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God's Way to Succeed in Trials – James 1:1-4

A Devotion for Families by *Dr. Jim Smyrl*

What is the last act you saw someone perform that you would consider an act of service?

Is there anything on your mind that is really a big struggle for you right now?

You are going to walk through a portion of a letter that James wrote to a group of Jewish people that had trusted Christ as Savior. In the first 8 verses you will see how a servant of God faces big struggles yet succeeds.

Introducing the Text:

Read: James 1:1-4

This passage begins a series of opposites that you can study throughout James. James presents many issues that Christians face and demonstrates how we are to respond in a manner that is totally opposite to how non-Christians respond. How is having the attitude of a servant opposite from how the world encourages you to act?

Note: The four verses you just read tell you how to respond to difficult struggles. Can you spot the ways in which this text tells you to respond in a manner that is opposite to how the world responds to struggles? List those ways here:

Asking For Help:

Ask God to show you, in this passage, just how to respond to difficult trials.

Exposing the Text:

Read verse 1 again and note that "bondservant" is a person who gives up their own will and desires, and does only what their master wills.

How are Christians to be bondservants?

Being a servant means that you must daily seek to do what God wants, even if that means you don't get to do what we want to do. Are you pursuing what you desire or what God desires?

James is writing to the twelve tribes, which were Jews that had trusted Christ as Savior. These were people who, because of their public profession of faith in Christ, were kicked out of their homes, fired from their jobs, and ignored by their friends. How do you think these people felt as they experienced such a difficult trial?

They knew these things would happen if they trusted Christ as Savior, but they willingly came to Him. How did these Jewish Christians demonstrate the attitude of a servant?

Walk Through the Text

I. Servants of God Profit in Trials (vs. 1-4)

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- a. "joy": Joy is a part of the Christian's life in two ways: First, joy is only available to those who know Christ as Savior and Lord. Second, joy is only experienced by those Christians who give up their will for the will of God.
- b. "when": Does verse 2 say that Christians may never go through difficult times? No, it says "when" telling us that we will all go through tough times as you follow Christ.
- c. "fall into various trials": Here is an opposite way of thinking when compared to those not in Christ. James instructs these persecuted believers to consider it "joy" as they are in these terrible trials. If you jump into a swimming pool from the high dive, can you keep your head above water? NO! Once you are under the water and open your eyes what do you see above you, below you, to your right and to your left? All you see is water. That is the picture James gives in describing trials. No matter where we go or look, all we can see and think about are those trials. He is talking about being totally immersed in a trial.
- d. Verse 3 tells us why we should consider it "joy" when we are covered by a trial. Read verse 3 again.
 - i. "testing of your faith": we know this trial is a test, designed to produce something in our lives. The opposite here is that when the world goes through a trial they look at the trial as an enemy against their life, not a servant of their life.
 - ii. "produces": Here is another opposite. If a lost person goes through a trial that causes them to lose their friends, money, home, and job, is he confident in what is being produced in his life or is he sad over what is being reduced from his life? So what is opposite about the way a Christian responds to a trial according to verse 3?
- e. In verse 4, James encourages these believers to "let patience have its perfect work." He is calling on them to let God complete the process of growing them and producing His qualities in their lives through the trial.
 - i. Here is another opposite in the text. Lost people want to take a recess when trials come, but James says Christians are to continue through process, trusting that God is producing something great in them.
 - ii. What does verse 4 say is the end result of the process we go through in our trials? Note: "perfect and complete, lacking nothing" describes a person who has reached the goal. Here, it is specifically describing a believer who trusts God through the trial and comes out of the trial with the qualities God desired to produce in him.
 - iii. How is this end result of a Christian's trial the opposite from the end result of a person without Christ that goes through the same trial?

Apply It

Go back over the first four verses and count the number of opposites you see in these verses. How should you look at the trial you are going through differently because you are saved?

Go back to verse 2 and note that since you are saved and desire to do God's will and not your own, you can say that it is a joyful experience to face this painful trial because you know that God is producing in you through the trial.

Ask God to help you have the right focus while going through a trial. Ask Him to help you focus on Him and not yourself as trials come.