

## The Troubles that Strengthen – James 1:2-5

**INTRODUCTION** – The immediate context of the epistle of James is stated in James 1:1, “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.” Not a few Jews became believers in Christ and paid the heavy price of the life of a fugitive. They lost jobs, homes and loved ones because of their faith in Christ. Persecution began with the Jews when the church witness started at Pentecost in Acts 2. God ordained this blueprint of church growth to begin from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the world. From the moment the church was born, persecution followed. The persecution intensified from rebuke to beatings, to imprisonment, and culminated in deaths.

The believers needed comfort from God to persevere. The best way was to understand the biblical significance of facing temptations or troubles.

But believers need to avoid the sinful temptations. We must pray to God to help us avoid them as Christ teaches us in the Lord’s Prayer. **Matthew 6:13** “*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*” These are evil temptations that all believers must flee from. We must not stand and resist, for it will be too late. We will have fallen into sin the moment we stand and resist. Jesus says that the moment a man lusts after a woman in his heart, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart! (cf. Matthew 5:28). We must flee like Joseph fled from Potiphar’s wife when she seduced and forced herself on him. **Genesis 39:11-12** “*And it came to pass about this time, that Joseph went into the house to do his business; and there was none of the men of the house there within. 12 And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.*”

The temptations that are not sinful but can still lead to sin if not dealt with appropriately by believers are adversities and all forms of hardship. For example, when the disciples were in a ship travelling to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, a storm suddenly arose. It is not a sin to be caught in a storm, but the reaction to the storm can result in sin if it is not one of faith. The disciples panicked because the storm was so fierce that the waters were getting into the ship. They thought they were going to die even though Christ was in the ship with them. Their faith was little, so they exercised no faith and sinned against God. **Matthew 8:23-27** “*And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. 24 And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. 25 And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. 26 And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. 27 But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!*” (cf. Mark 4:35-41). The temptation or trial was not sinful but it was a difficult one whereby the faith and trust of the disciples were tested. Sadly, they failed the test and doubted the Lord’s words that they would reach the other side, especially when He was in the ship with them.

The same word “temptation” is used in Matthew 6:13 and James 1:2, but with different meanings. The context determines the meaning of words. Matthew 6:13 refers to evil temptations, and every believer must pray for God’s help so as not to be found near them. James 1:2 refers to difficult trials that test our faith, whether we will trust God if things are challenging or only in times of ease and comfort.

Our focus is on James 1:2 – the troubles that aim to strengthen our faith.

- I. Strengthens his Heart – 1:2** – “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.” – James was writing to believers as he called them “brethren”. Only believers can obey what he shared here. Believers have experienced the forgiveness of sin and the cleansing power of Christ’s blood in their mind, heart, body and soul. The Holy Spirit who dwells within will help them.

Thus, the command is given to “count”, i.e. to lead like a man in charge; to govern the temptations that will come in every believer’s life. The believer must not allow temptations to control him; he must control and take charge of the situation when adversity comes. To take charge means to know that God, his heavenly Father, is the One who sends the adversity even though the immediate “sender” is an evil person or even the devil himself. See beyond the immediate situation and into the spiritual. Once he knows and acknowledges that his heavenly Father sends them, it will turn out for his good, i.e. the betterment of his spiritual well-being. He will not murmur, complain or indulge in self-pity. He will see the higher hand of God throughout the adversity, from beginning to end.

He will be able to count it all joy, i.e. be glad in his heart and feel privileged to experience these temptations from God. He needs to do so consciously. This personal effort is sustained by a deep, heartfelt conviction that brings joy. He needs to experience the things that bring joy to his heart, which are no longer transient but eternal. He must not regard the temptations as a punishment from God or something evil from the devil but as a source of all joy, i.e. the greatest of joy. Many things bring joy to a believer’s life, but the joy that trials bring is the best kind!

This joy begins when believers fall into divers temptations. To “fall” means that the believer is already in temptation. It is not a sinful temptation but a difficult trial. These divers temptations include sickness, loss of job, imprisonment, verbal abuse, physical hurt, threats, loss of loved ones, and death. These are life’s experiences that can happen to any believer. These are not trials caused by believers’ sins, which would be called chastisements. **Hebrews 12:5-6** “And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: **6** For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.”

If these trials are the consequences of wrongdoing, like committing a crime, making a mistake and getting fired, the believer cannot turn to James 1:2 for comfort. It is a wrong application. The right text from God’s Word is **1 Peter 2:20** “For what glory *is it*, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer *for it*, ye take it patiently, this *is* acceptable with God.”

James 1:2 does not refer to chastisements from the Lord for sins committed. The next verse supports this conclusion. It is about strengthening the believer’s faith.

