

Those who believe on Jesus become children of God. They are “born again”. Just as with any physical birth we expect growth and maturity to follow a spiritual birth. James, the leading elder of the church in Jerusalem, was moved by the Holy Spirit to write a letter to his Jewish brothers in Christ who had been scattered by persecution to help them mature in Christ and grow in the love of God.

Although the first big persecution stopped when Saul became a follower of Jesus, troubles in life did not stop. Troubles can come from various sources, but because of the persecution it was appropriate that James began with addressing this problem. How should we respond to the trials which come into our lives? How should we help one another respond to these trials? James gives four general exhortations in regard to trials in life.

I. Rightly evaluate the experience (1:2-4).

1. *The meaning of the word “trials”*: “Trials” are the difficult circumstances of life. It is not referring here to the temptation to sin, although trials may tempt us to make sinful responses. The word “trial” basically refers to an experiment, an attempt at something, or the proving of something. Positively it is a test to prove that something is good.
2. *The proper response to “trials”*: Though our tendency is to look at trials negatively, James surprisingly exhorts the reader to “consider it pure joy whenever you face trials.” God calls us to consider difficult situations as something positive rather than something negative. The trial itself may be difficult but God’s intent is good. The believer knows that there is a sovereign and good God who never intends circumstances for evil purposes in the lives of His children.
3. *The purpose of trials in our life*: God allows trials for the “testing of your faith”, to prove that your faith is true or genuine (cf. 1 Peter 1:7). When our faith is proven genuine, it encourages us to continue, that is, to endure or persevere. Endurance is not passively putting up with something but putting out effort to fight against opposition. When our faith is proven true again and again, we are encouraged to stand firm and keep standing. This is the reason why we can view trials with joy.

God works endurance in us to make us “mature and complete” (v 4). We should develop into all that we should be with nothing lacking. Perseverance (or endurance) is necessary to reach this goal of maturity. (Cf. Hebrews 12:1-3; Luke 8:4-15; 2 Peter 1:5-7.) If we wish to grow in our love for one another in Christ, we need perseverance. We need perseverance or endurance, so that we will be lacking in nothing. God allows trials in our lives so that we will grow in endurance and ultimately demonstrate greater love.

II. Request wisdom to respond to trials (1:5-8)

Verse 12 shows that the topic of trials is being continued in verses 5-8. Wisdom is offered to respond rightly to trials.

1. *The meaning of wisdom*: Wisdom needs to be understood in its Jewish background as a correct moral response to the circumstances of life. Cf. James 3:17; Proverbs 9:10.
2. *The need for wisdom*: Although we may know that God’s intents are good, we need to know how to persevere. God invites us to ask Him for such wisdom.
3. *The provision of wisdom*: God graciously offers wisdom to those who ask and who believe without any doubting (v 6). This is not faith in ourselves or our faith, but in God that He exists and rewards those who seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). James commands us to trust that God is sovereign and good and fully in control even in our trials. The one who doubts God is likened to the waves of the sea that are stirred up by the wind. James describes such a person as double-minded, sometimes thinking God can and will help, at other times thinking not. Such an attitude toward God will affect every aspect of a person’s life. Trials will be frightening. Instead of perseverance there will be an increasing sense of hopelessness or panic.

III. Glory in one’s spiritual position, despite economic conditions which might result in trials (1:9-11)

1. *Godly wisdom in responding to poverty*: Poverty and the difficult conditions it brought were a regular trial to believers in the New Testament. A wise response to such trials was to glory in the high spiritual position which all believers have. The believer has all spiritual blessings in Christ in heaven where no one can take it from him. God’s solution for poverty is not material wealth but a right attitude. God wants us to pursue His righteousness which includes taking pride in our high spiritual position.
2. *God’s wisdom for the rich*: It is possible that even the rich Christian suffered persecution, because of his faith in Christ. It is particularly difficult for the rich to turn to Christ (Matthew 19:23-25; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:26-29), but if they do, they should be glad that they were so humbled and no longer deceived by riches (cf. Mark 4:19). The rich should not put their hope and trust in wealth (1 Timothy 6:17), but remember that their lives on earth are short and their riches are transient. Time will take both. It is more important to recognize our spiritual poverty in order to be blessed (Matthew 5:3).

IV. Look toward the reward of perseverance (1:12)

Verse 12 is similar to the Beatitudes (cf. Matthew 5:3-10). “Blessed” refers to a joy in knowing the favor of God. Trials are intended by God to result in the approval of one’s faith (vv 2-3). Genuine faith which shows a true love to God is rewarded by God with the crown of life (v 12). The crown is not eternal life itself, which is a gift of God by grace through faith, but does proclaim that life which is possessed and demonstrated by the one who has persevered.

It is a help in trials to look beyond the immediate circumstances to God’s greater purposes for us. Ultimately God wants to form us to be like Jesus and to crown us with eternal riches. He want us to produce spiritual fruit that brings glory to Him and that enriches our own lives.