

The First Giver

James 1. 2-4; 12

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.

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.....5 if any of you lack wisdom...*

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. 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.*

- I. Introduction—Gospel Wisdom from the book of James
 - A. Dan, in the past, has taken us through various passages in the book of James. He titled his series "Gospel Wisdom...."
 1. As JT will be taking the month of August as a break and to prepare for our next sermon series, we, as elders, decided to continue what Dan started—the study in the book of James.
 2. So what that means is that we have chosen various portions of James to teach with the theme Gospel Wisdom. Gospel Wisdom is the foundation which ties them all together.
 - B. Another emphasis you will see in this series will be the emphasis on Holy Living.
 1. We have spent quite a bit of time in Ephesians—Sit , Walk, Stand.
 2. And we want to continue the emphasis on walking and standing in the context of sitting.
 3. We desire for all of us at NCC to walk in a manner worthy of our calling : As Paul urges the church in Eph. 4. 1-3: *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*
- II. James 1
 - A. Quick background and context of this letter. Verse 1
 1. *James, a servant of God and of the lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the dispersion: Greetings*

2. This is a scattered church. Primarily Jewish—poverty, stressors of living in a different culture and temptations to use their freedom in Christ to sin.
 3. James gives them instructions as to how they are to live.
- B. Dan spoke on this passage 2 years ago. I strongly encourage you to go to the website and listen to him. What he said is very important as he lays an important understanding of what James is writing to the scattered church. I will use some of what he taught to add continuity and then build on his foundation.
- C. I will be speaking today on James 1:2-3 and 12:15.

III. The First Giver

- A. *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings. 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.....*
- B. Verse 2: *Count it all joy, by brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ...LEAVE THE SLIDE ON THE SCREEN*
1. Count it all joy, by brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds...
 - a) I am going to take a minute and review some terms with you. I am primarily using Dan's definitions which will give us continuity, especially if you go back and listen to his messages.
 - b) This will be like a dissection which I am sure Graycee will enjoy. The danger with dissections is that we can focus on the pieces and miss the whole system or organ.
 2. Count-
 - a) This is a command given to the church by the authority of James, the elder of the Jerusalem church.
 - b) It is a simple command to the scattered believers—It simply means to Consider or deem, judge to be, or to regard as . (This is not literally counting as in 1,2,3...)
 - (1) Count happens in the mind, not in the emotions.
 - (2) Keep this word 'Count' in your mind as we are going to circle back to it and spend quite a bit of time on it.
 3. Count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds
 - a) 'It all'—means just that —all, every, the whole.
 - b) The word 'it' is referring to the Trials. All trials. ALL of the trials.

- c) Dan reminded us that a trial is any difficulty. The idea of 'any difficulty' lies in the perception of the person in the difficulty.
- C. Continuing the dissection:
1. Count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds
 - a) Joy—Calm delight. A calm delight resting in Knowing—with absolute certainty.
 - (1) "Joy is a deep, external sense of goodness internally, rooted in the the Holy Spirit *through whom we have an awareness of who God is and what God is doing.*"- Dan Lane (italicized is mine)
 - (2) Joy is an experience of God's presence through the power of the Holy Spirit which is always and only sourced from God.
 - (a) Since the only currency God accepts is faith...
 - (b) This Joy is experienced through faith which is always rooted in Jesus. James says "for you **know** that the testing of your faith..."
 - (3) The Christian experiences the joy of the gospel in ALL the trials of life because the Christian **knows** God.
 - (a) Listen to Paul in *Romans 5 NLT* —
 - (b) *Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. 2 Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.3 We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance.*
 - (4) "God is glorified in his people by the way we experience him, not merely by the way we think about him (or feel about him). Indeed the devil thinks more true thoughts about God in one day than a saint does in a lifetime, and God is not honored by it. The problem with the devil is not his theology, but his desires. Our chief end is to glorify God, the great Object. We do so most fully when we treasure him, desire him so supremely that we let goods and kindred go and display his love to the poor and the lost. John Piper (italics are mine)
 2. Count it all joy when you Meet—carries the idea of Falling into; of being surrounded by , or to come upon. When Trials come upon you, count it all joy.
 - a) We often say that LIFE HAPPENS!
 - (1) As if our days and minutes are filled with random events.