- II. Strengthens his Faith – 1:3** – “**3** Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.” – To know experientially is emphasized here. Head knowledge is good if it leads to heart-felt experiential knowledge. If it stops at only head knowledge, it is wasted knowledge. Life must be lived in light of God’s Word after God’s Word has been properly understood. There is no better

way to test and find out this truth than during a trial. It is easy to think that we have believed in Christ as our Lord and Saviour in times of health and wealth. The heart of every sinful man is deceitful and desperately wicked. There is no exception to this truth. Mouthing and confessing that we have received Christ as Lord and Saviour from a deceitful and desperately wicked heart is exceptionally deceptive. It can lead to a very delusional life. We think that a person who can preach and teach the Word of God passionately, dynamically and rightly must be a spiritual and mature believer when he might not even be a believer. This has been proven to be true in the lives of some well-known persons. God is not impressed with paper Christianity, where the writer writes and expounds God's truth accurately for the blessing of others but does not obey the very doctrines that he explains. Neither is God pleased with someone whose faith is restricted to the pulpit or inside a classroom, for the moment he steps down from the pulpit or walks out of the classroom, he behaves like the devil, blaming others for his faults and lies, like King Saul.

True faith is a life lived according to Holy Scriptures in times of adversity and peaceful tranquillity. The external circumstances do not make a difference in the believer's inner man, for he is a child of God in the darkest night and in the brightest light. He repents when he has done wrong. He corrects himself and apologizes for the wrong teaching once it is pointed out. He knows the difference between the voice of the Good Shepherd and those of the hirelings of the god of this world, and he follows the right preacher and teacher. We are following Christ through following the right preacher or teacher who preach and correctly teach the Word of God. This was the teaching of the Apostle Paul in **1 Corinthians 11:1** "Be ye followers of me, even as I also *am* of Christ." Man cannot follow Christ the way the disciples did when Christ walked on earth. The way to follow Christ today is through the Word of God, which is accurately and faithfully declared. If the believer obeys the false teacher or preacher, he is not following Christ but man. Believers must take heed and follow rightly, especially in these last days of great deception. When the believer follows correctly, he follows Christ by living a holy and obedient life according to the Scriptures. This is the life of faith.

Every believer's faith will be tested and strengthened through life's many trials. Through the pain and suffering, he must endure to the end. He must keep obeying the Word of God regardless of persecution or loss. He must not stop trusting his Saviour. Patience does not mean he will never be faithless in times of trials. There will be moments of faithlessness. He will stumble and fall into sin like the disciples in the gospels. Like them, he must repent with all his heart and return to the LORD. He will learn patience through these difficult trials. He must persevere in his trust regardless of the fears and losses he faces in his witness for Christ.

His faith may be stretched to breaking point, but it will not break, like muscles in the body that must be painfully stretched to become strong. There is no other way for muscles to grow stronger. The world is the believer's gym for the strengthening of his faith. God will thrust him into this gym when he becomes a believer. The membership lasts a lifetime. The believer must not quit this gym, otherwise his faith will remain weak. He will be of little use to God and God's people being a babe in Christ after many years in the world as a believer.

**III. Strengthens his Holy Witness – 1:4 – “4 But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”** – The believer must endure patiently till the end of the trial. If he quits halfway through the trial, he fails the Lord. To fail the Lord by quitting is a sin. It means that he stopped trusting God and wilfully went his own way. Whatever the reason for quitting does not matter. There is no excuse for quitting. If there is a legitimate reason for a believer to quit his holy witness that is acceptable to God, it would mean that God tempted him with a temptation that is too great for him to bear. According to 1 Corinthians 10:13, our God is faithful, which is why there is no justification for faithlessness.

The believer will be perfect once patience has completed its work, and will be entire, lacking nothing. The word “perfect” means complete.

What is completed in the believer’s life when he endures trials concerning his faith?

- His faith is real. When faith is real, it means his salvation is real. Without faith it is impossible to please God. The one who is born again must sincerely believe. The sincerity of his belief is completed when he holds on to Christ as he endures trials;
- His faith is no longer theoretical but experiential. He studies the Bible constantly but never knew that for Christ’s sake he will practise what he learns. When he faces each trial to the end, he will be complete;
- His trust in God will mature to the next level. He didn’t know how deep and mature his devotion to Christ is until he endured trials. For example, if the trial is the loss of his only begotten son through an accident and his faith in Christ remains strong; he can say from his heart like Job that the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the Name of the Lord;
- His love for God is biblical. He learns that he really loves God with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind by holding on to his love for Christ in the face of all trials.

