

STANLEY D. GALE



A LIVING FAITH

A Devotional Journey through James

A Living Faith

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A Living Faith

A DEVOTIONAL JOURNEY
THROUGH JAMES

Stanley D. Gale



Reformation Heritage Books
Grand Rapids, Michigan

A Living Faith: A Devotional Journey through James
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For Cheryl,
who encouraged me to write a book on James,

and for Linda,
who suggested a devotional format

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Introduction: Living Faith

The epistle of James reminds us that all theology is practical theology. God's written Word makes demands of us for what we believe and how we behave. His truth is not abstract but is to be applied, not to puff up but to build up.

James calls us to a life of faith. Faith is both passive and active. On the one hand, it is passive in the sense that it is received as a gift of God, a display of the Spirit's regenerating work in our lives. While we were dead in sin, God came to us and made us alive in Christ. With that grace of faith, we embrace Jesus Christ for salvation.

On the other hand, faith is active in that it expresses itself in a new relationship with God. We exercise faith, bringing it to bear and working out our salvation. Salvation is not by our works or even by our works prompted by faith. But authentic faith, faith given by God, will be authenticated by its deeds. As James puts it, "Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:17). And if it is dead, then it has no power to save: "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?" (v. 14).

James conveys great pastoral concern in his letter. He writes to believers in order to minister to them in their suffering. But his intention is more than extending comfort. He is concerned that we capitalize on the trials we face in pursuit of the purposes of God for us in them. He leads us in how to do that.

Prominent throughout the epistle is faith. The pressure of trials both proves and improves faith. It proves faith in that it demonstrates the tenacious grace of God. Genuine faith will endure under trial (see Luke 8:13–15). Trials improve faith in that they provide weight resistance by which faith is strengthened to rest and rely ever increasingly on Christ, the object of our faith. In pastoral fashion, James's letter is filled

with instruction, care, warnings, illustrations, and examples of living for Christ's kingdom amid the kingdom of this fallen world.

This devotional will take us through the entire epistle of James. It won't be exhaustive, delving into every detail, but it will be exhilarating as our Father in heaven leads us and counsels us in the trenches of life common to all. Each devotion will be followed by two questions aimed at doing the word (see James 1:22), whereby we look to put into practice what we have heard.

Hearing God's word and putting it into practice is an individual responsibility. We cannot exercise another's faith. But we are part of a community of faith and are to stimulate one another to love, what James calls "the royal law" (James 2:8), and good deeds. This devotional can be used privately, but its brevity is well suited for meeting with fellow believers to read the segment aloud, discuss together, and support each other in prayer and encouragement.

I urge you to read the epistle of James in one sitting, as you would read a letter written to you by a dear friend. Get the lay of the land through the bigger picture in preparation for our dive into the details, with an eye to navigating life in this fallen world animated by faith and guided by wisdom in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 1

Take on Trials

... when you fall into various trials ...

—JAMES 1:2

Several years ago, a Christian writer penned an article entitled “Don’t Waste Your Cancer.” The upshot was that the trial that cancer brings is not simply to be weathered, endured with a stiff upper lip. It is to be welcomed, received with a sense of anticipation.

James takes it a step further when he says, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials” (James 1:2). Not only are we to welcome trials, we are to welcome them with open arms, not resigning ourselves to them but actually rejoicing in them.

Consider what adversities you are dealing with right now. Perhaps it’s a diagnosis of cancer, or sudden financial disaster, or heart-wrenching divorce. Would you characterize your reaction as joy? Likely not, yet that is exactly where faith leads you, and not as some sort of happy-face, head-in-the-sand religious zealot. Rather, faith leads us to a joy that belies the tragedies that befall us, a joy expressed in part by the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk:

Though the fig tree may not blossom,
Nor fruit be on the vines;
Though the labor of the olive may fail,
And the fields yield no food;
Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,
And there be no herd in the stalls—
Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.

The LORD God is my strength;
He will make my feet like deer’s feet,

And He will make me walk on my high hills.
(Hab. 3:17–19)

To put it in contemporary terms, “Though my bank account is empty, my cupboard bare, and my prospects dim, yet I will find joy in the Lord my God. He is my delight, my sufficiency, my strength; and in Him I will persevere.”

