

Trials: not “if” but “when”!

I. **INTRO:**

- A. Amy Carmichael, in *Candles in the Dark*, The best training is to learn to accept everything as it comes, as from Him whom our soul loves. The tests are always unexpected things, **not great things** that can be written up, **but the common little rubs of life**, silly little nothings, things you are ashamed of minding (at all). Yet they can knock a strong man over and lay him very low.
- B. In ch1 an important distinction is drawn between: *Trials* which may have positive effects; & *Temptations* which is enticement to evil w/in the human heart.
- C. James is the ½ brother of Jesus; was a devout Jew; a leader in the Jerusalem Church; known as “Camel Knees” because of his prayer life.
1. You can call him *James the Challenger*: as there are **54 Imperatives or commands** in just 108 vs. - **Wow!**
- D. James gives plenty of practical advice on Christian living! (*Christian Living for Dummies!*)
1. It’s the N.T.’s book of Proverbs. You’ll hear bits of the Sermon on the Mnt. And you’ll see many *O.T. word pictures & references*.
 2. James refers to: Abraham, Isaac, Rahab, Job, Elijah; & alludes to 21 OT books
- E. It’s main point: “True Faith, is a Faith that Works!”
1. If we truly practice our faith it will be seen in: **How we Face Trials (ch.1); How we Treat People (ch.2); What we Say (ch.3); How we Deal w/Sin in our Lives (ch.4); How we Pray (ch.5).**
 2. **Or, it can be organized around faith’s response to life:** (Swindoll)
 When Faith is **stretched**, it doesn’t **break!** (ch.1)
 When Faith is **pressed**, it doesn’t **fail!** (ch.2)
 When Faith is **expressed**, it doesn’t **explode!** (ch.3,4)
 When Faith is **distressed**, it doesn’t **panic!** (ch.5)
- F. It deals w/the crucial relationship between **faith & active works!**
1. It’s balancing **right belief w/right behavior**. [Practical religion]
 2. Christianity must not only be *believed*, it must be **lived!**
 3. The type of Christianity that has “no experience of a changed life”, is no Christianity at all!
 4. The proof of real faith is a changed life!
- G. “The true seed of **saving** faith is verified by the **tangible** fruit of **servicing** faith.”¹

¹ J.Ronald Blue, the Bible Knowledge Commentary. Pg.816.

II. TRIALS: Not “if” but “when”!

A. INTRO! (1)

- B. When we were **young** we were full of bruises & scrapes on our knees; when we grow **older** they simply *move inside*!
1. Unfaithful marriage partner, crippling accident, sudden death of someone close.
 2. We may have traded *climbing trees* for *climbing the corporate ladder...but* it still hurts when we fall!
 - a) Job said, **Man who is born of woman Is of few days and full of trouble.** (14:1)
 - b) David said, **Many are the afflictions of the righteous.** (Ps.34:19)
 - c) Paul, **We are hard-pressed on every side...perplexed...persecuted...struck down.**
 - (1) If you were tracing Paul’s journeys in the 1st century, it would be like tracking the path of **a wounded deer** running from a hunter, leaving one bloody trail after another.²
 3. The Jewish Believers(12 tribes) were literally bruised with adversity.
 - a) They were being hunted under the persecution instigated by the **Roman emperor Claudius**. Treated w/hostility by the **Gentiles**. And, by **fellow Jews** who hated them for being Christians.
 - b) **So James goes to work re-setting fractured feelings, disjointed depressions, re-aligning attitudes, & binding bruised spirits w/the Great Physicians truths about troubles!**

C. TRUTH ABOUT TROUBLES? (2-4)

- D. **Story:** Sergeant Kenneth E. Neu was stationed in the U.S. Airborne unit in Germany, where the parachute drop zone was located next to a Mercedes-Benz test track. **One** windy day, a gust of wind blew his parachute over the track. Knowing how hard a landing on asphalt can be, he braced himself, landed and checked for broken bones. **Amazingly, he was fine.** Suddenly the wind inflated Neu’s parachute and started dragging him down the track. He hit the chute’s canopy release and looked up just in time to see a car speeding toward him. Acting quickly, he grabbed his chute and ran to the edge of the track. Out of breath but uninjured, he thought, “*How lucky can I be?*” Relieved, he turned, stepped into a gopher hole and **twisted his ankle.**
- E. **Troubles in a Christian’s life...Why do they exist?**
1. They are a **form of punishment** from God?
 2. They **go away** once you reach a certain level of maturity?

² Charles Swindoll: James; pg.16.

3. There really is **no such thing** as adversity. They are a figment of our imagination, like the boogeyman.

a) **Nope**, let's hear what James has to say.