- (2) We often view ourselves as people tossed on the random waves of life. Sometimes the water is calm and at other times it is choppy and at other times absolutely awful.
- (3) When in reality—Jesus—Ever Present, persistently active. There is the Always intentional presence and activity of the Holy Spirit
- b) Listen to this: "*(The apostle) John sharply reminds us that at times of (trials), we live deep inside enemy territory- in full view of the enemy! Why are we not destroyed?...the ONE who was born of God keeps him (us) safe, and the evil one cannot harm him.*" Let's enjoy the confidence (*count it all joy*) and comforts of God's promises to us; but not lose sight of our absolute dependence upon God for safety, moment by moment. The way to remain conscious of this dependence, by the example of Jesus, is to pray. (*Count it or Regard it*)" Mike Cochran (italicized words are mine)
3. Count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness:
- a) Trials—peirasmos of various kinds: Dan spent a lot of time on Trials, so once again I urge you to go back and listen to him.
- b) The word Trial has two uses in James 1. The two word-meanings are intertwined. They are the same word: peirasmos
- (1) FIRST USE: One trial comes from God and is related to the world around us. Vs. 2
- (a) Difficulties, discipline/correction, adversity, affliction.
- (b) Any difficulty, of any degree, sent by God to "test a Christian's character, faith and holiness."
- (c) "You have no idea what God has up His sleeve for you in order to change you into the image of Christ ." Elisabeth Elliot
- (d) *Philippians 1.6: And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*
- (e) Trials are given, as good gifts, to the believer by God.
- i) These trials are personalized and tailored for each believer.
- ii) Each and every one is designed by God to a create new habitus—to bring the believer to maturity in Christ .
- (f) Because of who God is—I'll say it again—**because of who God is**—the believer is able to and should consider the moments of life with joy; the deep external sense of goodness internally with an awareness of who God is and what God is doing.
- (g) TRIALS UNCOVER GOD—God uses trials to reveal Himself.

- (2) SECOND USE: The other trial, which is also translated temptation, comes from within the believer. I.e. The enticement to sin which originates from the desires within the Christian,.
- (a) **12** *Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial/temptation, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. 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.*
- i) These trials/temptations are those that are rooted in rebellion against God and this rebellion originates within the heart of the believer.
 - ii) These Trials entice a Christian to not go God's way. Again, these trials do not come from God, but originate from the heart of man.
- (b) These trials/temptations UNCOVER THE HEART. They only reveal what is already there. They hold no power. Christ has put them to death. They do not create sin. They reveal!: (Remember that God is the First Mover. The reality is that God is uncovering you)
- i) They reveal **unbelief-skepticism for what God really says or skepticism for who God is**
 - ii) They reveal **disbelief-a refusal to accept God on His terms.**
4. IMPORTANT!! The trials that reveal who God is, will reveal the heart as well. Both will occur at the same time.
- (1) Paul graciously shows us his heart in his letter to the Romans 7
 - (2) Summarize this: **15** *For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. 17 So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. 21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.*

