Him"* (Heb. 12:2), the joy of returning to heaven and sharing His glory with His church.

## **B. Our values determine our evaluations.**

*If we value comfort more than character, then trials will upset us.  
If we value the material and the physical more than the spiritual, we will not be able to  
"count it all joy."  
If we live only for the present and forget the future, then  
trials will make us bitter, not better.*

Job had the right outlook when he said, *"But He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold"* (Job 23:10).

**C. So, when trials come, immediately give thanks to the Lord and adopt a joyful attitude.**

Do not pretend, do not try self-hypnosis; simply look at trials through the eyes of faith. Outlook determines outcome; to **end** with joy, **begin** with joy. "But how," we may ask, "is it possible to rejoice in the midst of trials?" The second imperative explains this.

**II. Know – An Understanding Mind (1:3)**

What do Christians know that makes it easier to face trials and benefit from them?

**A. Faith is always tested.** When God called Abram to live by faith, He tested him in order to increase his faith.

*God always tests us to bring out the best; Satan tempts us to bring out the worst.  
The testing of our faith proves that we are truly born again.*

**B. Testing works for us, not against us.**

The word 'trying' can be translated 'approval.' Again, Peter helps us understand it better:

1 Peter 1:7 - *"That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth ..."*

*A gold prospector brings his ore sample into the  
Assayer's office to be tested. The sample itself may  
not be worth more than a few dollars, but the 'approval'  
the official statement about the ore – is worth millions!  
It assures the prospector that he has a gold mine. God's approval of our faith is precious,  
because it assures us that our faith is genuine.*

Trials work for the believer, not against him. Paul said in (Rom. 8:28) *"And we know that all things work together for good"*; and, in (2 Cor. 4:17) *"For our light affliction, which is not but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."*

**C. Trials rightly used help us to mature.**

What does God want to produce in our lives? Patience, endurance, and the ability to keep going when things are tough. In the Bible, 'patience' is not passive acceptance of circumstances. It is courageous perseverance in the face of suffering and difficulty.

*Immature people are always impatient; mature people  
are patient and persistent. Impatience and unbelief usually  
go together, just as faith and patience do.*

Hebrews 6:12 says: *"Be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."* Hebrews 10:36 says, *"For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have*

*done the will of God, ye might receive the promises.” Isaiah 28:16 says: “He that believeth shall not make haste.”*

- God wants to make us patient, because that is the key to every other blessing. The little child who does not learn patience will not learn much of anything else. When the believer learns to wait on the Lord, then God can do great things for him. Abraham ran ahead of the Lord, married Hagar, and brought great sorrow into the home (Gen. 16). Moses ran ahead of God, murdered a man, and had to spend 40 years with the sheep to learn patience (Exod. 2:11ff). Peter almost killed a man in his impatience (John 18:10-11).

- The only way the Lord can develop patience and character in our lives is through trials. Endurance cannot be attained by reading a book (even mine), listening to a sermon, or even praying a prayer. We must go through the difficulties of life, trust God, and obey Him. The result will be patience and character.

- Studying the Bible helps us grow in patience.

*“For whatsoever things were written aforetime*

*Were written for our learning, that through*

*Patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4).*

As we read about Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, and even our Lord, we realize that God fulfills His purposes as we trust Him. There is no substitute for an understanding mind. Satan can defeat the ignorant believer, but he cannot overcome the Christian who knows his Bible and understands the purposes of God.

### **III. Let – A Surrendered Will (1:4, 9-11)**

**A.** God cannot build our character without our cooperation. If we resist Him, then He chastens us into submission. But if we submit to Him, then He can accomplish His work. God is not satisfied with a halfway job. He wants a perfect work and He wants a finished product that is mature and complete.

**B.** God’s goal for our lives is maturity.

It would be a tragedy if our children remained little babies. We enjoy watching them mature, even though maturity brings dangers as well as delights. Many Christians shelter themselves from the trials of life, and as a result, never grow up. God wants the *‘little children’* to become *‘young men,’* and the *‘young men’* He wants to become *‘fathers’* (1 John 2:12-14).

**C.** Paul outlined three works that are involved in a complete Christian (Eph. 2:8-10).

First, there is the work God does *for us*, which is salvation. Jesus Christ completed this work on the cross. If we trust Him, He will save us. Second, there is the work God does *in us*; “For we are His workmanship” (Eph. 2:10). This work is known as *sanctification*: God builds our character and we become more like Jesus Christ, “conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom. 8:29). Third, this work is what God does *through us* – service. We are “created in Christ Jesus unto good works.”

**D.** God builds character before He calls to service. He must work in us before He can work through us. God spent 25 years working in Abraham before He could give him his promised son. God worked 13 years in Joseph’s life, putting him into ‘*various testings*’ before He could put him on the throne of Egypt. He spent 80 years preparing Moses for 40 years of service. Our Lord took three years training His disciples, building their character.

**E.** But God cannot work in us without our consent.

There must be a surrendered will. The mature person does not argue with God’s will; instead, he accepts it willingly and obeys it joyfully (Eph. 6:6). If we try to go through trials without surrendered wills, we will end up more like immature children rather than mature adults. Jonah is an illustration of this. God commanded Jonah to preach to the Gentiles at Nineveh, and he refused. God chastened Jonah before the prophet accepted his commission. But Jonah did not obey God from the heart. He did not grow in this experience. How do we know? Because in the last chapter of Jonah, the prophet is acting like a spoiled child! He is sitting outside the city pouting, hoping that God will send judgment. He is impatient with the sun, the wind, the climbing plant, the worm, and with God.

