

Tripping over Trials and Temptation

Introduction:

- I. The Bible encourages the Christian to stand. The problem is the devil is doing all He can to knock us off our feet. The devil wants to see us stumble and fall. The devil wants to trip us up and please be advised that he will use all the tricks in his bag to do so.
- II. Now, there are two things that have caused Christians to trip up over the years. Those two things are trials and temptations. Many Christians have lost their souls because one of those two things, and sometimes both, has caused them to stumble and fall. Not a few Christians have tripped over trials and stumbled over temptation through the years. So in this lesson, we want to look at a few things that James says about trials and temptation.

Lesson:

I. **We Must Avoid Tripping over Trials (James 1:2-4).**

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. ESV

Trials are the common lot of all Christians. There has never been a Christian yet who has not had some kind of trial with which to contend. And I'll tell you why I am so confident about that. It is because God allows them in our lives, and the truth is some of our trials are brought upon us by God Himself. Now listen to me! I'm not saying that every trial that we have, that every problem with which we are plagued comes from God. I am saying, however, that some of our trials are placed upon us by God and that all of our trials are, at the very least, allowed by God. Therefore, all Christians have trials of some sort in their lives from time to time (**2 Cor. 5:1-4**). Now notice that James says that we meet trials of various kinds (**v. 2**). There are trials of distress and disappointment. There are the trials of illness and ailments. There are the trials of financial problems, family problems and even church problems. There are trials that come to us from every walk of life. But the question is what will we do and how will we react when trials come? The answers are just as diverse and various as the trials themselves. Some Christians quit. Some Christians groan and complain. Some Christians lose their faith and other Christians leave the faith, but James tells us the proper way to react. James says, "...*count it all joy.*" Imagine that! How strange that sounds to the natural man who is guided by the wisdom of this world. He would shrug off that kind of advice as being preposterous and absurd. Those of us, however, who are led by the Spirit of God should receive and follow it. How can we do such a thing though? How can we really count it all joy when we fall into various kinds of trials? Allow me to suggest two things:

A. We Must Have the Proper Attitude.

Understanding what trials are all about is helpful. The Greek word for trials in ver. 2 is *peirasmos* and in this context it means, as it often does, to prove or put to the test. Now again, this is something that God does to us once in a while. As we will see later, God never tempts us. The KJV does a poor job in translating this word as *temptation* in verse 2. Trail is really more accurate for this text. And while again God never tempts us, He does, and He always has, put us to the test once in a while.

Heb 11:17

17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, ESV

Gen 22:1-2

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." 2 He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." ESV

Now, the thing we should know about the trials and testing of God is that they are meant to help us, not hurt us. God wants us to pass every test that He places before us. They are not meant to make us fall; they are meant to make us soar. A test is given to a student to see if he can pass, not pass out. And so God tests, sometimes by allowing trails in our life, not to defeat us; not to weaken us, but to strengthen us. This is what we should realize every time we are confronted by the trials of life. One man said, "*We must welcome each rebuff that turns earth's smoothness rough, for every hard thing is another step on the upward way.*" That is the kind of attitude that will help us to count it all joy when we encounter the trials and tribulations of life.

B. We Must Realize the Advantages of Trials.

Someone says, "What advantage could there possibly be in trials?" Well, James tells us.

1. They test of faith (ver. 3).

Trials test our faith by revealing its true nature. Let me ask you, "What kind of faith do you have?" That is a very important question. You see, without the proper kind of faith, it is impossible to please God. It is faith, John once said, that gives us the victory, but there are different kinds of faith and not all of them save. The Bible speaks of weak faith and strong faith. The Bible speaks of being almost persuaded and being fully persuaded. The Bible speaks of living faith and dead faith. The question is, "What kind of

faith do you have?” Someone says, “*My faith is strong and nothing can move me away from God.*” Well, how do you know that? “*Oh, I just know,*” the person says. Well, maybe, but if you want to be sure, your faith must be tested from time to time and the best way to have your faith tested is to experience trials and tribulations. One man said, “*All sunshine and no rain produce a desert; but sun and rain is good to make things grow.*” We need some rainy days in our life to test our faith and to help us appreciate the sunny days.

