

**Text: James 1:1-12**

**Title: “Our Multi-Colored Trials”**

**BUMPER VIDEO** – Towards the end of your New Testament find the little book of James. We’ll camp here in this part of God’s Word through the summer to learn about “living faith” as opposed to dead or useless faith. We’ll learn about “*living the faith*” ... living out our faith in Christ in our daily lives. So let’s just jump in.

**Read James 1:1.**

**ILLUSTRATION** – As I prepare for retirement I’ve been going through my library to decide what books I need to keep with me and which ones I can let go of. Some of my commentaries and devotional classics I want to keep; others I’m not sure I will have any use for them in the years to come. Well church leaders back in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century were going through a similar process, only far more significant. They were trying to decide which books should be included in the New Testament that we have today. Ultimately, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they identified the 27 books we have in our NT as being inspired by God as Holy Scripture. But there were some of the books that almost didn’t make the cut, one of them being the book of James. You see, James approaches the Christian life from a different angle than, say, the letters of the Apostle Paul. It’s not wrong; it’s just different. And because James is so different, as we’ll see in the study, they wrestled with whether or not to include it in the NT. Ultimately it was included. But what you’re looking at on the pages of your Bible today may just be the very first piece of NT Scripture to be written.

As you gather from v.1, James is a letter and NT letters are like emails or messages you receive today. The sender and the recipients are listed. It’s from James. There’s much discussion about who this James is, but the most plausible answer is that the author is the James who is also mentioned in the book of Acts as the senior elder of the church in Jerusalem. Apparently his authority was unquestioned because he doesn’t have to remind them that he’s anything but “a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” He’s a servant ... a slave. A servant of the Lord is one who has relinquished his personal freedom and is absolutely obedient to and dependent upon the Master. And that’s all James says about himself.

This is remarkable because of what else we know about this James. He is the half-brother of the Lord Jesus Himself. Mary and Joseph had other children after Jesus was born. James was one of them. But you wouldn’t know it by the way he introduces himself in this letter. He doesn’t care to flaunt his religious credentials

or even his family connection to Jesus. He's just a humble servant of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

He writes to "the twelve tribes scattered among the nations." Without a lengthy explanation, this refers to believers who come from a Jewish background. (There were twelve tribes of the nation of Israel). Jews, whether believers or not, were very transient in the NT world. Conquerors often deported Jews to different parts of the world. Persecution of the church also scattered believers to different nations. And James writes to them, wherever they are about a number of matters that were relevant to them as believers ... just as they are to us.

So with this short greeting, James just jumps right into the middle of their lives with a series of exhortations and commands revolving around what must have been the most pressing issue on the minds of the readers ... their trials. **Read James 1:2.**

**ILLUSTRATION** – I realize that as we gather as the church people are facing trials of many kinds. Some Sundays you come and things are going well. Other times your trials are so great that it's all you can do to drag yourself out of bed and get here. Some of you have brought financial trials to church with you. You're not sure how you're going to pay your bills. Some of you have brought marriage trials with you; your marriage is in trouble. Or you're going through trials with your kids. Some of you brought physical trials with you to church today. You have cancer or some other dreaded disease that you are battling. Some are severe; others are just annoying. Some have just come on us; others we have been battling for years. James refers to them as "*various* trials." Literally, they are multi-colored trials. They come in all shapes and sizes and patterns.

So how do we as believers handle our trials? There are a series commands (imperatives) given in the first twelve verses that can be grouped around four challenges the Lord through James gives us related to our trials. Think of these as four biblical actions you can take that will change your outlook on your trials even before you leave the room today.

### **ACTION #1 – REJOICE IN YOUR TRIALS.**

**Read James 1:2-3.** The word for trials means something that tests us. This is not meaningless suffering. Trials mean adversity with the purpose of testing.

And what are we to do with our trials? We may be shocked when James commands in v.2, “Consider it pure joy.” That’s not the way we typically think about our trials, is it?

**ILLUSTRATION** – If your doctor comes into the examining room and tells you that you have to have extensive back surgery, you probably wouldn’t rub your hands together and say, “Oh boy! Can’t wait!” That probably wouldn’t be your natural response. Not unless you knew that the trial of back surgery is going to produce a new lifestyle for you. You’ll be able to sit up, stand up and lie down without pain for the first time in years. In that case you would count that trial as “joy.” In the same way we can count it a joy to endure these trials. Why? **Read James 1:3.**

**ILLUSTRATION** – Whatever you put your faith in needs to be tested before you put your weight on it. Man, if you need to get up on your roof to do some work you set up a ladder. If you’re wise you’ll test that ladder before you put your weight on it. Then you can trust the ladder.

Trials give us the opportunity to *test* our faith so we can *trust* our faith. You see, your trial, whatever it is, is not just about sickness or a financial need or a struggling marriage. If you’re a believer it’s about your faith ... the testing of your faith. Just how strong is your relationship with the Lord? You don’t know until you go through trials. It’s a test. God is developing that part of you that is most important ... your faith. So rejoice in your trials. That’s what Jesus did:

**Hebrews 12:2 - Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

Jesus rejoiced in the sufferings of the cross because He knew it was accomplishing the purpose of God. So...

**ACTION #2 – PERSEVERE IN YOUR TRIALS.**

So the testing of your faith produces perseverance. **Read James 1:4.**

So here’s another command. “Let perseverance finish its work.” The word “perseverance” is a big word in the NT. Sometimes it’s translated “patience” or “steadfastness.” It’s a combination of two words that mean “to remain under.” You may think that what you are going through is senseless and you’d rather escape it.

