

What You'll Need Inside the Storm

James 1:1-12

Bellevue Baptist Church

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I once sat under a pastor who would often say: *"Every person in this room is going to face storms in life. In fact, at this very moment, you are moving into a storm, you are in a storm, or you are coming out of a storm."*

The Bible certainly agrees with him. Job put it this way: *"Man is born for trouble as surely as sparks fly upward."* (Job 5:7) No person lives long in this world without dealing with problems. Family problems. Financial problems. Health problems. People problems.

The ancient Roman ruler Marcus Aurelius kept a journal back in the year 170. He wrote down random observations about the world, which today give us a glimpse of what life was like way back then. At the beginning, he writes:

When you wake up in the morning, tell yourself: the people I deal with today will be meddling, ungrateful, arrogant, dishonest, jealous, and surly.

–Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 170 A.D.

I had to look up surly—it means rude. Such a nice thought as you commute to work and mentally prepare for your coworkers and customers. Aurelius goes on to write, that living in the world requires learning how to live at peace with people—even the surly ones.

This is where the book of James begins. James starts by teaching us how to suffer successfully. He wants us to mentally and spiritually prepare for the storms of life that are headed our way.

Let me read the first 12 verses before I break them down for you.

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ:

To the twelve tribes dispersed abroad:

Greetings.

² Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and

complete, lacking nothing.

⁵ Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly—and it will be given to him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord, ⁸ being double-minded and unstable in all his ways.

⁹ Let the brother of humble circumstances boast in his exaltation, ¹⁰ but let the rich boast in his humiliation because he will pass away like a flower of the field. ¹¹ For the sun rises and, together with the scorching wind, dries up the grass; its flower falls off, and its beautiful appearance perishes. In the same way, the rich person will wither away while pursuing his activities.

¹² Blessed is the one who endures trials, because when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.
James 1:1–12

Let's walk through this passage, panning for gold, shall we? There's so much here. What will you need in a storm? That's what this is about. Five things.

What You Will Need In a Storm

1. A joyful attitude (v.2)

Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials...

When it says we should consider it a joy, the Greek word for consider is in the form of a command. My natural human tendency is to gripe in times of trouble—how could God let this happen to me?!—God commands us to view our problems a growth opportunities.

To accept a trial without complaining is one thing, but the Scriptures go even further. We are called to walk into a storm with great joy. That phrase can be translated as unmixed joy, total joy, or sheer joy. The Bible says that Christians can look at their troubles and “I'm looking forward to seeing what God does with this.”

In the Old Testament, Nehemiah said:, “Let the joy of the Lord be your strength!” In the New Testament, James says, “Consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds. I like how John MacArthur summarizes v.2:

James is speaking of a unique fullness of joy that the Lord graciously provides His children when they willingly and uncomplainingly endure troubles while trusting in Him—regardless of the cause, type, or severity of the distress.

–MacArthur New Testament Commentary

Willingly and uncomplainingly. Those are key words.

Now, I don't have to tell you that preaching this text and practicing this text are two different things. I would much rather tell you—consider it joy that you just lost your job than to wake up tomorrow to an email saying Bellevue has a new pastor. That last guy wasn't working out.

How can a person maintain joy in the midst of trouble? There's no better place to look than the life of Joseph in the Old Testament. Joseph was a man who could not catch a break. As his story unfolded, he found himself time and time again betrayed, overlooked, heartbroken, jailed, and judged. Yet, over time, the Lord taught him to maintain a sunny optimism in the midst of every storm. In fact, at the end of his story, he is able to say: *What man meant for evil; God intended for good... Gen. 50:20*

James says that we can do the same. We can go through hard times without letting it harden us. In the midst of a storm, we'll need a joyful attitude. Now, what else? V.3 says, we'll also need:

2. A thoughtful perspective (v.3)

Look with me at V.3. The text says...*because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance.*

You know this. You know that we grow the most when life is difficult. Keep that in your mind when the bad news hits your desk. When life is over, and you look back, you will be able to see how God used trials to cut away your pride and increase your dependence.