**F.** One difficult stage of maturity is weaning.

Actually, weaning is a step toward maturity and liberty. Sometimes God has to wean His children away from their childish toys and immature attitudes. God uses trials to wean us away from childish things; but if we do not surrender to Him, we will become even more immature. We have three imperatives from James so far: **count** – a joyful attitude; **know** – an understanding heart; **let** – a surrendered will. He gives a fourth.

#### **IV. Ask – A believing heart (1:5-8)**

The People to whom James wrote had problems with their praying (4:1-3 and 5:13-18).

Note the following:

**A.** When we are going through God-ordained difficulties, what should we pray about? James gives the answers - ask God for *wisdom*.

- The Jewish people were lovers of wisdom, as the Book of Proverbs gives evidence.  
Quote: *"Someone has said that knowledge is the ability to take things apart, while wisdom is the ability to put them together."*

- Wisdom is the right use of knowledge.

All of us know people who are educated fools - they have brilliant academic records, but they cannot make the simplest decisions in life.

- Why do we need wisdom when we are going through trials? (Why not ask God for strength, or grace, or even deliverance?)

- For this reason: we need wisdom so we will not waste the opportunities God is giving us to mature.

- Wisdom helps us understand how to use these circumstances for our good and God's glory.

**B.** James not only explained what to ask for (wisdom), but he also described how to ask.

- We are to ask in faith (v. 6).

- We do not have to be afraid, for God is eager to answer, and he will never scold us! *"He giveth more grace"* (James 4:6). He also gives more and more wisdom.

- The greatest enemy to answered prayer is unbelief.

**C.** James compares the doubting believer to the waves of the sea, up one minute and down the next. You can be sitting on a rock by the ocean, watching the waves and enjoying the sunshine. Then you suddenly hear a sound behind, turned to see who is approaching, and instantly you are drenched by a huge wave! Never turn your back on the waves – they are down, then they are up. This is the experience of the *'double-minded man.'*

- Faith says, "Yes!" but unbelief says, "No!" Then doubt comes along and says "Yes!" one minute and "No!" the next.

- It was doubt that made Peter sink in the waves as he was walking to Jesus (Matt. 14:22-33). Jesus ask him, *"O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"*

When Peter started his walk of faith, he kept his eyes on Christ. But when he was distracted by the wind and waves, he ceased to walk and began to sink. He was double-minded, and he almost drowned.

- Many Christians are like corks on the waves: up one minute, down the next; tossed back and forth. This kind of experience is evidence of immaturity. Paul used a similar idea in Ephesians 4:14 – *"That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about"*



*with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.”* If we have believing and united hearts, we can ask in faith and God will give the wisdom we need. Instability and immaturity go together.

## Summary

James closed this session with a beatitude - *“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation.”* (1:12). This beatitude is a great encouragement because it promises a crown to those who patiently endure trials. Paul often used athletic illustrations in his letters, and James does so here. He is not saying that the sinner is saved by enduring trials. He is saying that the believer is rewarded by enduring trials.

## How is the believer rewarded?

**First**, by growth in Christian character - this is more important than anything else (2 Cor. 9:10; 1 Thess. 3:12; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 1:5-6; 2 Pet. 3:18).

**Second**, He is also rewarded by bringing glory to God and by being granted a crown of life when Jesus Christ returns. First the cross, then the crown. First the suffering, then the glory (1 Cor. 9:25; 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 5:4). God does not help us by removing the test, but by making the tests work for us.

**Third**, Satan wants to use tests to tear us down, but God uses them to build us up (Job 5:17; 23:10; Ps. 17:3; John 10:10; Heb. 12:11).

In verse 12, James used a very important word, **love**.

Why did James use **love** instead of ‘*trust Him*’ or ‘*that obey Him*?’

Because love is the spiritual motivation behind every imperative in this section.

Why do we have a **joyful attitude** as we face trials?

Because we love God, and He loves us, and He will not harm us.

Why do we have an **understanding mind**?

Because He loves us and has shared His truth with us, and we love Him in return.

Why do we have a **surrendered will**?

Because we love Him. Where there is love, there is surrender and obedience.

Why do we have a **believing heart**?

Because, we know that love and faith go together. When you love someone, you trust him, and you do not hesitate to ask him for help.

### ▪ Let’s go back to the weaning.

The child who loves his mother, and who is sure that his mother loves him, will be able to get through the weaning and start to grow up. Likewise, the Christian who loves God and who knows that God loves him will not fall apart when God permits trials to come. He *is secure in God’s love*.



▪ **God's purpose in trials is maturity.**

*"Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing"* (James 1:4). The *Charles B. Williams* translation says it graphically: *"But you must let your endurance come to its perfect product so that you may be fully developed and perfectly equipped."* If that is what you want, then in love to Christ, **count, know, let, and ask.**

"Adversity is not necessarily an evil. Beethoven, composed is deepest music after becoming totally deaf. Pascal set down his most searching observations about God and man, life and death, in brief intervals of release from a prostrating illness."

Robert McCracken

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## Assignment

1. Look over James 1: 1-12 to learn about the benefits of trials. What does it reveal about the spiritual examination in v. 2?

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2. Why does God permit believers' testing, (v. 3)? What about Job who also was perfect - Job1?

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3. The intention of God is that Christians, become mature in the body of Christ. Explain using 1 John 2: 12-17 as your foundation text.

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4. The people to who James wrote were normal Church folks, with numerous defects. But what is there if anything, that we could learn from their difficulties. (See Chap 4: 1-6; 5: 13-18?)



*Chief Editor*

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