Now, as an added benefit, trials not only reveal the nature of our faith, they also strength our faith (**1 Pet. 1:6-7**). Gold in its rawest state is put into the refiner’s fire. Why? It is put into the fire because the fire will burn away all the dross and impurities and the gold that comes out will be more valuable than the gold that went in. Even so, the furnace of affliction will burn away the imperfections and weaknesses of our faith much more so than ease and prosperity will. We should see, then, the advantage and usefulness of trials.

2. Trials produce steadfastness (ver. 3).

Steadfastness is a glorious word in the realm of true religion. Without steadfastness there can be no real adherence to Christ. The Greek word here is ***Hupomone***. It means “to wait or remain behind.” It has to do with endurance and constancy and the ability to sustain. May I say to you, that steadfastness is one of the most important virtues that we can possess. Steadfastness is the guardian of faith, the preserver of peace and the teacher of humility. Steadfastness subdues pride, bridles the tongue and restrains the hand. Listen to me: no man can truly live an acceptable life before God without it. We are told often in the Bible to abide in Christ, to remain firm in the faith and to endure.

1 Cor. 15:58

58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. ESV

Rev 2:10

10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. ESV

Can we not see the need for steadfastness from these passages? Now, what does James say produces this steadfastness? The answer is the trials of our faith

Illustration:

"A young preacher, realizing his lack of patience, once asked a more experienced preacher to pray with him about his problem. The aged man of God knelt with the young man and began to ask the Lord to send troubles and difficulties into the young preacher's life. As he continued along those lines, the young preacher finally stopped him as said, 'You must have misunderstood me. I asked for more patience not trouble.' The older preacher said, 'I understood you perfectly. The scriptures teach us that trials and tribulation produce patience."

3. **Steadfastness leads to perfection (ver. 4).**

Trials can be faced with joy because when joined with the proper kind of faith, they lead to steadfastness, and if steadfastness is allowed to run its course, it will develop a thoroughly mature Christian who lacks nothing spiritually. The word *perfect* here is **teleios**. It means "to be full grown or of full age," as opposed to being a little child. So then, to be perfect, points to the idea of being mature in Christ. But James adds another word for emphasis. He tells us that steadfastness not only leads to perfection, that is, maturity in Christ, it also leads completion. The word complete here is **holokleros (ha-lock-lay-ros)** and means "complete in every part." It points to being mature in every part of our Christianity (love, speech, temper, duty, devotion, etc.). The one who is complete in Christ is the one who is lacking nothing necessary to please God. Now, this doesn't happen overnight. In fact, I'm not sure that anyone ever literally reaches this state of spiritual perfection and completeness. However, it should be the goal of every Christian to get as close to this state of being as is humanly possible. Why? Because closer we get to complete maturity in Christ, the closer we resemble Jesus and that should be the goal of each and every Christian (**Phil. 3:12-16**). Now, we can accomplish this, that is, we can grow in Christ and continue to become more and more like Jesus, demonstrating maturity as God's child as we press toward perfection. But do you know what we absolutely have to have in order to do it? Steadfastness! And do you know what produces steadfastness? Trials! So then, when we endure the trials of life, that God allows us to experience in order to test our faith, the end will be the prize of heaven.

James 1:12

12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. ESV

II. We Must Avoid Tripping over Temptation (vers. 13-15).

James 1:13-15

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. ESV

James understood that believers are in danger, not only of tripping over trials, but of giving in to the attractions of temptation. Now, there is a difference between the trials that James has spoken of in this chapter and the temptation to which he now refers. The trials were outward occurrences meant to strengthen us and build our spiritual character. The temptation in the text before us, refers to inward inducements meant to lead us away from God and into sin. Now, make no mistake about it, the temptations of life, though they come from a different source, are just as real as the trials of life and once again they are the experience of every child of God. So, what can we do to avoid tripping over temptation?