From the completion of his faith in Christ, he becomes “perfect and entire, lacking nothing.” The word “perfect” is the same but with a different emphasis. The former focuses on completing his faith, whereas the latter focuses on completing the person’s life in every aspect of his relationships:-

- *With God* – His prayer life, worship of God and devotion to God will improve significantly. He knows how real God is in his life through the trials. His hand was in God’s hand throughout the trials. God provided for him and answered his prayers throughout the trials;
- *With God’s Word* – He studies God’s Word more now that he has experienced how powerful and real God is, as a lamp unto his feet and a light unto his path. The truths in the Bible are not just for saints of old but also for saints today. He can testify of this spiritual reality from his heart through the trials;
- *With His Possessions* – He now owns his possessions when in the past, his possessions owned him, and he could not do without them. He kept on serving them through sweat and tears. He

is now a free man from all the pressures of this carnal world as he no longer measures his life by the abundance of his possessions but only by his close walk with his God in Christ;

- *With People* – These people include his loved ones, friends, God’s children, his enemies and God’s enemies. He knows how to relate to all of them through the divers trials he falls into. If he has wronged them, he apologizes. If he obeys the Bible and they stumble, he educates them on the truth. He turns the other cheek when his enemies attack him verbally.

“Wanting nothing” means “lacking nothing.” The believer will be blameless in his holy witness for Christ. All areas of his life from his home to his work place to church will bring glory to God and blessing to God’s people. The trials he experiences are in all areas of his life. Sometimes, he may experience trials concurrently in a few areas of his life, according to God’s will for his spiritual growth. We know that if one area of our lives is in sin, our witness will be compromised completely. The other areas will no longer glorify Him because one area is weak and in sin. The nature of witness is always in its entirety, never piecemeal. God is concerned with this, and that is why divers temptations do not mean only the severity but also different areas of the believer's life.

When believers struggle to make sense of the divers temptations and the duration, God will help.

**IV. Strengthens his Prayer – 1:5 – “5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”** – If (first class condition of reality) any of God’s children lack wisdom, i.e. does not know how to apply God’s Word correctly to help strengthen his faith, all he needs to do is to ask God. The issue is not a lack of knowledge of the Bible. It is not understanding how to apply the right portion of God’s Word to the right circumstances so that the believer will understand the significance of his trial and respond correctly in holiness. This is the most challenging part of every trial. If the response is wrong and faithless, like that of the disciples in the ship when the storm broke, it will result in sin. But when wisdom from God is sought in prayer and is answered at the right time, the believer’s prayer life will deepen. He will experience the reality of God and the power of prayer. He will pray more from henceforth.

To ensure that wisdom is sought in times of trial, the believer must pray without ceasing. When he prays without ceasing daily, he will naturally pray in times of trial. Prayer will not be the last resort, but the first before any decision or action is made. God sends the trial to strengthen the believer's faith; He wants the believer to run to Him for help to know what to do and how to respond. He will not chide or taunt His child. He will help and provide the answer so His child will continue trusting throughout the trial. As a loving heavenly Father, God wants all His children to pass every trial. He decides when the trial comes. He controls the nature of the trial and its severity. All areas of the believer’s life are in God’s control, so that when He sends the trials he knows His child can manage them to strengthen his faith. The believer will learn to cast all his cares to the Lord and wait patiently with peace in his heart even as the stormy trial swirls around him with hurricane speed. **Philippians 4:6-7** “Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. **7** And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

**APPLICATION** – All areas of a believer’s life must be strong in the Lord. If one area is not, his witness for Christ is compromised in holiness regardless of how strong the other areas are for Christ. The believer must ensure that he becomes stronger through the trials that will come. He must also strengthen his weak areas so that there is no weakness in his witness for Christ that the evil one can take advantage of and cause him to stumble and fall into sin. The divers trials will draw him closer to the Lord if he endures to the end of each trial. His prayer life will improve. The presence of God in his life will become more real and stronger.

These experiences will help believers in these last days to validate the reality of their faith. All God-appointed troubles will strengthen.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. A Christian sole breadwinner lost his job due to the financial crisis. He has been a holy witness for Christ in his now-defunct company. He is troubled because of the many monthly bills he has to pay. His savings will run out in six months if he does not find a new job. Highlight three doctrines that can comfort his heart during this trial.
2. Is there another way to strengthen a believer's faith besides trials? Please elaborate.
3. Is there any area in your life that is not yet “perfect and entire, wanting nothing”? If there is, are you taking concrete steps to resolve it to God’s glory?
4. What is the best way to encourage a Christian student who is being mocked and ostracised because he shares with his classmates that it is a sin to be a homosexual?
5. A husband is abusive after his wife becomes a Christian. His harsh words started after she shared that she had accepted Christ. She is indirectly being forced to choose between Christ and her marriage. What biblical advice should be shared with the wife to encourage her in her faith?