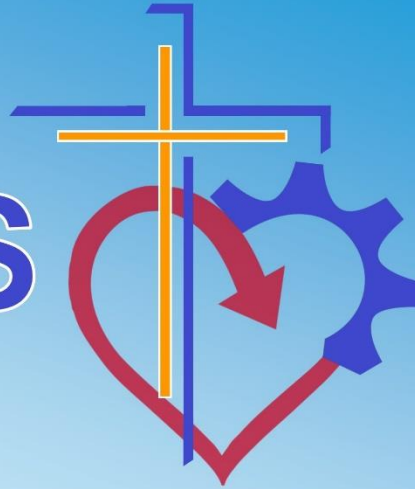


faith WORKS

The Book of James

-DEVOTIONAL PODCAST-



Trials as Spiritual Strength Training

James 1:2-8 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

So much of our attitude towards life depends upon our perspective. Two people can go through the very same difficulty and one comes out the other side wiser and more resilient, while the other is dejected and defeated. One saw the difficulty as a challenge to be overcome and a learning opportunity; the other saw it as a punishment to be avoided and complained about. All the difference was in their perspectives. As children of God through faith in Jesus we have a point of view unlike any other in this world. We believe that our God is in absolute control of all that happens. We trust that his love for us is infinite, his mercy is unchanging, and his forgiveness is new every morning. Because of these inalterable truths promised us by God, we have an upside-down view, a heavenly perspective, of the hardships that come into our lives. James would have us see our trials as spiritual strength training.

Just as we all need bodily exercise to stay in good physical shape, we also need regular spiritual exercise to keep spiritually fit. We can be joyful when we experience trials and tests of every kind because these challenges develop perseverance. The picture behind the word "perseverance" is a "pushing up" against a weight that is bearing down. The difficulties we go through are not accidental. They are part of God's good plans for us. Like a personal trainer they force our faith to get up off the couch and "push up" by resisting that temptation or sacrificing our convenience, or going to our knees in prayer. Faith builds "muscle" not by learning to be more self-sufficient but by becoming more God-dependent. By relying on the almighty Lord Jesus, who said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). All of our troubles—big and small—have a silver lining when they drive us to Christ.

At the same time many of us if left to ourselves might prefer to only exercise certain muscles in certain ways at preferred times. For example, I enjoy long morning bike rides, but I wouldn't be caught dead on a bench press or in a gym after 9 PM. However, God's goal for us is not to be like the guy whose right arm is massive but whose left arm is puny because he only lifts weights on the one side. Instead, God's objective is for us to be "mature

and complete, not lacking anything." In other words, spiritual "pushups" are introduced in every area and time of our lives—even, and perhaps especially where we are weakest or when it's most inconvenient—all so our strength in him becomes more balanced and well-rounded. We should then expect and yes, rejoice, when God allows troubles to come to test our perseverance from every angle—our relationships, our health, our finances, and also enduring persecution. All these are his ways of strength training our souls.

How does faith react to spiritual challenges and tests? It looks to and relies on the Lord. We need the wisdom that comes from above to respond to and navigate through trials in a god-pleasing and soul-strengthening way. In the scriptural sense wisdom is more than just knowledge. Rather it is the proper application of knowledge at the right time and in the righteous and moral way. That can only be taught by the Spirit. Recall how King Solomon asked God for wisdom, and he received it abundantly. Solomon informs us in Proverbs that living in a relationship of fear and respect of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (1:7). The Psalmist says that the precepts of the Lord give understanding and light (cf. Ps. 119:104, 130). When we start with the Lord in any situation, we have begun wisely.

Finally, James reminds us that faith seeks God's wisdom confidently trusting that he will direct and sustain us. In our prayers for help and our quest for spiritual clarity we ask God to lead us through as he promises. We wait on him and his timing, which builds our long-term endurance.



Reflection Questions:

- 1.) Where is your life being "weighed down" right now? Relying on the Lord and seeking his wisdom and insight from his Word, how is your faith prompted to "push up"?
- 2.) How can you find joy in the tests of life?



Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, you patiently and joyfully endured rejection and the cross for our salvation. Help us to persevere under trials by relying on your strength and your wisdom to see us through. Give us singlemindedness of soul that seeks you and trusts your will to give us what we need to be strong. Amen.