

Studies in James

Lesson 3

When Troubles Won't Go Away

INTRODUCTION:

- I. One of the harsh realities of life is that it is filled with hurts, heartaches, pain, problems, disappointments, sickness, suffering, disease and death.
 - A. NO ONE is immune from this harsh reality – not even the Christian.
 1. Sometimes these problems arise, then pass away.
 2. Other times, they NEVER go away.
 - B. EVERY ONE OF US have faced these kinds of situations in our lives.
 1. If you've lived very long on this earth at all:
 - a. You can think back to times when YOU were bruised with adversity – deep within the soul.
 - b. You can remember times when the WALLS were closing in, or when it seemed as if the entire ROOF had collapsed.

2. Some of you may even be experiencing these things in your life RIGHT NOW.
 - a. You may be feeling all the hurt, heartache, the pain, the problems, and the disappointment of some tragic event in your life.
 - b. Others may be experiencing all the suffering that goes along with sickness and disease – your health is failing and there seems to be no way out of the problem. Things just simply AREN'T getting any better.
 - c. And still others are facing harsh reality that your time on this earth is now very limited. You're in the winter of your life, and like the apostle Paul, you know that the time of YOUR departure is at hand.
- C. Although there may not be anything we can do to CHANGE our situation, we're STILL faced with the problem of how to cope with all these troubles – especially those that seem to linger on and on?
 1. How do we struggle with the questions that naturally rise in our minds concerning God's mercy and justice – questions like:
 - a. Why is God allowing these things to happen to me?

- b. What purpose could possibly be served by all the pain and heartache I'm feeling?
 - c. And, why can't my life as a faithful Christian (assuming you ARE a faithful Christian) – why can't my life be filled with GOOD things? Why the BAD?
- D. Men and women have been asking these questions since the beginning of time.
- 1. Even the greatest philosophers have wrestles with these questions for centuries – but they've never found satisfactory answers.
 - 2. Our friends and faithful family members may offer advice and consolation, but none of them have been able to tell us WHY?
- E. And so the dilemma continues. Times arise in life when we are simply OVERWHELMED by troubles and trials.
- 1. King David said, "*Many are the afflictions of the righteous...*"
(Psalms 34:19)
 - 2. Job, who suffered more than any man who ever lived (other than Jesus Christ) said, "*Man... is of few days (his life is short-lived) and full of trouble (turmoil).*" **(Job 14:1)**

3. The apostle Paul spoke of being, "*hard pressed on every side... perplexed (confused, disoriented)... persecuted... struck down.*" **(2 Corinthians 4:8-9)**
4. He also spoke of being, "*burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.*" **(2 Corinthians 1:8)**
 - a. "*Despair*" – Meaning, "at the end of the rope," "no way out," "hopeless."
5. Are you there right now? If you're not, you more than likely will be someday – maybe sooner than you realize.

II. James, the Lord's brother, writes to Christians who are at the end of their rope – those who are facing hopeless situations in their lives.

A. He's writing to people just like us!

1. And, as he was being directed by the Holy Spirit, James addressed this issue of hopelessness – of facing the trials of life – in such a way to give us real, genuine, tangible hope.

B. On the basis of this text, we can find the answers to FOUR important questions to "TROUBLES THAT WON'T GO AWAY:"

1. What is the truth about troubles?
 - a. Does everyone have them?
 - b. What purpose do they serve?

2. How can I rise ABOVE my troubles?
 3. Why do troubles seem to overwhelm me at times?
 4. What promises do I have when I've learned to handle my troubles correctly?
- C. Originally, James wrote to Jewish Christians who were undergoing severe persecutions under Claudius Ceasar, the Roman emperor.
1. But these truths are as valuable to us today as they were to the first century Christian.

BODY:

- I. So, let's begin by examining the first question: "What is the truth about troubles?"
 - A. The very FIRST thing we learn about troubles is that they are INEVITABLE.
 1. **James 1:2** – *"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials..."*
 2. Take a closer look at what James said, *"Count [Consider] it all joy WHEN [not "if"] you encounter various trials?"*
 3. Do you notice something about the CHOICE of words James used here to describe these trials? He called them *"various"* trials.