You just want it to be over, but God has His eye on you and He has a goal for your life and that is that you will be a mature, well-rounded follower of Jesus. And He knows that we grow in this way by going through trials. Yes, God is concerned about your pain and suffering. He cares. But He has His eye on an even greater outcome ... developing spiritual perseverance. So...

**Romans 5:3-4 - We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.**

Next...

### **ACTION #3 – PRAY THROUGH YOUR TRIALS.**

To persevere in our trials doesn't mean that we just grin and bear it. To persevere means that we remain under the load with our focus on what the Lord is doing. And so we need wisdom. **Read James 1:5-8.**

Back in v.5 there's the command: "Ask God." Think of the last trial you endured. Was your first instinct to look to the Lord? Did you complain or did you trust the Lord? Did you immediately start trying to figure out how to fix it yourself or did you pray, "Lord, how am I supposed to deal with this?" Notice we are not told to ask God to eliminate our trials; we pray for wisdom in our trials.

**ILLUSTRATION** – I try to start every day with the Lord in His Word and prayer. I try to think and pray through everything I know I have to do that day. James 1:5 is one of the verses I pray virtually every day. And years ago as a college student I developed that discipline of starting my day giving it all to the Lord. But what remains a struggle to this day is that I then go out and try to manage everything myself. So I'm still learning to handle things throughout the day, turn by turn, conversation by conversation, decision by decision, looking to the Lord for His wisdom. "Lord, I need wisdom."

And when we ask God for wisdom in our trials He gives it generously and graciously. "It will be given to him..." That's one of the great promises of the Bible. Jesus promised the same thing:

**Matthew 7:7-8 - "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.**

Now we have to pray properly. In fact there's another command in v.6 related to praying through our trials: "When he asks, he must believe and not doubt..." You see, there's believing prayer and there's unbelieving prayer. What's the difference? True believing prayer means that I have a settled peace as I leave something in the hands of the Lord. According to v.6, unbelieving prayer means I stay all torn up and tossed about by my feelings. Believing prayer means I'm settled in my confidence that God will take care of things. Unbelieving prayer, according to v.7, means I shouldn't expect I will receive anything from the Lord. Believing prayer means I'm steady and not knocked off course. Unbelieving prayer, according to v.8 leaves me going back and forth between faith and fear ... peace and turmoil ... confidence and uncertainty.

Do you really expect God to answer your prayer for wisdom? In times of suffering we can become practical atheist ... thinking and acting and feeling as though God doesn't exist. So rejoice in your trials. Persevere in your trials. Pray through your trials and ...

#### **ACTION #4 - TREASURE YOUR TRIALS.**

**Read James 1:9-10.** So here's the next command (action step) for us as we go through trials ... treasure them. James says in v.9 that when your trials bring you into humbling circumstances, take pride in your high position. To "take pride" in this context is not a bad thing; it actually means to value or treasure something.

What is this "high position" we're to treasure in our trials? It is all that we are and all that we have in Christ. A child of God may be hungry, but she has the bread of life in Jesus. He may be thirsty, but he has the water of life in Jesus. She may be poor and struggling to make ends meet, but she has eternal riches in Christ. He may be despised by others, but he has been eternally welcomed in Christ. She may live in a shack on this earth, but she has a glorious home in heaven. So we treasure the things that humble us because they only serve to remind of us of all we have in Christ.

And trials come to wealthy people as well. They just come in a different way. In v.10 it says that the believer who is healthy or wealthy or blessed in other ways should also rejoice when trials come and remember that their true treasure is in heaven, not in their bank accounts.

**ILLUSTRATION** – We had a garage sale a couple of weeks ago. And I was reminded that one person’s trash is another person’s treasure. I had an old tool that I hadn’t used in years. I had it marked for like \$2.00. One guy stopped and said, “Wow, I’ve been looking for one of these. This is valuable.” I said, “What? I think I mismarked that. It should say \$200.” What I thought was trash was really a treasure. You may look at those humbling circumstances you’ve been through and think it’s trash; but if it’s made Jesus more precious to you, treasure it.

So James comes back to the issues of perseverance, trials and testing.

**James 1:12 - Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.**

In your mess you are blessed if you persevere. Keep your eye on the prize at the finish line. Now you may sprint confidently across the finish line when you get to heaven, but many of us will stumble and limp across the finish line. Oh, we’ll finish, but it’s hard, isn’t it. I’m so grateful that our reward in heaven is great ... greater than our sin ... greater than our failures.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Last week Bill Buckner died. Some of you real baseball fanatics will know who that is, but I didn’t. He played 22 seasons in the major leagues and even won a batting title in 1980 playing for the Chicago Cubs. He played in the All-Star Game in 1981. But for MLB fans, Bill Buckner is best remembered, not for his All-Star status, but for a single play that defined his whole career. In the 1986 World Series he was playing first base for the Boston Red Sox. The game was tied and a batter hit a ground ball to first base and it rolled right under Buckner’s glove, allowing a run to score. The Red Sox ended up losing the World Series because of it. Red Sox fans were brutal to Buckner. They booed him and even threatened his life. Many years later, however, in 2007 the Red Sox finally won the World Series. At the home opener of the 2008 season Bill Buckner was invited back to Fenway Park to throw out the first pitch. When he walked on the field Red Sox fans didn’t boo him; they gave him a standing ovation. His past was behind him.

When you put your trust in Christ you start a journey that will end one day in the presence of God in heaven. Your multi-colored trials in this life are all part of God’s glorious purpose to shape us into the likeness of His Son Jesus. And you may wonder, “Will God pull me aside when I get to heaven and say, ‘Man, you really messed up down there. Stand over here and let me think about whether I will

let you into My heaven.” No, you’re welcomed with open arms not because you got it all right, but because Jesus got it all right.