

Inductive Study

Week 2

Read James 1:2-8

This passage reveals that God gives two things: trials and good gifts. Sometimes, they are one in the same.

At one time or another, everyone has either given, or received gifts with strings attached. Perhaps a donation to a non-profit is given with the attached hope of being acknowledged. A neighbor needs help with a home project and you pitch in expecting some sort of future reciprocity. When we give of ourselves, our selfless, loving motivation is often mingled with some sort of personal gain or at least hope for recognition. And being on the receiving end of a gift given by say a guilt-tripping relative ruins the gift.

God is the perfect gift-giver. James 1:5 states that God “gives generously without reproach”. He gives with no air of disapproval or disappointment, not wanting anyone to hesitate to come to him. His gifts always accomplish both redemptive purposes in the lives of his children while simultaneously displaying his glory, by revealing his perfect character.

When it comes to life difficulties, however, few of us jump with joy when the unexpected comes along. According to James though, these are opportunities to grow in faith. In our limited understanding, health, wealth, ease and comfort define our ideas of a full life. Romans 8:28-29 clarifies that “all things” work together for our good, including our trials. Suffering, then, is a means that God uses to draw believers into greater conformity with Jesus Christ, and is a God-ordained means to joy

In and through trials, God gives us both the testing of our faith to reveal where we find our true identity and stability, and the wisdom to withstand the trial. Experiencing joy at the introduction of a trial rests firmly on a deep faith in the character of God.

But, we must ask for this wisdom with devoted faith and trusting confidence that reveals that our belief is deeply rooted in God, through Christ, who alone is our rescuer, even during fearful circumstances.

Observation

- What trials had James faced that allowed him to speak with authority concerning the trials of others?
- What kinds of trials do believers face? How are those trials different from unbelievers?
- How are joy and steadfastness connected in these verses?
- From where and how does wisdom come to us?

Interpretation

1. What truths (from this passage and elsewhere in Scripture) must we cling to in order to meet trial with joy?

- Read 2 Cor. 1:3-4, 4:17, Roman 5:1-11. What does Paul have to say about the purpose of trials in his life?

- Read 1 Peter 2:19, 4:12-13. What does Peter have to say about trials?
- Read Matthew 16:24-25. What does Jesus have to say about trials?
- In light of these verses, what themes about trials emerge?

Application

- What trials in life have tested your faith?
- How did you respond to the trials?
- To whom and to what do you turn to for comfort amidst trials?
- Do you tend toward maximizing or minimizing trial in your life?

For Further Study

Take some time this week to share a story of trial with a friend. Did you grow in character through the trial, or were you left feeling stuck?

If you are struggling to make sense of a theology of suffering, below are resources that will help you dive deeper into this area of study.

Some helpful resources include:

Pastor Ryan Rice: 9 Part - Teaching Series from the book of Philippians called the "The Happiness Project" <http://www.northvalleychurch.org/sermons/series/the-happiness-project>

Mike Leake, Torn to Heal: God's Good purpose in Suffering (Cruciform Press, 2013).

Tullian Tchividjian, Glorious Ruin: How Suffering Sets You Free (David C. Cook, 2012).

4. Pastor Matt Chandler, The God Of All Comfort: The Varied Purposes Of Suffering And Affliction In Our Lives: <http://www.thevillagechurch.net/sermon/the-god-of-all-comfort-the-varied-purposes-of-suffering-and-affliction-in-our-lives/>