In fact, imagine you reach the pearly gates of heaven, and God shows you a graph depicting the periods of growth in your journey. It would likely look like this: (graph)

Spiritual growth is like the stock market—ups and downs, peaks and valleys all the way. But notice there were, in this person's life, three huge spikes in spiritual growth. What happened in those moments?

What happened? Mega-trials. Something that felt like a crisis. The death of a loved one. The humiliation of a moral failure. A tornado took down your house. Each of these

scenarios caused you to change. They drove you to your knees. Your trust in God grew along with the gray hair on your head, and the wrinkles on your face.

The testing of your faith, says James, expands your endurance. That word for endurance is synonymous with patience.

David testified:

I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me and heard my cry. He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay, and He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm. Ps. 40:1–2

Notice that David had to learn the hard way, how to be patient. He had to sit in a pit. He had to feel stuck in the mud and stay there a while. Why? So that He could learn to wait for the hand of God to grab ahold of his hand, pulling him out and putting his feet on solid ground. David had to learn this perspective. So do we.

When you're entering a storm, you'll need a joyful attitude, and a thoughtful perspective. Let's see the third:

3. A surrendered will (v.4)

And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.

Maturity means we've grown to our potential. Think of a young man who has reached his full height—he is now mature. His mother can stop buying him a size-up in shoes. This is the idea here. Trials are one of God's primary tools for bringing us to our full spiritual height. Trials are God's growth supplements.

However, notice the first two words of the verse: **And let...**

That is the language of surrender. James is telling us that suffering only serves us well if we go along with what God is doing. We can cooperate with Him, or we can fight Him every step of the way.

This reminds me of a moment in the Apostle Paul's life.

Before Paul surrendered his life to Jesus, he was determined, driven, ambitious, and, frankly, angry. He was convinced he was right. He was fighting the church, persecuting Christians, and resisting God's purposes. Then one day, on the road to Damascus, Jesus confronted him.

And He asked Paul a fascinating question:

Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads. Acts 26:14

That is probably not an expression you've used with your children recently—son, why are you kicking against the goads? In fact, most people today have no idea what a goad is. But the people back in biblical times would have understood the term immediately.

The ancient world was an agricultural world. Farmers often used oxen to pull heavy plows through the fields. Attached behind the animal were sharp pointed sticks called goads. Their purpose was simple: to keep the animal moving in the right direction, down the field. If the ox became stubborn and started kicking backward in protest, it only succeeded in driving those sharp points deeper into its own legs.

The more it resisted, the more pain it created for itself. That is the picture Jesus chose to describe Paul's life. Paul wasn't simply fighting Christians. Paul was fighting God. He was resisting the direction God wanted him to go. He was kicking against the goads. And every kick was making life harder than it needed to be.

Isn't that often true of us? Sometimes the greatest pain in our lives is not the trial itself. It's our resistance to what God is trying to accomplish through the trial. We argue. We complain. We demand explanations. We tell God how we think the story should unfold.

Meanwhile, James says, "Let endurance have its full effect." In other words, ask yourself: Will I surrender to what God is doing, or will I keep kicking against the goads?

When I was entering my senior year of college, I made a big mistake when I asked for a girl's hand in marriage. We had been dating for about a year and I did what many people do in relationships—I got ahead of God. With graduation approaching, many of my friends making decisions to get married, I acted on impulse and became engaged before the Lord had given me the green light. We all make decisions in life that we wish we could turn back the clock. This is one of mine. I didn't want to leave college without a life partner. I was afraid of being alone, so I took my life into my own hands. I kicked against the goads, and not only brought pain upon myself, but pain into another person's life, and her family.

