

## Introduction

If there is one word that captures the essence, character, commitment and expression of devoted motherhood, it is the word, *perseverance*.

Every mother knows what I am talking about because both child-bearing and child-rearing pushes mothers to the outer limits of their personhood.

To be a mother is to stress, struggle and suffer. Therefore, motherhood requires fortitude, commitment and stick-to-it-ness like no other single role in life. Funny, we expect it, lean into it and depend on it. Mothers learn/live to endure!

### *Things My Children Have Taught Me*

- A 3-year-old's voice is louder than 200 adults in a crowded restaurant
- You are having a good day when you get through it without a child leaking bodily fluids on you.

- Legos will pass through the digestive tract of a 4-year-old. Duplos will not!
- Always look in the oven before you turn it on.
- Garbage bags are poor substitutes for parachutes.
- Shouting to make your children obey is like using the horn to steer your car... and you get about the same results.
- Children brighten a household, yet they never seem to turn any lights off.
- When you hear the toilet flush and hear "uh oh," it is already too late!

Recognizing these things—and many more afflictions of much greater consequence that are brought into the lives of mothers through those they love—give us reason to say thank you and to consider, through their example, how we grow through trials, difficulty and suffering.

"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings. Count it all joy, my brothers, 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 in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him" (James 1:1-5 ESV).

Note this letter was written to scattered people, not sheltered people. It was written with one goal in mind—steadfastness. It is interesting to see how this word appears in comparative translations:

**KJV** = *patience* (too passive)

**NASB** = *endurance*

**NIV** = *perseverance*. The Greek word, *hupomone*, means to *bear up under*. It is the idea of not only withstanding external stress and strain, and to remain, but also of turning this toward greatness and glory. For an athlete, this means breaking through the quitting points. In church history, martyrs oftentimes did not die sobbing, but singing.

"And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the

stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them" (Acts 16:23-25 ESV).

Constancy with joy!

"The capacity to finish well is what the New Testament writers called endurance or perseverance. It is the virtue by which we become increasingly able to honor commitments that ought to last a lifetime. It is especially the ability to honor commitments when honoring them becomes difficult."

—John Ortberg

I think this is a significant statement relative to spiritual growth. Much of our spiritual maturity comes through difficulty. There is no spiritual transformation without it.

If you talk with people who have made any significant progress in life and faith, you will often discover it has come through pain, suffering and endurance.

"Faith is something forged, not simply something learned."

To this end, James gives instruction and guidance for us all. Let's see how he makes the case for growth through adversity and suffering.



## Expect Tests

"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds" (James 1:2 ESV).

Note this is not simply a possibility, it is an ever-present reality ("when"). Times of testing come into all our lives.

- **Tests Come Unexpectedly**

"meet"—not an appointment, but an unplanned encounter. Have you ever slipped in a store for a quick pick-up only to meet everyone you know?

- **Tests Come Repeatedly**

Not *just one and done*! Tests come over and over and over again. Aorist active—repeated point of action (this one, that one and another one). Tests are individual, yet continual in our lives.

“I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33 ESV).

### • **Tests Come with Variety**

Tests are not all the same. Some tests are more severe and more difficult than others.

I read about a college student taking a final exam in Ornithology (scientific study of birds). He arrived in the classroom only to discover there were no questions on the test (no true/false, no multiple choice, no essay). There were just photos of various bird's feet rotating in a loop on a monitor screen—25 photos in all. The exam was to sit, observe and name each type of bird by the image of their feet.

“Insane,” protested the student. “I can’t do this!”

Professor: “You have to. It is your final, and your grade will affect this entire course.”

Student: “I won’t do it – I’m leaving!”

Professor: “If you walk out, I will have no choice but to give you a zero and you will fail this course”

Student: "Go ahead, fail me!"

Professor: "What is your name?"

The student looked down, kicked off shoes and said, "You tell me!"