This sentiment reflects a common theme of the Bible for those whose God is the living Lord. James brings it to the fore as the first word for believers who are uprooted and oppressed. He fits us with the spectacles of faith. These lenses are not rose colored. Quite the contrary—they give us greater visual acuity for understanding the days and navigating the paths of life in this fallen world. Through faith, we see suffering in all its harshness. The lens of faith enables us to see even the direst affliction as the soil from which the blossom of joy emerges with the fragrance of grace.

Finding joy in trials does not happen automatically. Likely, our default response to ordeal is fear or worry or dread, a reflex that balks at the trial, like touch to a flame. That’s why James will explain to us how to capitalize on our hardships, contrary to our impulse.

But for now, he simply says, “Count it all joy” when we encounter the unwanted guests of trials along the way. He wants us to don those glasses of faith that will enable us to perceive benefit in it and to persevere through it with joy and great expectation.

DOING THE WORD

1. How does faith transform trials?
2. What is your greatest obstacle to finding joy in trials?

Chapter 2

Every Joy or Trial

Count it all joy.

—JAMES 1:2

“Trials” carries a negative connotation, however the word is used. Legal trials are anxiety producing and menacing. Time trials stretch us to the extreme and place us in opposition to other athletes. Trials of life weigh us down, rob us of peace, and threaten our security. By their nature, trials provoke unpleasantness and hardship. Peter describes the response to trials as being “grieved” by them (1 Peter 1:6). Trials bring with them the danger of growing weary and losing heart.

Yet James looks us in the eye and with a straight face tells us to “count it all joy” (James 1:2) when we encounter trials of various kinds. He is not just talking about nuisance difficulties, like a fender bender or getting locked out of the house, where we are more likely to be able to grin and bear it. No, James has in mind the gamut of trials that we meet in the course of life. Such hardship comes in all shapes and sizes, intensities and durations. In his letter James gives us a sampler of trials when he writes of persecution, sickness, financial struggle, and temptations.

How can we possibly find joy in suffering? We begin to answer that question when we recognize the hand from which the trial comes to us. Later in his epistle, James will hold up Job as an example of someone who persevered through affliction. But James wants us not so much to look at Job as he wants to direct our attention to where Job is looking: “You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful” (James 5:11). Job’s focus is on the God he knows to be compassionate and merciful and who is at work according to His perfect purpose.

If we would not only endure trial but somehow find a peculiar joy in it, we must see through faith the hand of God our Father Almighty that extends it to us. When Job had been beset by one affliction after another, surely what James would describe as trials of various kinds, Job's wife urged him to "curse God and die!" (Job 2:9). How did Job respond? He said, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" (v. 10). Job couches his comment in terms of foolishness as opposed to wisdom. Foolishness speaks its own mind. Wisdom speaks in the fear of the Lord, something that James will have much to tell us about in his letter.

James, as well as Job, understood that God is sovereign over all that comes to pass, and everything serves His good and perfect will. Frances Ridley Havergal, nineteenth-century composer of classic hymns such as "Take My Life and Let It Be," grasped this foundational truth. In her hymn "Like a River Glorious" she wrote, "Every joy or trial falleth from above, traced upon our dial by the Sun of Love."

We see this principle most vividly represented in our Lord Jesus, "who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2). Jesus's food was to do the will of Him who sent Him. Like with our Lord, the joy is not in suffering but in the purpose of the God we know and love.

DOING THE WORD

1. Describe a time when you were tempted to grow weary and lose heart in trials.
2. How does looking at God cast trials in a different light?

Chapter 3

Exercising Faith

... the testing of your faith ...

—JAMES 1:3

What makes muscles grow stronger? One way is simply through use. You won't find "couch potato" on a list of workout routines. A way to build muscle is through weight resistance, but that resistance must be appropriate. If you curl a dumbbell that is too light, you won't realize much benefit. But if the weight is just beyond your reach so that it requires effort, your muscles will develop and strengthen.

Trials offer weight resistance to our faith in order to strengthen it. And the weight they offer has been measured for us by our God. He knows the degree of our spiritual development and brings trials tailored to us to mature us in the faith.

