

Steadfast Under Trial

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Lent / Trial; Steadfast; Gift / Genesis 22:1–18; Psalm 25:1–10; James 1:12–18; Mark 1:9–15

- › Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Lenten King. Amen.

Trials, temptations. These are words we use during Lent. These are words that we use to describe our life as Christians as we know and experience it. Really these words describe how we feel about life. There are times when we gather with other Christians that they become pity parties, as we share our trials, our temptations of this life. Those things we might share our physical health issues, perhaps a problem relationship with a child, parent or friend. We might share our financial troubles. We might if we are brave enough share about our mental health challenges. There is one thing nobody wants to discuss: Temptation....the true temptations....the temptations that cause us to sin, lest their ugly selves be exposed. Everyone has that one temptation that preys on them more than others.

Is this how James writes about trial (and temptation)? Hardly! He comes at them not as a negative, not as something to drag you down, but just the opposite. He talks about the only answer to the trials (and temptations) we seem to love to dwell on. He talks about God and what he does in the midst of our trials (and temptations). James reminds us that the giver of every good and perfect gift is on our side...even in trial and temptation. And this dear Saints is what makes all the difference.

This sounds hard to believe, but James begins his letter by saying:

English Standard Version Chapter 1

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

Joy? In trial? Joy? in Temptation? I don't think so James! I want to take you to an image, the image is on the front of your bulletin today. It's an image of single boat in the seas with winds and waves. That little boat is in its trial, do you think there is much joy. I don't. You all have your own trials, your own temptations and do you feel joy? I can tell you the last 11 months and four days have not felt very joyful. Sometimes as your pastor I have felt like I've been on that little ship by myself in a wide open sea being blasted by the devil with the winds and the waves of life. I've struggle with joy. That's me being honest with myself, with you, and with God. I don't like trials and I know you don't either. No human being does. Trials

and temptations suck in this life. It doesn't matter what that trial is. And a trial isn't supposed to be easy is it? The Christian life isn't supposed to be a walk in the park is it?

All of our trials...the death of a loved one, no matter his or her age, the divorce, the depleted bank account, the disease, the depression. Joy? I wouldn't call it that? The Saturday that our miscarriage happened, I didn't call it joy. But what is James saying? What is he telling us. Let me reread the first verse of our text:

English Standard Version Chapter 1

12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

God uses trials to strengthen our faith. Few Christians seem to get stronger during easy times. The tough times move us to flee to and cling to God. We see his hand and experience God keeping his promises to us as he sustains during our trials. God is the giver of every good and perfect gift...and that includes his ability to take the trials we suffer in this world and use them for our God to strengthen our faith in him and in his dear Son.

Jesus Christ knows all about trials. He had nowhere to lay his head. He was arrested on made up charges, he had an unfair trial, he was beaten, nailed to a cross, had a crown of thorns shoved into his skull, and a spear in his side. He knows about trial. He knows dear Christian. He suffered trials beyond what you can even imagine. Yet, he always had his eyes on his heavenly Father to sustain him during the very trials that God ordained for him to suffer in order to save you. IN perfect obedience to the Father, he suffered all, and all the while he had perfect faith in His Father and His plan for Him.

In your time of trial, in my time of trial he is there with us. He knows exactly what we are going through and sympathizing with us. He does more than sympathize with us. He's the one who gives us a strengthened faith through it all. He's the one who'll bring us through the trials of this life and give us life everlasting. The crown of life is ours, it's yours because of Jesus, your dear Savior who suffered the trials of Calvary for you and me. So the next time a trial comes, or as you live through a current trial, look to Jesus. When you wonder where God is when you're suffering, go to the cross. He's there to give you comfort, his understanding, his power, and his victory. He will speak to you. He will continue to love you. Go to his table and receive his body and blood. You will be strengthened.

During the time that we did not gather in worship, that was a trying time. It was a trial for you and me. I missed the gathering of believers. I missed the Lord giving to me His very body and blood. When we gathered again at the Lord's Table it strengthened me. I can always tell when I need his medicine again. Today is one of those days!

Today dear Saints, you are strengthened in the midst of trial.

Today dear Saints you are not in your boat alone getting beaten by the winds and the waves. Your Savior is with you. He is holding you close. He loves you. Only with him navigating will you get through your trial.

So yes, you will be steadfast under trial, not by anything you do, but because of Jesus.

It's not just trials that James speaks about. He also speaks on temptation. It's also the day in the Church Year that we hear that our Savior Jesus was tempted...tempted by the devil. And the temptations are not God's fault, and certainly our succumbing to sin is not his either. We do blame God for all of this. We've been blaming God since Adam blamed God first! After all isn't he the one that created us with desire...desire for sex or food or anything else. Well, he did, but he didn't create us to abuse our desires. That came later. Whether we like it or not we cannot blame God for temptation or falling into temptation. James makes it clear that we look no further than ourselves for the problem of temptation.

English Standard Version Chapter 1

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Each person. His own desire. Temptation is all around us. We struggle with it. We feel guilty when we fall into it. We make up our minds to defeat it. We can't. We won't. We fail when we trust in ourselves to overcome.

There are times in our lives when temptations seem to come at us faster. The devil knows when we are weakened, when we battered and bruised due to trial, and the devil knows that this a perfect opportunity to come and grab you and pull you under the water and kill you and take away the good gifts of God.

The devil wants you to fail in your faith. He wants to take you away from worship. He wants to take you away from the medicine that gives you life...his body and blood.

Temptation and trial are horrible. Yet, God rescues. He brings to you every good and perfect gift. He brings you the message, the Word of truth, the Gospel. We know that Faith comes through hearing and hearing through the Word of Christ. That Gospel tells us, tells you that God gave us the best, good, and perfect gift, the gift of HIS SON> He knows what Trial is...and he knows what temptation is. Not only was he tempted by Ssatan as we read in the Gospel, he was tempted even more than that. His greatest temptation was to avoid the greatest trial of his life...the cross. He was tempted not to go to the cross to save you and me. He was tempted not to suffer his trials. He was tempted not to suffer and die for you and me. He was even tempted to come down from the cross. He overcame all of those temptations for YOU.

He overcame it all for you so that He can save you. He overcome every trial and temptation for you so that He can walk with you and carry you in your trials. He overcome every trial and temptation so that He can forgive you when you fall into temptation.

And it is here...that you and I receive those great gifts: Forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. It is here, that you and I receive those great gifts: peace, encouragement, and strength to meet the days ahead.

Dear Saints...God knows all about trial and temptation. He sent his only Son to suffer them as we do and give you all you need so that you can come through trials and temptation of this world and receive the crown of life that Jesus Christ has earned for you at the cross and the empty tomb.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

- › Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.