- a. In the original language, this is the word from which we get our English word "variegated" – meaning multicolored, of many colors or shades or hues, or speckled with color, dotted, or polka dots of color."
 - b. This word means "diversified, spread out, of all different shapes and sizes."
 - c. James is saying our life is SPECKLED and DOTTED with all shapes and sizes of troubles – all colors and hues, all different KINDS of difficulties; everything imaginable.
- B. But the second thing James tells in these verses is that trials serve TWO distinctive purposes in our lives.
1. **James 1:3-4** – Regarding these various trials, James says, *"knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."*
 2. The first purpose of testings or troubles is to help us learn patience.
 - a. The word "*patience*" means "to abide under, to be patient, or endure."

- b. God tests His servants to bring into our lives those circumstances that can teach us something really significant.
 - c. **Romans 5:1-5** – The apostle Paul also learned this.
"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."
3. But perhaps most important, James tells us testings or troubles are intended to "PROVE" us.
- a. **James 1:12** – *"Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved [NIV - "when he has stood the test"], he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."*

b. The word "*approved*" is from the Greek word "dokimos," which has a two-fold application:

(1). The word was often found stamped on the bottom of earthen jars that were intended to house precious manuscripts. It was a "seal of approval," meaning these jars had been through the fire and had not cracked.

(2). The word was also used as a smelting term for some precious metal, like silver or gold, which had been purified by fire -- all the impurities had been removed.

c. In the same way, trials make US "approved."

(1). Troubles and trials enable us to have our spiritual "pots" tested – to see if we're worthy of being entrusted with keeping the sacred word of God and giving it to others.

(2). And if not, then the troubles and trials can rid us of all the impurities that keep us from becoming a "sterling" example of a faithful Christian.

C. This is why James says, "*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds!*" (**James 1:2**)

1. They're God's way of helping us develop the quality of endurance and steadfastness – having the ability to withstand future trials and troubles.
 2. And, they're God's way of proving us – and if we're found lacking, to purge us of all the impurities that will keep us from heaven.
- II. But, we also want to consider this question: "How can I rise above my troubles?"
- A. The answer is found in THREE key words:
1. *"CONSIDER (Count) it pure joy..." (v. 2)*
 2. *"KNOWING that the testing of your faith produces patience (perseverance)" (v. 3)*
 3. *"But let patience have its perfect WORK (result)..." (v. 4)*
- B. Let's take a closer look at these three words.
1. *"CONSIDER (Count) it pure joy..." (v. 2)*
 - a. The term *"CONSIDER"* pertains to "a belief resting not on one's inner feeling or sentiment, but on the due consideration of external grounds, the weighing and comparing, of facts." (Thayer's Greek Lexicon)
 - b. James says we can view trials with *"pure joy"* because we look beyond our own inner feelings or sentiment, to

see the REAL value of trials by looking beyond ourselves – by considering and weighing the facts about trials found in Scripture.

- c. It certainly is not normal for "*pure joy*" to be our first response, but we can cultivate this joy when we understand the REAL value of trials.
2. James goes on to say, "*KNOWING that the testing of your faith produces patience (perseverance).*" **(v. 3)**
 - a. The word "*KNOWING*" means "to understand, perceive, or have knowledge of," (Thayer) and suggests that we can view our trials with the proper mind-set, because we understand their end result is actually designed for our good.
 - b. It's been said, "Nothing happens by accident to the faithful Christian." I don't necessarily think that's true, because Solomon tells us, "*time and chance*" happens to all. **(cf. Eccl 9:11)**
 - c. However, the Christian can view even the worst situations as an opportunity God has granted us to grow in genuine, authentic faith, and to develop an even greater dependence on Him.

3. And finally, James says, "*But let patience have its perfect WORK (result)...*" **(v. 4)**
 - a. The word "WORK" in this passage pertains to anything that is accomplished, or the result of something.
 - b. In essence, James is saying we need to stop fighting and consentrate on PERSEVERANCE. Only then can we allow the testing of our faith to finish work of bringing spiritual maturity.
 - (1). **1 Peter 5:6-7** – "*Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.*"
 - (2). **2 Cor 12:7-10** – "*And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in*

reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

III. But perhaps one of the most important questions we can ask about our trials is this: "Why do troubles seem to overwhelm me at times?"

A. James actually gives two reasons.

1. The first reason troubles overwhelm us at times is because of a lack of wisdom.
 - a. **James 1:5** – *"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him."*
 - b. Trials usually come when we least expect them, and seriously tax our human understanding. No matter how much we rely on human reasoning or human wisdom, we will never find the help we need to adequately endure.
 - c. Therefore, we need to ask for WISDOM – the ability to put to use the knowledge we've gained from God's word, and the ability to realize there is a much bigger reason for the trials and tribulations that come our way.
2. The second reason trials overwhelm us at times is because of a lack of faith.

