

PROFITTING FROM TRIALS

Today's Text: James 1

Extracts:

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.... Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, rings forth death [James 1: 2-4,12-15]

*There is the story of a very rich man from my part of Nigeria who could get whatever he wanted. Suddenly, things started to fall apart around him, and he felt that the only option open to him was to commit suicide. On the chosen day to kill himself, he passed through the village market and, because he was hungry, he bought **moin-moin**, a popular Nigerian meal, bean pudding cooked in wrapped thatched leaves. He climbed up a tree near the market square and tied the rope to a branch. Then, he ate the moin-moin and threw down the leaves. As he was about to put the rope around his neck, he saw a cripple crawl near the tree and eat with relish fragments of the moin-moin hidden in the leaf folds. After eating, the cripple raised up both hands towards heaven and said, "God dey!" [there is God]. The man up the tree was shocked that his thrash was somebody else's treasure. He gave up the idea of killing himself, climbed down and went back home. Over time, he recovered and became rich again.*

What lesson do we learn from that story? We all face trials and tribulations daily but what should be our attitude/reaction to them? Is giving up the best solution? In today's study, James says we should count it all joy when we fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of our faith produces patience and much more. How can we profit from and love God under trials? Let us find out.

1. Background: What are trials?

We all (or, at least, most of us) prefer success to failure. Yet, the road to success is always under construction! That suggests that from birth to death, we are bound to face and struggle with trials. We are confronted with needs and wants that we do not have adequate means to satisfy. A popular saying is that necessity is the mother of invention. But who is the father? You need a man and a woman to produce a child? Therefore, trials are an integral part of life.

Trial can be defined as a challenge or obstacle delaying or denying us our ability to meet our set goals or objectives. It can be physical or psychological or spiritual. It is a state of uncertainty because you may not know where you are going, how to get there and how it will end. To give up may not be a viable option. To commit suicide is not an option for those of us who want to go to heaven at the end of their earthly sojourn. Therefore, we need to look up to our faith in God to profit from trials. That is where James' piece on the subject becomes very handy and helpful.

Let us pay attention to the following aspects of Chapter One of James' epistle to Jewish believers in the early church:

a) We all face temptation

James writes, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" [**Jam. 1: 2**]. Satan is mainly after those who have what he wants. For example, after losing the battle in heaven and was thrown down to the earth, his main desire was to make war with those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ [**Rev. 12: 17**]. Therefore, the moment you have given your life to Christ, get ready to face temptation and trials!

For example, you have just got married. You are looking forward to being parents as soon as possible. Nothing happens. Your doctor is talking about challenges with your sperm count or eggs. That is a trial point. Or, you have just got a lucrative job that you plan to make a career. All of a sudden, corrupt persons approach you with fat bribes to compromise your integrity. That is a temptation point. Are you going to succumb or resist?

Take the case of Joseph. For no just cause, his brothers had sold him into slavery in Egypt. By God's special grace, he found favour with Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard, who put him in charge of his estate [**Gen. 37: 12-36**]. Joseph was said to be very handsome. Then, all of a sudden, Potiphar's wife cast her longing eyes on him and asked him multiple times to lie with her. Joseph refused because he feared God [**Gen. 39: 1-10**].

Like all of us, trials and temptations will pour your way but by faith, you are expected to resist them. In the words of the Psalmist, many are the afflictions of the righteous but the Lord delivers him out of them all [**Ps. 34: 19**].

b) You will suffer for your integrity

James writes, “Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures” [**Jam. 1: 16-18**]. In other words, you may suffer for your integrity which is anchored on your faith in God and His Christ. People will laugh at you for refusing gratifications when your children are out of school because you cannot pay their school fees. You will be called foolish for not divorcing your barren partner to raise a family by somebody else.

Take the case of Job who did nothing wrong and yet he lost his children and material wealth within a short time when God gave Satan the privilege to try his faith. Even his wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!” Job replied, “You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?” [**Job 2: 1-10**]. As his suffering and physical pains got worse, Job told his friends who came to console him, “As long as my breath is in me, and the breath of God in my nostrils, ... till I die, I will not put away my integrity from me” [**Job 27: 3-6**]. He held on to his integrity to the end of his ordeal.

c) Hope sometimes looks hopeless!

James writes, “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” [**Jam. 1: 12**]. Even when hope looks hopeless, you are to hang in there!