James describes this weight resistance as *testing*. He speaks of both the exercise and the outcome when he says that "the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:3–4). The testing of our faith through the weight resistance of trials strengthens it and leads to Christian maturity. Twice James uses the word "perfect." The term he uses carries the sense of a goal reached. He reinforces the idea by speaking positively of "complete" and negatively, "lacking in nothing."

What James is saying is that the trial you are facing right now is tailored to your level of spiritual maturity for the purpose of growing you in Christlikeness. The Holy Spirit is your trainer. Your job is to show up, embracing the trial as given by God, exercising the faith He has worked in you, and cooperating with the Spirit.

God's Word reminds us that it is the Spirit who forms Christ in us, but that does not make us passive for our spiritual development. When

Paul writes, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13), he encourages us in the ability to do what God calls us to do, and he also engages us as the doer (“I can do”). Paul describes his own labors as “striving according to His working which works in me mightily” (Col. 1:29). We are the ones who exercise faith.

How do we exercise faith? James gives us our starting point, where to begin when we encounter trials. He has told us to “*count* it all joy” (James 1:2; emphasis added). He uses a word that takes us to the exercise mat of the mind, where we prepare ourselves to deal with the heft the trial brings to us. To “count” is to regard, to adopt the position, to bring a perspective to bear for the trial at hand. James goes on to say, “Knowing that the testing of your faith produces...” (v. 3). Again, he appeals to the mind for the work to be done.

What exactly do we know? What faith perspective are we to put in place to govern our opinion about the trial and to handle it for spiritual growth? We’ve already noted two stretching exercises for the strengthening of faith. One, we recognize that the trial at hand has come from the hand of our sovereign God and Father. Two, we operate in faith believing that His purposes for our growth in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ are at work, tailored to our needs.

DOING THE WORD

1. What is God’s ultimate purpose in the trials you face?
2. What attitude adjustment do you need to make to benefit from trials?

Chapter 4

A Word to the Unwise

If any of you lacks wisdom ...

—JAMES 1:5

A family had an emergency at their home. Their furnace had quit on them. Outside temperatures were in the teens. Inside, their thermostat read forty-one degrees. They called for repair, and a service tech showed up. He took a look at the furnace, pulled off a faceplate, and pushed a button. The furnace roared to life. The service tech then presented the bill—\$245. The homeowner railed, “You’ve got to be kidding. You weren’t even here for five minutes. All you did was push a button. I could have done that.” The tech said, “True, but you needed to know what button to push and when to push it.”

The service tech displayed not just knowledge; he displayed know-how. James calls that “wisdom,” and he will develop the concept throughout his letter. Wisdom is necessary to handle trials so that we benefit from them for our spiritual growth.

James already told us that when facing trials, we need to employ the perspective God gives us. Now James goes on to address how we put that knowledge to use. “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). To handle the trial adroitly, we need wisdom. Wisdom looks to God, learns from God, and leans on God.

I am what you might call directionally challenged. For me the greatest technological advance is GPS. The thing is, the Bible says we are all directionally challenged. As the proverb puts it, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Prov. 14:12). We all have a built-in misalignment. Left on our own, we can easily go astray. That is precisely why we need wisdom.

Wisdom is skill in living biblically. That skill is no more urgently needed than in the turmoil of trials. When we panic, we can act reflexively and impulsively. But that sort of reaction does not usually lead us in the way our God wants of us and certainly not in a way to capitalize on the trial He has brought to us and that carries His purposes for us in it.

For wisdom to function as it should, it must be calibrated properly. A compass functions properly when it is oriented to due north. Due north for wisdom is the fear of the Lord. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Prov. 9:10), the proverb informs us.

The idea behind this fear is that God be given the glory that is His due. It is to acknowledge Him for who He is, in all He reveals Himself to be. With a proper view of God comes a proper view of self. God is the creator; we are the creature. Operating in the fear of the Lord brings that distinction, dependence, and devotion to bear in navigating the trials of our lives.

Where do we get wisdom? We find it where faith points us, to our God and Father.

Yes, if you cry out for discernment,
And lift up your voice for understanding,
If you seek her as silver,
And search for her as for hidden treasures;
Then you will understand the fear of the LORD,
And find the knowledge of God.
For the LORD gives wisdom;
From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.
(Prov. 2:3–6)

We are not alone in handling trials.