- a. **James 1:6-8** – *"But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."*
- b. Notice in these verses that James is contrasting FAITH with DOUBLE-MINDEDNESS.
 - (1). A simple definition of "double-minded" would be "wanting to do God's will, while refusing to give up our own!"
 - (a). Not being able to decide what we want more -- God's way or our own way.
 - (2). Double-mindedness is illustrated in the way monkeys are caught.
 - (a). A small quantity of fresh fruit seeds are placed in a gourd which is then tied to a tree. The monkey smells the seeds and slips his hand through a small opening to get a handful. But he can't pull his fist back through the hole. He wants free, but he doesn't want to let go of the seeds.
 - (3). A double-minded man is *"unstable in all his ways."*

- (a). NOTHING will lead to depression and mental instability any faster than being double-minded – wanting to do GOD’S will, but not being willing to let go of our OWN!

IV. So, let’s consider the final question: "What promises do I have when I've learned to handle my troubles correctly?"

A. The first promise is REAL HAPPINESS.

- 1. **James 1:12** – "*Blessed [genuinely happy, happy many times over] is a man who endures temptation [endures trials]...*"

WHY are we genuinely happy, or happy many times over?

- a. First, we experience REAL HAPPINESS because we know the TRUTH about trials.

- (1). They're God's way of making us "*perfect, complete and lacking in nothing.*"

- (2). They are God’s way of producing endurance or patience.

- (3). And, they are God’s way of proving us – removing all the impurities from our lives.

- b. The second reason why we experience REAL HAPPINESS is because we know that we can rise ABOVE our trials.

- (1). When we "CONSIDER" it a joy and stay positive by looking BEYOND our own inner feelings and see the REAL value of trials.
- (2). When we "KNOW" and comprehend that the end result of trials are for our good – for our benefit.
- (3). When we allow God to complete His "WORK" in us through perseverance, these trials bring about the desired result of spiritual maturity and dependence on God

c. And the third reason we can experience REAL HAPPINESS in the midst of trials is because we know WHY trials overwhelm us at times.

- (1). They can overcome us when we lack wisdom – the ability to put use the knowledge we've gained from God's word about trials.
- (2). And, they can overcome us when we are double-minded – wanting to do God's will but not wanting to give up our own.

B. But in addition to experiencing REAL HAPPINESS and JOY when we've learned to handle our trials correctly, we also experience REAL VICTORY.

1. When we have endured trials and temptations, and we have been "*approved*" (proven to be of sterling character because the trials have removed the impurities from our lives), James says we will, "*receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*" (**James 1:12b**)
2. Crowns represent a number of things in Scripture, including:
 - a. A symbol of royalty:
 - (1). **Psalm 21:1-3** – "*The king shall have joy in Your strength, O LORD; and in Your salvation how greatly shall he rejoice! 2 You have given him his heart's desire, and have not withheld the request of his lips. 3 For You meet him with the blessings of goodness; You set a crown of pure gold upon his head.*"
 - b. A symbol of honor and glory:
 - (1). **Prov 1:8-9** – "*My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother; 9 For they will be a graceful ornament (crown or wreath) on your head, and chains (of gold) about your neck.*"
 - (2). **Prov 4:8-9 (NLT)** – "*If you prize wisdom, she will exalt you. Embrace her and she will honor you. 9*"

She will place a lovely wreath on your head; she will present you with a beautiful crown."

- c. And perhaps most importantly, a symbol of victory:
 - (1). **2 Tim 4:7-8** – *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing."*
 - (2). **Rev 2:10** – *"Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."*
- 3. During the midst of even the WORST trials imaginable, we should never forget that when this short life is over, we will receive a crown of VICTORY – given by the Lord Himself.

CONCLUSION:

- I. Every one of us have experienced troubles and trials to some degree in our life.
 - A. But perhaps the three most important questions James wants us to consider are these:
 - 1. How have you handled them in the past?
 - 2. How are you handling them now?

3. How well do you believe you will be able to handle them in the future?

II. Since none of us can escape trials, the only thing we can do is be prepared for them when they come.

A. How are you preparing yourself for the trials that still await you?

1. Some of you haven't faced the greatest trial of your faith yet.

What will it be?

- a. The loss of your husband or wife?
- b. The loss of a child?
- c. The loss of your job?
- d. The loss of your home and all your possessions?
- e. The loss of your health or the loss of the health of someone you love dearly?