As Job’s agony became unbearable, he cried out, “I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God” [**Job 19: 25-26**]. When King Nebuchadnezzar had tied up Meshach, Shadrach and Abed-Nego to throw them into the burning fiery fire for not worshipping the golden image, the young Jews said to him [**Dan. 3: 16-18**];

O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your

hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.

Both Job and the Jewish young men received the crown from God- Job was restored double-fold and the fiery furnace had no power over the young men!

From the foregoing, it is clear that we can profit from trials if we focus on God, not our pains and inconveniences. In Paul's words, "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content... I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" **[Phil. 4: 11-13]**.

2. Coping with trials

The following may be helpful to enable us to cope with trials:

a) Focus on your faith in God

The only way that we can glory in trials is to focus on our faith in God. Doing so enables us to have valuable information on the final outcome of our tribulations. For example, on his return to Jerusalem from his third missionary journey, Paul was arrested and brought for trial before the Sanhedrin. Being a Roman citizen, Roman soldiers rescued him from the divided council and brought him into protective custody in the barracks. The following night, the Lord stood before him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul, for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome" **[Acts 23: 1-11]**. So, when he was brought before Felix, the Roman governor, a few days later, Paul could say with all boldness, "I stand at Caesar's judgment seat... I appeal to Caesar." That was why he was sent to Rome **[Acts 25: 1-12]**. He relied on his faith in God.

So, as you face trials, ask God for specific guidelines on what to do and what to expect. The word of God says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" **[Phil. 4: 6-7]**.

b) Focus on your purpose

Your trials may centre around attempts by your adversaries to distract your attention from your purpose so that you may be delayed or unable to complete it. Therefore, one way to deal with your trials is to focus on your purpose.

For example, see the resistance faced by Jewish exiles that King Cyrus had allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple [**Ezra, Chaps 1-9**]. The enemy used misleading helpers, ignorant experts and legal constraints, among others, to stop the work. However, Zerubbabel and Ezra beat all the odds by focusing on their purpose.¹ In like manner, you can follow what God has asked you to do to the letter for “we walk by faith, not by sight” [**2 Cor. 5: 7**].

c) *Always be a doer not a mere hearer of the word*

According to James, the qualities needed in trials are to be swift to hear, slow to speak and slow to wrath “for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God” [**Jam. 1: 19-20**]. If we are only hearers of the word and not doers, we deceive ourselves [v. 22]. Therefore, the faith that comes by hearing is hearing by the word of God [**Rom. 10: 17**].

What your denomination or pastor or prophet or expert is advising or prescribing may not be what God has specifically commanded you to do. For example, disciples *in Spirit* warned Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Even a prophet, Agabus, took Paul’s belt to demonstrate how Jewish leaders would tie him up and hand him over to the Gentiles. Everybody pleaded with Paul not to go to Jerusalem but he replied, “What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” So, when they could not persuade him, they said, “*The will of the Lord be done*” [**Acts 21: 1-14**]. What was God’s will for Paul?

When Jesus appeared in a vision to Ananias, a disciple in Damascus, to go to the house of Judas to restore the sight of Saul of Tarsus, He said, “He is a chosen vessel of Mine *to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake*” [**Acts 9: 10-16**]. In his testimony to the Galatians, Paul said that in line with God’s plan to reveal His Son to him, he did not immediately confer with flesh and blood. Rather, God led him to Saudi Arabia and it was after three years that he went to Jerusalem to see Peter [**Gal. 1: 13-18**]. He was once caught up into Paradise where he heard inexpressible words which is unlawful for a man to utter [**2 Cor. 12: 1-6**]. Indeed, Paul was faithful to what he had heard from the Lord. You too can seek to do only what you have heard from God.

Trials are not easy meat. They can involve physical pains. You may merely be marking time without any visible progress. Like Joseph and David, God may have “anointed” you for a crown but there are people who have sworn to deprive you of it. But remember that patience stretches and strengthens your endurance

¹ http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/Volume_5/PDFs/10_Focusonyourpurpose.pdf

muscles during your trials. In the end, you will be the one to celebrate; you will indeed profit from trials.

3. Conclusion: The road to success is indeed always under construction!

In his valedictory piece to Timothy, Paul said, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 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 **Tim. 4: 7-8**]. In other words, to profit from trials is to hang in there till the day God calls you home to eternity in heaven. That is a lifetime of great pain through faith.

What does that imply? *If the road to success is always under construction, it means that success is measured at the end of our life on earth.* Heaven is the reward for beating all the trials in your faith walk. It is your ultimate profit for beating all earthly trials.

So, hang in there!