DOING THE WORD

1. Why is wisdom necessary for handling trials?
2. How does wisdom relate to the fear of the Lord?

Chapter 5

Wisdom's Well

Let him ask of God.

—JAMES 1:5

We need wisdom to navigate the trials of our lives. James makes it clear that wisdom comes from God. We gain that wisdom from God by *asking* Him for it. “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). James expresses this asking as a command to be obeyed and something we need to persist in. He describes what we might call importunate prayer, a relentless pursuit of God, what Isaiah characterizes as giving God no rest (Isa. 62:6–7).

Really what God wants is our attention—our rapt attention. He wants us to see Him through the eyes of faith: His presence with us, His grace sufficient for us, His word that lights our path, His hope that is an anchor to our soul. He wants us to draw near to Him, taking courage in His promises and finding joy in His purposes for us in Christ through the trial. He wants us to hear Him when He says,

Fear not, for I am with you;
Be not dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you,
Yes, I will help you,
I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.
(Isa. 41:10)

He wants us to heed the words of His Son: “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

Wisdom positions us with our God. In our weakness, we will know His might. In our fear, we will know His peace. In our foolishness, we will know His discernment doled out as needed, manna for the day at hand.

James assures us that we will not find the well dry when we approach it for wisdom. I mentioned that I am directionally challenged. A fellow pastor and I would head out to lunch at a place we both enjoyed near where he lived. Invariably, I would need to ask for turn-by-turn directions, even after having gone there several times. My friend would patiently tell me which way to go. It would be a bit embarrassing for me to ask for directions *yet again*, but my friend always responded with as much information as I needed and without recrimination. That's how James describes our interactions with our heavenly Father. God will respond to our request for wisdom generously and without reproach.

Our Father never says, "Are you back again?" or "How dumb can you be?" He tends to His children in their foolishness and according to their need. He knows our frame. He is responsive to our plea.

When we ask for wisdom, what might we say? There is no formula, no script. It's simply a matter of being real before our God. No Christian happy face. No stiff upper lip. We simply lay the trial out before Him, being honest about our struggles, our doubts, our fears. If we need a tutorial in this sort of conversation with God, we need look no further than the Psalms. The book of Psalms gives us the vocabulary for praise, confession, lament, confusion, doubt, thanksgiving, and petition as we wrestle with God in the direction of hope.

DOING THE WORD

1. Why does God want us to ask for wisdom?
2. How does God want us to ask for wisdom?

Chapter 6

Believing Prayer

Let him ask in faith.

—JAMES 1:6

We knew there had to be a catch. James has guaranteed that God will dispense the wisdom we need to handle the trials we encounter “liberally and without reproach” (James 1:5). There will be no rationing from the well of wisdom. It’s ours for the asking. But now he shows us the fine print: “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (vv. 6–8).

What are we to make of this proviso? I don’t know about you, but it makes me nervous. I have plenty of doubts at times. In fact, trials can bring an infestation of doubt. What exactly is James saying? Actually, nothing that should surprise us.

We have noted that the book of James is not primarily about trials, although trials and adversity feature prominently. Nor is James primarily about wisdom, although wisdom is an oft-mentioned topic. Rather, his pastoral letter is primarily about faith, what genuine faith looks like and how it operates in everyday life. So it’s no surprise that when James speaks of prayer, he incorporates faith. At the close of his letter, James will present a tutorial on prayer. There he refers specifically to “the prayer of faith” (James 5:15).

Prayer does not work as an incantation, where we utter the right words or mindlessly repeat empty phrases. Here, James echoes the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount:

And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the

heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.

Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.

(Matt. 6:7–8)

Real prayer is infused with faith. Such faith knows that God exists, believes that He hears, and trusts that He will answer in keeping with His perfect purposes. In fact, God has established prayer as His means to His ends.¹ He actually ordains our feeble, ignorant utterances for the accomplishment of His outcomes. James will make this vivid through his explanation of believing prayer and the example of Elijah later in his letter. Prayer is the voice of faith.

