

# James 1

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## **Psalm 119:65-72**

- <sup>65</sup> *Do good to your servant  
according to your word, LORD.*
- <sup>66</sup> *Teach me knowledge and good judgment,  
for I trust your commands.*
- <sup>67</sup> *Before I was afflicted I went astray,  
but now I obey your word.*
- <sup>68</sup> *You are good, and what you do is good;  
teach me your decrees.*
- <sup>69</sup> *Though the arrogant have smeared me with lies,  
I keep your precepts with all my heart.*
- <sup>70</sup> *Their hearts are callous and unfeeling,  
but I delight in your law.*
- <sup>71</sup> *It was good for me to be afflicted  
so that I might learn your decrees.*
- <sup>72</sup> *The law from your mouth is more precious to me  
than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.*

## **James 1:2-15**

### **Trials and Temptations**

<sup>2</sup> Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, <sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. <sup>4</sup> Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

<sup>5</sup> If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. <sup>6</sup> But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. <sup>8</sup> Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

<sup>9</sup> Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. <sup>10</sup> But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. <sup>11</sup> For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.

<sup>12</sup> Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

<sup>13</sup> When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; <sup>14</sup> but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. <sup>15</sup> Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

<sup>16</sup> Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. <sup>17</sup> Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

<sup>18</sup> He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

## JAMES 1: THE REDEMPTION OF TRIALS

**HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF THE BULLDOG ANT?** These ants are well known in Australia for their aggressive behaviour and powerful stings.<sup>[14]</sup> The ant *Myrmecia pyriformis* has been certified as the world's most dangerous ant by *Guinness World Records*.<sup>[17]</sup> The venom of these ants has the potential to induce anaphylactic shock in allergic sting victims. As with most severe allergic reactions, the reaction may be lethal if left untreated. These large, alert ants have characteristic large eyes and long, slender mandibles. Some bull ants, such as *Myrmecia pyriformis* and *Myrmecia pilosula* are known to have caused several deaths in humans.<sup>[17][18]</sup> They have superior vision, able to track and even follow intruders from a distance of 1 m.<sup>[14]</sup>



**Fearless and belligerent, the inch-long bulldog ant of Australia uses her sharp vision and venomous stinger to track and subdue formidable prey.**

The bull ant famously appears in the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer's major work, *The World as Will and Representation*, as a paradigmatic example of strife and constant destruction endemic to the "will to live".

" the bulldog-ant of Australia affords us the most extraordinary example of this kind; **for if it is cut in two, a battle begins between the head and the tail. The head seizes the tail in its teeth, and the tail defends itself bravely by stinging the head: the battle may last for half an hour, until they die or are dragged away by other ants. This contest takes place every time the experiment is tried.**"<sup>[35]</sup>

If you observe the behavior of a bulldog ant cut in two, you can understand some of Schopenhauer's basic claims, namely, the **inevitability of conflict in a world in which every individual thing struggles to snatch the matter of another, to survive.**

**This conflict pollutes every every human interaction and every institutional interaction and even the inner way in which we treat ourselves.** The book of James is dealing with these kinds of conflicts.

## DON'T BE SURPRISED AT TRIALS

To many of us this passage will be something we have wrestled with many times over the course of our lives. How can James say:

**<sup>2</sup> Consider it pure joy, brethren, whenever you face trials of many kinds.**

Joy. That's the last thing I feel like when I am triggered and angry, frustrated and suffering. The Greek word here for trials is the same used in the Good Samaritan story where a man fell among thieves and was beaten and left for dead and Paul's experience of being shipwrecked in Acts 27:41. These are pressures which comes against us and totally threaten our well being.

James' counsel to count suffering and tests like this as **altogether joy** is a radical proposal... , not our natural default setting nor let's be honest, something you can just turn on by will power, though we certainly can have good go at that.

So we have to figure out where this kind of attitude will come from and how we can cultivate it.