Thankfully, Peter used this same word to describe God's varied grace in places of need in our lives.

"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Peter 4:10 ESV).

All testing is difficult, but through tests, our values, commitments and beliefs are revealed. The theme of James 1 (and really all of the New Testaments letters) is filled with this message: We can triumph over trials.

## **Choose Joy**

"Count." There is a choice in the accounting of our lives. All the things we face, endure and meet, we can call them *credits* or *debits*—accounting term. Which side of the ledger does this go? Is it an asset or liability?

Think forward.

“Our values determine our evaluations.”

—Warren Wiersbe

If we value comfort more than character, trials only serve to disrupt and upset us. But if we value character, we find joy in the struggle and beyond the pain.

When you value life in Christ (growth, maturity, holiness, faithfulness), you evaluate life differently—joyfully!

What is joy? It is the condition of the human spirit shaped by faith. It is linked to happiness, but it is greater than happiness; it involves both smiles and tears.

“We thank Him for sun,  
Do we thank Him for rain?  
We thank Him for joy,  
Do we thank Him for pain?  
We thank Him for gains,  
Do we thank Him for losses?  
We thank Him for blessings,  
Do we thank Him for crosses?”

—*The Power of His Presence*  
Adrian Rogers



“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you”  
(1 Thessalonians 5:18 ESV).

To thank God in the hard places and spaces of life is not to give approval to them, but to announce our confidence that God is greater than these things.

Our Lord is the Sovereign One. There is no area of life where He does not rule and overrule, even in tragedy. We can triumph in our trials by faith!

## **Embrace Adversity**

... “for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness” (James 1:3 ESV).

*Knowing* is not just hoping or wishing. There is something we know (experiential) in the midst of things we don’t understand. There is an outcome to testing—steadfastness, endurance, durability.

God is working in your life even when you struggle to understand amid the stress, strain and pressure.

Your circumstances may involve much hardship. Hardship is an indication of being in the center of God's will, not a sign of being wrong!

Testing works for us even while tensions work against us.

... "so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7 ESV).

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28 ESV).

"For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Corinthians 4:17 ESV).

"Suffering alone does not produce perseverance, only suffering endured somehow by faith." —John Ortberg

That is why Hebrews 11 is filled with testimonies of faith. Tribulation is followed by triumph. Crowns are formed in crucibles.

## **Pray Expectantly**

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him” (James 1:5 ESV).

Wisdom is a great deficiency in humanity. It is easier to let our emotions move us to foolishness and folly than to have faith.

Our generation is the most informed and progressive in science, technology and information. We have more college graduates. We travel farther, faster, higher and better than any other generation. Yet as knowledge increases, wisdom is in decline. Suicide rates are higher. Morals are lower. Marriages fail faster. Divorces are quicker. Civility is poorer. The world lives on the edge of chaos, yet God offers a gift to His children—wisdom.

Sometimes God uses the severity of life to bring realization of our need for divine wisdom and daily dependence.

“Wisdom is the art of living skillfully in whatever actual conditions we find ourselves.”  
—Eugene Petersen

The wisdom mentioned in James 1 is not one of philosophical speculation, but one of practical application in the hard places and spaces of life.

“We need wisdom so we will not miss the opportunities God is giving us to mature.”  
—Warren Wiersbe

This is a wisdom we receive, not achieve.

“It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man” (Psalm 118:8 ESV).

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!” (Psalm 111:10 ESV).

“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God... And because of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:18, 30 ESV).

One of the most powerful messages of the cross is that God has chosen not to stand apart from our suffering, but to embrace it, endure it and overcome it by the work of His Son, Jesus Christ, for us. He is not unmoved by the creatures He loves.

Jesus bore our shame, pain and suffering at Calvary so that when we come to Calvary, we can know we are never alone. There is a resurrection hope that transforms our suffering (the injuries we endure) into something glorious.

“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” (1 Corinthians 15:58 ESV).