B. The Story of Ari Afrizal: Lying on a small wooden plank far out to sea, Ari Afrizal (off-free-ZAL) looked to his left and saw the fiery sun dipping into the horizon. Exhausted, he turned his face the other way and saw a brilliant, full moon rising in the east. All around him, the sea looked like it was sprinkled with leaves of gold, shimmering in the sun's glow. Ari had never seen a more wondrous sight. It was dusk on December 26, 2004, and Ari was adrift in the Indian Ocean.

Earlier that morning, Ari, and a crew of other carpenters, were standing on scaffolding, hammering nails into planks of siding of a large, luxurious beach home being constructed along Sumatra's western coast. When the earthquake struck, the frightened carpenters quickly climbed off the scaffolding, moved away from the house and squatted in the sand. Then the waves started coming. The first wave that washed over the beach was 3 feet high, but strong enough to knock the terrified men off their feet and rip the scaffolding down. But in less than minute later came the big one – a bluish-white wall of water about 30 feet high. Tons of water suddenly engulfed the house. Ari and his fellow carpenters felt themselves churning in the massive wave that carried them 1,500 feet inland. As Ari fought his way to the surface, he slammed against a mango tree and barely managed to grab a branch. But as the tsunami receded, it pulled him under and sucked him out to sea. Swimming desperately to get back to land, he could see the hills of his home receding fast.

Ari swam and floated for an hour before he found a wooden plank about 5 feet long drifting by and he climbed aboard. He also saw five bodies floating past, and not more than 300 feet away two other men were clinging to debris. Eventually they drifted apart and Ari was all alone.

Exhausted, Ari lay on the plank all day, weak and hungry. He soon saw Coconuts drifting nearby that had been caught in the mass of debris swept out to sea by the tsunami. He paddled to the nearest one, and used his teeth and a piece of wood to split open the coconut to drink the milky water. That night, he barely slept, afraid he would fall off the plank and drown.

The next day, a small, badly damaged fishing boat drifted by. Ari swam to it hoping to find some food and water, but there was none. For several days, he drifted in a busy shipping lane near Sumatra, where ships carrying cargo from Europe, India, Africa and the Middle East steam toward Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. Many ships passed by Ari's small boat, barely noticeable in the vast Indian Ocean. He was sure one of them would notice him sooner or later. But after five days, he began to lose hope. By then, the damaged fishing boat was listing badly, and slowly sinking. If he were not found soon, he would either drift out of the shipping lanes into the vast, empty ocean, or the small boat would sink and he would drown.

Two days later, Ari spotted a man-made raft adrift on the ocean. Abandoning the sinking fishing boat, he swam to the raft, accompanied by the fins of six sharks, and safely climbed aboard where he found a gallon bottle of water. Fortunately for Ari,

coconuts were still plentiful in the sea.

Finally, on Sunday morning, 15 days after Ari had been swept out to sea, he awoke to the sight of a passing container ship looming over him. It was too close to miss him, he thought. And so, he pulled his shirt off, waved frantically, shouting for help.

The large container ship, which was heading from Oman to Malaysia, eased past, leaving Ari and the raft in its wake. But then the ship slowed down. As the container vessel came around, Ari could see people on the ship looking at him through binoculars.

The crew threw Ari a line, and helped him climb aboard. For the first time since he had been swept out to sea 15 days earlier, Ari at last broke down and sobbed. His thoughts turned to his parents, his two elder brothers, a younger brother and a sister. He knew the giant waves were too powerful to have spared their home, only a mile from the shore. He would later learn they were among the 300,000 dead and missing.

During his 15-day ordeal, Ari had drifted approximately 155 miles from where he had first been swept out to sea by the tsunami. If he had not been found when he was, officials say he would have drifted out of the shipping lanes and would have never been found.

- C. What will you do when the "tsunami waves" of trials sweep through YOUR world?
1. Ari Afrizal (off-free-ZAL) was able to survive because he was able to cling to a 5 foot long plank during the first 24 hours of this terrible ordeal. Without that small plank of wood, Ari would have drowned.
- D. How will you be able to cling to hope, especially when you have none – when there seems no reason for your troubles, and no end to them either?
1. If you're not a child of God – one who had never obeyed the gospel of Christ – what will you be able to cling to when the massive waves of adversity come crashing down on you?
 2. And if you ARE a child of God, but have turned away from the Lord, then what will you cling to when adversity strikes?
 3. The answer to both questions is NOTHING! There is nothing that will keep you from being swept away – nothing left to cling to.
- C. That's why you need to prepare now. It's only a matter of time.