It will mean we need to learn to THINK DIFFERENTLY, to accept the trials that come as a means of our faith becoming stronger and purer. And we will need to GUARD WHAT COMES OUT OF OUR MOUTHS – the words we speak out of our heart and mind have power to hurt and destroy or power to build up and create. (What we speak is important and we will pick this up again more next Sunday.)

### So how do we learn to think differently?

James will say these trials have a purpose and when they have done their thing there will be major attitude changes, if you let it do its work.

I have been reading Psalm 119...anyone know how many verses that is? 176 verses. It's the longest chapter in the Bible, but its well worth studying. It's the reflection of the Psalmist who suffered at the hands of those who arrogantly disregarded God's word and made him the target of their hostility, ridicule and slander, both physical and psychological abuse. In v 87 'they almost wiped me from the earth' – what he has learned to do is constantly focus on the teachings of the law, the word of God and meditating on it all day long. What he has found is a person and an unfailing love that is his comfort through it all.

In the midst of suffering he has the capacity to also say:

- 65 Do good to your servant according to your word, LORD.
- 66 Teach me **knowledge and good judgment**, for I trust your commands.
- 67 **Before I was afflicted I went astray**, but now I obey your word.
- 68 **You are good, and what you do is good**; teach me your decrees.
- 71 **It was good for me to be afflicted** so that I might learn your decrees.

Two things are highlighted here:

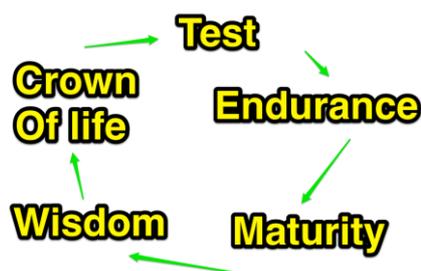
1. the goodness of God
2. that affliction is good for me.

**How are you dealing with these two statements or questions?**

Affliction, trials, tests, temptations, conflicts with people, conflicts with self...these are all good for me.!

Here's what they will accomplish if we will let them.

**<sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. <sup>4</sup> Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.**



What is the quality of your faith, wisdom and maturity?

Will you let it be proven under trial so that you will in the end receive the crown of life?

This is the question that James is posing in the first chapter of James.

How do you react under pressure?

Will the gold rise to the surface, for

as fire manifests pure gold, so testing manifests our pure faith.

Patient endurance will result in maturity and completeness.

And the **one who perseveres under trial because, having**

**stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. V 12**

**If you lack  
WISDOM**  
↓  
**ASK**  
↓  
**In Faith**

**WISDOM** in the midst of trials is a desirable trait.

**<sup>5</sup> If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.**

**HOW IS DIVINE WISDOM ACQUIRED?** By hard work? By pursuing suffering? By putting myself into a dangerous situation?

No. IT IS firstly ACQUIRED BY ASKING.

**IF YOU LACK WISDOM, YOU SHOULD ASK!**

He gives generously TO ALL, without any preconception...unreservedly, without any hitch.

God's wisdom according to James 3:17 is:

**<sup>17</sup> But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.** It brings me to peace and joy. And this is a good test.

So when we don't know what to do, nor why we feel so crap, nor why this is happening to me we should simply ask for His insight:

Jesus what do you want me to know? To teach me?

What are you highlighting that is unhealthy, unholy, unhealed in me, and doesn't reflect wisdom and maturity in my life.

Wisdom is the ability and courage to look behind a situation and say: what can I learn? This might well be about someone else's stuff but I am having an over-reaction, a response that is signalling a need for me to change something and grow up.

### **Who is wise?**

Do you have to have grey hair and be old to be wise? NO

There's a difference between Biblical wisdom and worldly wisdom which comes from observation, intelligence, wiliness, earthly success and experience. This can seem very wise but be false, empty and idolatrous.