- D. Let me, by Example, show you what I am talking about: : Priscilla and I have been married for 36 years. A few weeks ago we were having a simple discussion about our upcoming vacation with our kids and grandkids
- a) We were discussing bringing my truck to help hold all the stuff we were to bring with us.
 - b) Priscilla made the comment that it was 'not very nice' to expect adults to sit in the back seat of the truck because the space is so limited.
 - (1) NOT NICE! I threw my hands into the air, how can you say I am not nice! I didn't say you were not nice, she said. Yes you did. Just now you said I am not nice. No I didn't. She said again.
 - (2) I don't know why, EVERY time I give my opinion you get so emotionally hot. What do you mean by that?. I said. Are you saying that I have been treating you poorly for the last 36 years?
 - (3) I went upstairs. She remained downstairs. Fine, I thought. Since you believe that about me, we can divorce. I will go my way and you can go your way. She is downstairs—we need counseling. I just don't get what is happening between us, especially since he retired.
 - (4) A Trial had come upon us!!! Little were we expecting it!!
 - (5) NOTICE: how both Trials and Temptation occur at the same time. In the trials of this life in which God is transforming His people; His people will bend toward their desires to not go God's way, ie sin. We will Not acknowledge God but will try to be rid of the trial and will sin against God instead.
2. *Count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing...(vs 3,4)*
- a) "For you Know" is to : know absolutely. This is not a hope or a wish.
 - (1) Knowing is, James says, is a foregone conclusion. He says "For you know.." You don't need convincing. You don't need more faith. You already have been given the faith and this faith already bears the fruit of knowing.
 - (2) The church is the Center of Christ's initiating love! (JT) so He has equipped us with all things necessary for life and godliness. We KNOW God
 - b) This Testing- This Examination of one's faith
 - (1) It's here, in the trials and temptations of our days, faith is active and bears fruit. Fruit that matures in the **absolute sovereignty of God.**

- (2) Whether the test/trial is from God or whether the test comes internally from the desires of the heart; I need to point out that the emphasis is NOT on the trial or the temptation. Nor is it on the WHY it is happening.
- (a) AND if we place the emphasis on Trials or Temptations, we run the risk of neutering the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- (b) By Emphasizing Trials/Temptation we de-emphasize Faith by skipping over the command to Count it.
- (c) I am beginning to bring us back to the beginning command—Count, but first I need to touch on what God produces in the believer during the exercising of faith.
- c) *The testing of your faith Produces Steadfastness — Produces Endurance.*
- (1) This is a deliberate, purposeful loyalty to Christ through FAITH in the face of the greatest AND the most mundane trials/sufferings and temptations.
- (2) *Romans 5: Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory. We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character **strengthens our confident hope of salvation.** And this hope will not lead us to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.*

E. So How does a believer arrive at steadfastness/ endurance?

1. Is it through being steadfast? Is it through the trials or temptations?
- a) Does 'being' steadfast or 'enduring' hardship produce anything?
- (1) No— Listen carefully. If we believe that 'being steadfast' in trials/temptations, we will grow weary and we will lose heart. And this weariness will lead to despair.
- (a) James does NOT command us to be STEADFAST! He does not tell us to strive or fight to be steadfast.
- (b) The ability to remain steadfast/ to Endure Under trials and temptations does not and will never originate from within us.—not our grit or fortitude or stubbornness.
- (c) Let's look at our passage again: Count it all joy.....for you know the testing of your faith produces steadfastness...

- (1) Trials happen regardless.—The outcome? —Knowing God through Trials
 - (2) Temptation happens regardless.—The outcome?—Knowing God when He uncovers us for He provides remedy (Jesus) and the way of escape.
 - (2) Steadfastness is NOT the goal; Steadfastness is not the command. Steadfastness is the result of the command. What is the command?
2. James commands the believer to **COUNT (SMARTY WORD)**
3. All of our sitting, walking and standing hinges on this command to 'Count'
- a) Why? Because Count has its roots in Faith. And w/o faith, it is impossible to please God.
 - b) *Count it all joy when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your FAITH produces steadfastness...*
 - (1) Count begins in the mind (not in the emotions): Count..for you know...
 - (2) Count is anchored in the KNOWing—"the absolute knowing of who God is and in knowing what God does." (Dan's definition of wisdom).
 - (3) Count is the door way into Joy ("Joy is a deep, external sense of goodness internally, rooted in the the Holy Spirit *through whom* we have an awareness of who God is and what God is doing."- Dan Lane)
 - (4) Count is the gateway to experiencing the peace of God.
 - (a) *Philippians 4: 4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. 5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving (count) let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*
- (5) To regard trials or consider trials or judge trials from a supernatural point of view requires faith functioning in a renewed mind. Faith necessarily results in prayer; it results in communication with God.
- (a) Do not judge your trials or temptations using your senses.
 - i) Listen to Paul in Hebrews 12 and notice that he tells us to use our minds.
 - ii) ***11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.***

iii) A Christian is commanded to view and experience trials and temptations in the light of Christ who transforms

iv) Discipline will seem painful using the senses but we KNOW (using the mind of faith) it will yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