So I had to suffer the humiliation of asking for the ring back, and then spent my senior year feeling kind of dazed and confused. All I could do is to let life happen. To just wake up every day and believe that God knows what He's doing and all things happen for a reason. He wants me to be mature, and complete, not lacking anything—that's why He allows me to suffer.

I'm saying this to encourage someone in the seats today. If you are wandering through a season of confusion, the Word of God says, "Stop kicking against the goads." As Paul later would say, "Press on toward the goal." Keep moving forward, choosing to believe that all things work together for the good of those who love Him.

When you're heading into a storm, be sure to pack your surrendered will.

Now, let's keep going. What else will you need in a storm?

4. A God-believing heart (vv.5-8)

Notice V.6...*But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind.*

What can this mean? That's is always wrong to doubt? Surely not. Consider John the Baptist. Jesus said that among those born of women, no person has risen higher than John. Yet, when his life went south, and he was sitting in prison, he sent a message to Jesus asking: "*Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?*"

He was doubting. That's an astonishing question coming from the very man who baptized Jesus. So whatever James is teaching us here, it cannot mean that every question, every struggle, or every moment of uncertainty is sinful.

No, the doubt James warns against is something deeper. It is a settled attitude of unbelief. It is the habit of counting God out. It is living as though God is uninvolved, uninterested, or unwilling to help. That is what James is addressing, when he says:

For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord, ⁸ being double-minded and unstable in all his ways.' Jas 1:5-8

Notice the stormy sea language. He pictures a person out on rough water, waves crashing over them, winds blowing like a hurricane.

When you're in a storm like that, the last thing to do is to cast over the side your confidence in God. Maintain a God-believing heart. No matter how difficult life became, the strongest Christians his history refused to cave to atheistic thinking. They refused to live as though God were absent.

There is a famous story about the skeptic David Hume. Hume was one of the most influential philosophers in the 1700s. He was highly skeptical of miracles and deeply

doubtful of Christianity's claims. For some reason, he went to hear a famous preacher George Whitefield, who delivered a sermon to big crowd assembled outdoors. Someone in the community spotted the atheist and approached him: "What are you doing here? I thought you didn't believe what George Whitefield preaches."

Hume replied, *I don't, but he does.*"

Hume was drawn to Whitefield's confidence. His conviction that God was real, that Christ had been resurrected, that eternity was at stake. There is something compelling about conviction—a person who refuses to count God out. A faith that still trusts Him in the middle of the storm.

Now, let's get to the fifth and final point. When you face a storm, you will need:

5. A humble spirit (vv. 9-11)

It should come as no surprise that one of the best tools in God's toolbox, for teaching people to be humble, is financial loss. James is about to talk about humility and money. V.9...

⁹ Let the brother of humble circumstances boast in his exaltation, ¹⁰ but let the rich boast in his humiliation because he will pass away like a flower of the field.

James 1:9–11

Now, I just made the point: all doubters are not sinners. In a similar vein, I say: all rich people are not prideful. In fact, some of the most humble people I have ever met have been highly successful business leaders. It was their humility that took them to the top! It was their love for people that helped them rise in the ranks. So we must remove this idea immediately that rich people are greedy and poor people are generous. But, that doesn't mean the Bible has nothing to say about the dangers of wealth.

In V.9, James is essentially saying: imagine two people in polar opposite positions financially.

This man, on my right, has been born into a poor family. When I dig into his bag of savings, I can find here, at the very bottom, a single dollar bill. Can you see it up there in the balcony? He has this one dollar. He's not broke, but he has to wonder every day where his help will come from.

The man over here, however, when I reach into his bag—it's overflowing with cash. This bag is jam-packed with hundred dollar bills—stack after stack, and he's got more in the back. There's 500 full bags of cash sitting in storage. He was born into a wealthy

family—he has super rich parents that sent him to an Ivy League school. He’s never had to worry about dollars—not even for a single day in his life.