When James stresses asking in faith “with no doubting” (James 1:6), he is not teaching what we sometimes hear: “If only you had enough faith, your child would be healed,” or “If only you had more faith, your bank account would be full.” James’s point is not the amount of our faith but the object of our faith. He urges a faith that fully and exclusively rests in the true and living God. We are not to be double-minded. We are not, as Elijah pressed when challenging the prophets of Baal, to “falter between two opinions” (1 Kings 18:21) or, as Jesus put it, to “serve two masters” (Matt. 6:24).

James’s illustration of a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind relates not to insecurity but to instability. All of us are insecure at times and need the reassurance of our God. Having faith does not mean that we never doubt. But it does prompt us to pray, “I do believe. Help me in my unbelief” (see Mark 9:24). Rather than being double-minded, we operate with a singleness of focus on the God we love and serve.

DOING THE WORD

1. What does it mean to ask in faith?
2. How can we be double-minded?

1. For greater detail on God’s design for prayer, see Stanley D. Gale, *Why Do We Pray?* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2012).

Chapter 7

Kindred Spirits

As a flower of the field he will pass away.

—JAMES 1:10

So far, we've been fairly confident in following James's flow of thought. It has been a well-marked trail welcoming believers, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to navigate a difficult path that leads to the blessing of spiritual maturity. For safe conduct on that path, we need the discernment of God's wisdom, which is ours for the asking. Along the way we enjoy a certain delight and expectation from our Father in heaven who set us on the path and walks with us each step of the way.

James has given us tremendous encouragement in the trials we face in life. Our hearts are buoyed to hear that our adversities carry purpose and their level of difficulty is set by God, tailored to our individual need. That knowledge helps us to press on.

But after charting this course, James says something that throws us off balance:

Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation,
but the rich in his humiliation,
because as a flower of the field he will pass away.
For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat
than it withers the grass;
its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes.
So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.
(James 1:9–11)

What does being rich or poor have to do with what James has been describing about handling trials? Evidently, the have-nots of the congregation were being looked down on and even oppressed by those who had.

James will deal with this elephant in the room in detail a bit later. But he introduces the disparity of wealth here to make something perfectly clear—that we all are on the same journey and share the same need. The poor are cut from the same cloth as the rich, and that cloth wears out and fades away.

Whether we walk with our feet shod in two-hundred-dollar sneakers or in two-dollar flip-flops, we all traverse an arduous path in an inhospitable world sharing a common need for wisdom in dealing with the perils and pitfalls of life. When James earlier said, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (1:5), the “any” and the “all” of that verse encompass both rich and poor. Having money may help in trials, or it may create its own trials, but no amount of wealth gives anyone greater wherewithal to handle adversity as God wants us to.

Money can be a problem for both rich and poor. It’s a problem for the rich because wealth can blind them to their need and lull them into a false sense of security and self-sufficiency. It’s a problem for the poor not because they lack riches but because they can buy into the delusion that if they only had money, everything would be okay.

James presents a level playing field and a common need for the wisdom and grace of God. Only through humility are these provisions for the journey received. Humility is what will drive us to ask for wisdom and walk in dependence on our God, as James will later assert: “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6).

DOING THE WORD

1. In what way are we all in the same predicament with the same need?
2. How does James lead all of us to God as our sufficiency?

Chapter 8

Steadfast in Trial

Blessed is the man who endures.

—JAMES 1:12

The radio and internet ads promised huge profits. Hawkers scoffed at piddly returns of 10 percent and urged investors to come to them for the big bucks, at virtually no risk. So described the accounts in the newspaper's exposé of the Ponzi scheme, along with the sad stories of many who had entrusted their life savings to the scam.

Before making any investment, we should do due diligence to examine the product, the claims, and especially who is behind it. James has presented us with an investment option. He has called us to be “all in” in the trials of our lives, telling us that they offer vast dividends for personal investment. No reservation. No doubting. That investment strategy applies to everyone, rich and poor alike. James is urging us to faith in God, believing that He intends our good.

Our approach to trials will depend on our trust in the God who brought them to us. Due diligence calls us to know God and believe His word. Contrary to the “get rich quick” schemes of scammers, the best investments are often long-term. The wisdom is to ride out down times with expectation of better days. James issues the same sort of counsel when he says, “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial” (James 1:12 ESV).

Faith invests in the trials God brings to us. Trials are part of the portfolio of investment vehicles by which our God enriches us in the blessings of salvation. The problem is, though, that trials are the most likely of those vehicles to scare us off because in them we suffer hardship and seeming loss.