F. They are **Inevitable!**

1. Note not **"if"** but **"when"**.

2. Peter says, **Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;** (1 Pet.4:12)

G. What kind of trials await us?

1. They will be **various**. [ποικίλος *poi-kee-los*] **Where we get the term *polka-dot*.**

a) We can expect our lives to be *spotted & spattered* w/trials of all **sizes & shapes**.

H. They are **Purposeful!**

1. Experiences that come our way are not accidents.

2. **We have a loving Heavenly Father who** controls the affairs of this world.

3. **We have a loving Heavenly Father who** has a purpose behind each event.

4. **Stop viewing troubles as simply *bothersome offenses* & start seeing them as *tests*.**

5. God is not interested in watching our faith get torpedoed by trails!

a) We must understand **testing!**

(1) It comes from a Greek word *dokimos*, which means **approval!**

(2) **It's a word found on the *underside* of many ancient pieces of pottery unearthed by archeologists in the Near East.**

(a) This mark meant that the piece had gone through the furnace *w/o cracking*; it had been approved!

(b) God's desire is to help the clay vessels created in His image to mature in the furnace of trails **w/o a crack!**

6. **God's initial purpose?** Endurance (**patience**) - Lit. "*to abide under*".

a) *Dokimos* is applied only to those who *persevere*, or *abide under*, the tests He sends

7. Nietzsche said, **"He who has a *why* to live can bear with almost any *how*."**

a) James gave us our **why**(purpose).

b) **Now we can do more than just *bear them* *but* can choose to *grow* through them!!!**

I. Mature(*perfect*) & Complete!

1. **Maturity** is developed only in the *laboratory of life*.

- a) **Joseph**: 13 years of testing, to raise up the Prince of Egypt.
- b) **Peter**: spent 3 years in the school of testing to be changed from sand to rock!
- c) **Paul**: went through many testings, & each one helped to mature his character.

J. Trials can strip away everything **but** our attitude toward them. [3 attitudes:]

1. **1st, Joy** - **not deny the pain & sorrow you feel in a trial; not think positive; not** the shallow advice to *grin & bear it; not don't worry be happy!*
 - a) He does not say that **trial** is all joy, **but** that we are to consider it an opportunity for great joy(NLT).
2. **2nd, Knowing** (3) - knowing they're designed by God for **good**, not evil.
3. **3rd, Let** (4) - meaning *cooperate*. **Give in to the testing. Allow it to do its job in your life!**

K. **WHAT IF YOU DON'T SEE HIS PURPOSE?** (5-8)

L. **Ever flunk any trials?** We **flunk** trials because of: wrong responses; resistant attitudes; & because of temper tantrums demanding instant relief.

1. **This only advances our immaturity & misery.**
2. Why do we have these attitudes because we **lack wisdom & lack faith**.

M. **Lack Wisdom!** *Ask of God*

1. When tests come, especially pop-quizzes, James says immediately pray for help.
2. This is not prayer for wisdom *in general*, but for the ability to view a test from God's perspective.

N. **Lack Faith!** *Ask in faith w/no doubting*

1. James is not referring to *saving faith*, **nor** to a *general kind of trust*. He's advocating a **sustaining faith** that involves complete abandonment to God & His purposes in our trials.
2. **Opposite: double-minded man**. Someone who wants his or her own will **and** God's at the same time.
 - a) It's the **little field mice** that run out into the street, stops goes back, stops goes back the other way, then your car passes right over him.
 - b) **I can kill a fly every time**: The key is coming at it from both directions at once. The fly's *central-nervous-system circuitry* is geared to avoid approaching movement in only 1 part of its visual field at a time. 2 simultaneously approaching threats render the fly immobile, for its central nervous system now cannot compute at which angle to take off.³ [maybe Satan knows we're wired the same way?]

³ [Fly-neuroscience. Dr. Edward Gray of England's University College, London]

O. **ARE TRIALS JUST FOR THE RICH, OR POOR!** (9-11)

P. Trials benefit both groups.

1. Trials remind the **poor** they are *rich in the Lord* & therefore can lose nothing.
2. Trials remind the **rich** they dare not **live for** riches **or trust in** them.

Q. *Mary Kimbrough* composed this poem based in **Job 13:15**, which underscores the wisdom of **trusting God through trial**:

1. Though He slay me, I will trust Him,
Said the sainted Job of old;
Though He try me in the furnace,
I shall then come forth as gold.

Though the 'worms of deep affliction'
Cause this body to decay,
In my flesh I shall behold Him -
My Redeemer - some glad day.

Though He slay me - can I say it
When I feel the searing fire,
When my fondest dreams lie shattered -
Gone my hope and fond desire?

Though He slay me, I will trust Him,
For He knows just how to mold,
How to melt and shape my spirit -
I shall then come forth as gold!

Imagine a **mayfly** spending the entire day weighing itself down w/*treasures*, which must be dropped at sundown when it is no more.