James takes these two people, and he says of this poor man: “be sure you go around and tell folks what an advantage you’ve been given in life. *Let the brother of humble circumstances boast in his exaltation...*

And then he says to this other guy: And you sir, be sure you go around and say, “How silly it is to assume all this will last!” ...*but let the rich man boast in his humiliation because he will pass away like a flower of the field.*

Why does James imply that this man deals with a disadvantage? Because, whenever this guy feels afraid, or insecure, he’ll be tempted to hop online and find hope in his savings rather than opening Scripture and finding hope in God.

This is why Jesus said that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus intentionally paints an absurd picture of a camel straining through a needle.

Don’t miss this. Take a large land animals and push him through a tiny hole. See how that goes! His point is clear: money is addictive, and once you start chasing it, you can quickly lose focus on what matters.

I’ve told you before that I’m a country music guy. The other day I was driving down the road and a classic country tune started to play. It was George Strait’s song: *I Can Still Make Cheyenne*

The song tells the story of a rodeo cowboy who has become consumed with his sport—always looking for the next adrenaline rush. When he falls off the next bull, he call home to let his lady know that he’s headed back.

According to the song, she says:

Don't bother coming home.

By the time you get here, I'll be long gone.

There's somebody new, and he sure ain't no rodeo man.

It’s a breakup song. Country music has a few of these.

The woman has had enough with her man’s obsession. And you would think, at this point, surely he will come to his senses. He must think to himself: “Forget this rodeo. I’m headed home to win her heart back.

But instead, he says:

I'm sorry it's come down to this.

There's so much about you that I'm gonna miss.

But it's alright, baby. If I hurry, I can still make Cheyenne.

Ok, the rodeo must be the crystal meth for cowboys. There are so many songs about this rodeo thing. I don't get it. And I don't get this guy. Anyone listening to the song can grasp that he's got a marble loose from all those crashes in the dirt. This guy is chasing after something that is never going to satisfy. He's going to regret this one day.

And that's the tune James is singing here. Chasing money easily becomes an addiction—the thing that they chase more than anything else. And if you hope to make it through the storms headed your way, you'll need a lot more than money. You'll need a deep relationship with God. You'll need a humble spirit.

So there you have it.

Five things you'll need when the storms of life come: A joyful attitude. A thoughtful perspective. A surrendered will. A God-believing heart. And a humble spirit. Now, with my time remaining, let me see if I can raise a few questions to apply this text.

A Curious Church Member Asks:

So Ben, which of the five qualities have you struggled with the most?

A joyful attitude.

A thoughtful perspective.

A surrendered will.

A God-believing heart.

A humble spirit.

If I had to pick one, I'd have to be honest and say that I often wrestle with the ways of God. You might be surprised to hear that my greatest struggle among these is #4...keeping a **God-believing heart**.

A book helped me see this in myself. Years ago, Christian Counselor Larry Crabb wrote *Shattered Dreams*. Early on in the book, he tells about a time when he sat alone in a coffee shop, wondering who his true friends are. There was a manilla folder sitting in front of him and he decided to jot down the names of those he'd consider close friends. When he was done, there were six names. Then he asked himself a question: *What is it about these six people that makes them so special to me?*

He felt like a narcissist when he admitted the answer. All six of these people respond quickly when he needs help. These six friends meet his felt needs.

As he looked at that list, he then came to realize that one name wasn't there. Crabb writes:

Sometimes God seems like the least responsive friend I have. It never occurred to me to put Him on my list. The name Jesus did not appear on the manilla folder.

–Larry Crabb, *Shattered Dreams*

Crabb says it was then that the truth came crashing down. He was having a hard time believing that God had good plans for Him. Because, unlike his other friends, God doesn't always respond in a moment's notice. He doesn't always do exactly what we ask Him to do. In fact, sometimes He lets our dreams shatter. Why? Larry Crabb writes:

Shattered dreams destroy false expectations, such as “the victorious Christian life” with no real struggle or failure. We need the help of shattered dreams to put us in touch for what we most long for, to create a felt appetite for better dreams.