In Psalm 119: 98-100 the PSALMIST says by meditating on : 'Your commands I am wiser than my enemies, have more insight than all my teachers and more understanding than the old men'.

- Wisdom is skill at life.
- It is the ability to make sound judgements and speak the right words. James goes on to make a lot of this.
- But there's more: it is a **divine skill to live in a godly way and to endure testing.**

The kind of wisdom we want is that which bears the character of God.

It is something acquired through trials and by prayer, unwavering faith and as divine insight.

James goes on to explain how that wisdom is applied in chapters 2 and 3

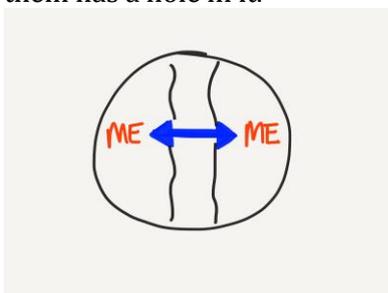
**But there is a problem, the contrast to the above picture and that is our DOUBLE-MINDEDNESS.**

**<sup>6</sup> But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. <sup>8</sup> Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.**

**Doubt** ( GK: diakrino) here is a form of passing judgment on God's word – faithlessness. James is not condemning uncertainty or questions about what God's will is or about genuinely trying to understand. Rather he is condemning a lack of commitment, a divided loyalty, an indecision that questions the integrity of God.

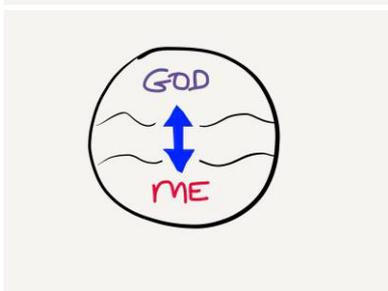
The one who doubts like this should not expect to receive anything from God. This sounds harsh, but in truth when we are in this place it is not that God doesn't want to speak it's that we have shut the door on our hearing. When you are angry and triggered and questioning God, it becomes very difficult to receive anything.

Coming back to our bull ant. How many of you feel like a bulldog ant on the inside sometimes? There is a fierce battle going on, on the inside, a pulling apart, a going around and around in an inability to find unity of thought. You are battling yourself in fact, sometimes to the death. And you literally can't receive anything from the Lord in this state. You are experiencing double-mindedness. The word for double-mindedness is "dipsuchos," a combination of the words for "two" (di) and "soul" (psuchos). So a division in the soul. A di-lemma of having different minds at different times, unsettled, undetermined, swayed, pushed around. It 's like having a foot in two boats and one of them has a hole in it.



This is like having two different desires or intentions, two differing mindsets or beliefs about God or about how life should treat you. Two beliefs which struggle for supremacy in our thinking and behaving and in the process tear us apart because we don't have enough insight or truth to be one whole person around the issue. I don't agree with myself.

And what it may point to is a hidden rift with God.



Is God good? All the time? Hmmm... I don't agree with God.

Will I throw myself upon Him in trust when I encounter various trials believing that the affliction is truly good for me and that God has the very best in mind for me?

### **What does it mean to be unstable?**

An unstable person is someone who is undependable, unreliable, lacks personal conviction, is easily manipulated and influenced by others - in short, is like a leaf flitting in the wind.

What it looks like...weariness, sleeplessness, guilt, self sabotage, self recrimination, frustration, and this psychological phenomenon results either in frustration, confusion, procrastination, depression, anger or a combination of all of them.

But folks this is not all bad! Let's count it absolute joy when God loves us so much that He allows these trials to come to us.

Ambivalence which persists in the form of doubt may be essential. If we have no uncertainty about ourselves, our decisions, our world of meaning, we have closed ourselves down to the world of options and growth. Doubt could be viewed as valued ambivalence which could lead to a creative new dynamic.

**Ambivalence may signal to us that our soul is in distress. And the doubt valued may become our friend to cultivate new growth within.**