(1) Thomas Manton - "True judging and counting always...is the result of some principle of faith... As thus, *our trials* are misery; but we *know* that God will turn it to our good: God's corrections are sharp; (for) we have strong corruptions to be mortified: we are called to great trial; but we (count) upon the great hope *of salvation.*"

(2) With this simple word-'count'- James exhorts believers to enter into a 'heart experience of the gospel's power (that can only happen through *faith* (prayer) (Keller; Prayer page 15)

(6) The Act of Counting- Illuminates the reality of God's presence in the Christian. (Eg ??Red light/Green Light??)

(7) The Act of Counting forces the believer/forces His church to experience once again the First Giver's intentional love through faith.

(a) *Romans 8.15,16—14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*

(8) To Count is Faith

(9) To Count is to pray

(10)Count is accomplished through the Power of the Holy Spirit given to us freely to us.

(11)Count is infused with wisdom—God's wisdom—that of knowing God better

(12)Count is the 'heart experience of the gospel's power.'" Timothy Keller in his book Prayer

F. Finish the example:

1. I was upstairs, my mind full of arguments and self-pity and I considered myself injured. I heard the Lord say—why don't you practice what I have been teaching you about Count IT all joy?
 - a) I STOPPED. Since Count is the heart experience of the gospel's power, I thanked God for Priscilla...I need wisdom to know what is happening!—This simple act was an exercise of faith. By faith, I accepted our trial as from God. In so doing, I was uncovered—my heart was open to the Light. God was uncovered—He loves me and Priscilla, and He desires to make us both complete.
 - b) By Faith, I asked Him for wisdom. Regarded my reaction as a sinful reaction and brought that before the Lord.
 - c) I went downstairs where Priscilla and I communicated properly. Do you know that when she said that placing someone in the back seat of my truck was unkind, she meant that it's very uncomfortable back there? That's all!
 - d) God's wisdom was given to us. We are not each other's enemies. And so, as we continue to learn how to communicate in a godly fashion, we use that phrase first when making assumptions about the other is 'meaning' when we speak with each other.

G. NCC—

1. God is Immense beyond understanding and imagination. He is the most supremely worthy Object of admiration, honor and delight.
2. God is Unimaginably awesome in all of His perfections, absolutely righteous, holy and just in all of his ways
3. God is unbelievably good and merciful to us, His children ,as the Creator and Sustainer of our lives.
4. Every breath, every heartbeat, every function of every organ in our bodies is a gift from Him. If He would stop thinking of us for a nanosecond, we would cease to exist.
5. Every pleasure and every trial we experience is a gift from His loving hand. By faith we embrace Him,
6. All that we are and all that we have come from His Goodness and love toward us. We, the church, are the Center of Christ's initiating love.
7. Our lives, in every way, is and will always be utterly dependent upon Him in whom we live and move and have our being.
8. He has created us with the intention of glorifying Him by finding our soul's delight in Him and by living in joyful obedience to Him in all of our ways.
(Modified from A Gospel Primer for Christians by Milton Vincent)

9. So what happens when I DON'T CARE? Or I JUST CAN'T due to great sorrow or fear?: We have been given The Church who is the center of Christ's initiating love. JT
- H. In all areas of living, God is God . He is Lord of ALL. This is why He commands us to Count it all joy! This "Is the heart experience of the gospel's power." To Count it all joy is the gateway to soul-rest.; to restful peace of God
- I. *James 1. 17—Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. **18** Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*