God allows our hearts to be broken so that He can build them back better.

When I go through a season of storms, I can doubt the goodness of God. But that book reminded me once again, that God always has my back, even when His name doesn't make my manilla folder.

I'd encourage you to pick up his book in our bookstore today, if you're walking through a season of shattered dreams.

For me, that remains one of the hardest lessons of the Christian life.

A Good-Hearted Skeptic Asks:

You say that God uses suffering to grow us. But what about the people who aren't made stronger by hardships? What about those who seem crushed by it?

Have you ever noticed that two people can grow up in the exact same house and respond to it in completely different ways? Let's say two brothers were raised by parents who had a terrible marriage. The fighting never stopped. The home was filled with tension, anger, and disappointment.

One boy sees the war his parents wage and says, "When I get married, I'm going to learn from what I saw. I'm going to choose a different path. I'm going to work hard at loving my spouse well. I'm going to build the kind of marriage my parents never had."

The pain becomes a teacher. The hardship becomes a motivation. The negative experience helps that person become wiser.

But then the other brother, he grows up and reaches a different conclusion. He says, "I'll never get married. I've seen enough. I don't want anything to do with what I watched growing up." Slowly, a wall forms around his heart. He becomes like a castle surrounded by a moat, keeping everyone at a distance.

Same house. Same parents. Same circumstances. Suffering makes the one become better, and the other, bitter.

This is why the Bible says,

No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Hebrews 12:11

Notice those last words: *"to those who have been trained by it."*

All people suffer, but just a few will choose to be trained by it. The difference is not the hardship itself. The difference is what they do with it.

One of the great ministries of the Holy Spirit is helping us redeem our pain. He teaches us how to take life's lemons and make lemonade. He helps us find purpose in what once felt pointless. He helps us turn wounds into wisdom. Your past does not have to become your prison. By God's grace, it can become your teacher.

That's why James says trials can produce perseverance and maturity. Not because suffering is magical, but because God is able to use even painful things for our good when we surrender them to Him.

A Student Asks:

I got an hourly job this summer, and it's changed the way I think about money. The other day I wanted to buy a \$40 shirt, but all I could think was, "That's three hours of work!" Is it wrong to want a high-paying job someday so I won't have to think about money so much? Does God see that desire as selfish?

Not at all. There is nothing wrong with wanting to make a good living, provide for your family, build some savings, or even help pay for your kids' college one day. Financial freedom is a good goal. In fact, the Bible repeatedly warns against laziness. Read through Proverbs and you'll find dozens of verses about the danger of being a slacker who refuses to work hard and eventually finds himself in poverty. Scripture celebrates diligence, excellence, and faithful work.

The book of James isn't telling ambitious young people to stop chasing dreams or pursuing promotions. If God opens doors for you to become a doctor, a lawyer, an engineer, a business owner, or anything else that pays well, receive those opportunities with gratitude.

The real question isn't, "How much will I make?" It's, "What kind of steward will I become?"

God is far more interested in what you do with your money than how much money you have.

Let me share something that struck me this week. In our finance committee meeting, we celebrated that our church is averaging about 900 more people in attendance than we had this time last year. That's wonderful news. The tree of attendance is growing. But we also learned that our giving is about 3.7% behind where we were a year ago.

I don't share that to shame anyone. I'm just reporting the facts. As a pastor, it's my job to remind people of uncomfortable truths, and one of those is this: money is one of God's tests of our obedience. When God increases your income, He's waiting to see if it will increase your generosity.

So students, here's the bottom line: Work hard and dream big. If you go to law school and they want to name you partner, take the promotion and feel some healthy pride for your accomplishments.

But, don't be like that cowboy who's always chasing the next bull. Keep your eyes on Christ and keep your priorities in line with His.