A. We Must Understand the Source.

Let me emphatically declare that God is at no time or in no way involved in our temptations. *"Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one."*

Both James and those to whom he wrote were familiar with the Jewish teaching concerning the origin of evil. You see, the Jewish leaders struggled over the problem of evil and its origin. Several theories emerged from among them but many rabbis, because they couldn't explain where it came from, took the giant leap of concluding that it must have come from God. So then, it became easy for some to ultimately blame God for any sort of temptation to sin, and for the sin itself when it was committed. The problem with that hypothesis is that it doesn't take into consideration the nature of God. You see, ladies and gentlemen, God is holy in an absolute sense. As such, He abhors sin. Therefore, it is an offense to Him, and may I say that it is the height of folly and the apex of error, to ever conclude that God has anything whatsoever to do with tempting us to sin or with sin period, save the condemnation of it.

The Jewish rabbis were not the first ones to conclude that God is responsible for sin. That distinction belongs to Adam, doesn't it? Do you remember what Adam said when God confronted him about his sin? *"The woman whom thou gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat."* Adam was blaming, not only Eve, but God Himself and this kind of reasoning continues today. The Calvinists says, "I can't help being a

sinner. God created me totally depraved and so I have no choice in the matter.

Augustine

“Every person born into the world is enslaved to the service of sin and apart from the efficacious grace of God, is utterly unable to choose to follow God...”

Presbyterian Confession of Faith

“Man, by his fall into sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation.”

This is the core thinking of Calvinism and it begs the question, “If God creates us as sinners, and if we are utterly unable to choose to follow God in the sinful state in which we are created, whose fault is it when we sin?” Calvinists don’t want to admit it but the doctrine leads to the inescapable conclusion that sin is ultimately God’s fault. God’s to blame for the sin problem of the world. But James says, **NO SIR!** It is not God’s fault. When we sin it is our fault. Sin in our lives comes from within.

James 1:14

But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. KJV

We are carried away from God and into sin by lust. Lust, ladies and gentlemen, is the foundation for all temptation. Now, lust, while it has to do with desire, it is more than just a simple desire, it is a longing or craving for something, especially for something forbidden. Lust is unregulated desire. We all have certain God-given desires, but lust has to do with those desires being out of control. Lust has to do with longing for something so desperately that God’s will is no longer as important as obtaining whatever it is that is desired. Now notice the genealogy of ver. 15.

James 1:15

Then when lust hath conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death. KJV

The biological imagery is striking is, isn’t it? Lust is the bride. The unmentioned father is Satan and the grotesque child that is born of this devilish couple is sin. Then when sin is finished, when sin grows up in us, it brings forth its own offspring and James says that offspring is death. What kind of death? Spiritual death! That is the consequences of sin. Paul declares it to be so in the book of Romans.

Rom 5:12

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— ESV

Rom 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. ESV

So then, death is the wages of, the product of, the offspring of sin. If you sin, you will die, that is, you will be separated from God and that is the end result of all unrepented sin. Now the point of it is this—when we die because of sin it is our fault not God's or anyone else's.

Ezek. 18:4

Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die. ESV

Ezek. 18:20

The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself. ESV

Now, why is it important to understand all this? It is important because as long as we are blaming other sources for our temptations, we won't address the real problem, i.e., self. We won't put forth the needed effort to curtail our desires and to keep them in check. Instead we will just continue to make excuses for our sins when we fall, and thus there will be no repenting and therefore there will be no pardon. In other words, instead of overcoming temptation, we will trip over it and the devil will have his way with us (*e.g. of governor visiting inmates at a prison in which all but one made a plurality of excuses for why they were there. The one who admitted his guilt was pardoned. Read 1 Jn. 1:7-10*).

B) The Solution for Temptation (James 1:16-21).

We have just seen what we should not do when temptation comes, that is, we should not blame God and conclude that they come from Him. Well then, what can we do? How can we keep our desires under control and not give temptation an opening in our lives. The answer is we can rest in that which does come from God, that is, the word of God (**Jas. 1:17-21**). When we turn to the word of God and apply it to our lives (**vers. 22ff**), we can overcome any temptation the devil throws before us.

Conclusion:

So, here we have it—two things over which we must be very careful not to trip, trials and temptation. James gives us the ammunition to deal successfully with both of these things. Let's apply these things to our lives.