That's why James urges us to remain steadfast under trial. Trials are described as tests to be withstood. At worst, we are inclined to resist them. At best, we resign ourselves to them. But our Lord would have us find joy in trials because they prove our faith, build our character, and offer great reward, what James calls "the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (James 1:12).

This crown is not something we merit by our steadfastness. Rather, it represents sharing in the victory of Jesus Christ. Though the crown may adorn our head, we cast it down at the feet of Him who sits on the throne because to Him belong all glory, honor, and praise.

We've heard this language of God's work to those who love Him. Paul uses it in the context of trials in respect to the character of God. He writes to the Romans, "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God" (Rom. 8:28). Paul agrees with James that trials are a source of good and a reason for joy because God is carrying out His workmanship of grace in our lives. Our confidence in trials is found in Him who cannot lie and who keeps His promises.

By knowing God, believing God, and trusting God, faith will persevere in the face of trial. He who began a good work will bring it to completion. We will reap the rewards offered because we trust Him who is faithful to His character and to His word.

DOING THE WORD

1. What keeps you from fully investing in the trials you encounter?
2. What divine dividends does God promise you for steadfastness in faith?

Chapter 9

Misreading Trials

Let no one say when he is tempted ...

—JAMES 1:13

I can't tell you how many times in my pastoral ministry I have heard someone say, "Why did God allow this to happen?" I have heard it from those young in the faith and from those who had walked with the Lord for many years. Often that question has been a challenge to the goodness of God. Sometimes it has reflected a crisis of faith from someone wondering what sort of God He is and whether He is worthy of trust.

It's not unusual for trials to prompt us to question the character of God. What kind of Father allows His children to endure such hardship? If God is all-powerful, couldn't He have prevented this from happening? These sorts of questions cause us to examine our faith as well. Is my trust misplaced? Have I believed a lie? God promises forgiveness of sins and eternal life, but seeing all these bad things happen, can I be sure?

The value of trials depends on the character of God. Our investment in trials depends on the trustworthiness of God. That's why James goes on to assure us of the character of our God for the profitability of our trials: "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" (James 1:13).

In order for us to grasp James's gist, we need to know that the word for "trial" in the original language has the same linguistic root as the word for "temptation." The word "trials" in verse 2 is the same word translated "temptation" in verse 12 and used as a verb in verse 13. Whether the word is translated "trial" or "temptation" depends on the context, like we might understand the word "green." Context will help us to know whether "green" means color, emotion of envy, environmentally friendly, or a rookie. In this

case, James wants us to understand a difference between temptation and trial but also an overlap.

What is James telling us? He is saying that with every trial we face comes temptation. Trials are given to us by God for our good. God does not intend our harm. But present with each trial is the effort of our enemy the devil to lure us to the rocks of spiritual ruin. He seeks to turn us against God, to question His character by asking, “Is God really good?” “Does God really care?” “Is God really able?” “Is God real?”

Perhaps these are questions that have occurred to you. Maybe they have sprung to mind and been quickly repulsed by you. You may have become unnerved that they even occurred to you, maybe even causing you to question your faith.

But these sorts of questions are not blasphemous. They are legitimate questions that arise from your distress of soul in spiritual conflict. Such questions are not to be repressed. They are to be addressed and answered with what God has revealed about Himself in His Word and in His Son. In fact, through the nourishment of God’s Word your faith will be strengthened. His truth will be as sandbags holding back the flood of doubt spurred on by our enemy the devil.

DOING THE WORD

1. In what way does every trial from God hold temptation from Satan?
2. How are you to deal with the doubts that besiege you in trials?

This sample provided courtesy of Reformation Heritage Publishers.

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This devotional walks readers through the epistle of James, discovering faith as a key theme of this letter. With pastoral insight, Stanley D. Gale helps us understand James's portrayal of a living faith that clings fervently to our Father in heaven and results in following Him faithfully through the trials of this life. Each devotion is followed by two questions aimed at doing the word, whereby readers put into practice what they have learned. This devotional can be used privately, but its brevity makes it well suited for reading the segment aloud with fellow believers, discussing it together, and supporting each other in prayer and encouragement.

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Edward T. Welch, Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation

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