

Wisdom for Life's Trials
James 1.1-15
October 21

Who was James, the author of this short? James was the “little brother” of Jesus. James did not believe the claims of his brother – “For not even his brothers believed in him (John 3.5). The resurrected Jesus personally appeared to James (1 Cor. 15.7). James became the leader of the church in Jerusalem (Gal. 1.9; 2.9). As the key leader of the church in Jerusalem, James made the decisive pronouncement granting Gentiles inclusion into the church without the necessity of circumcision (Acts 15.13-21). Christian history recalls two details of James' life not recorded in the New Testament. First, James was a man of prayer. His nickname was "Camel Knees" because of calluses on his knees because of his prayer life. Second, James died as a martyr by stoning in 62 AD as a result of the actions of the Jewish high priest.

James wrote around 50 AD; thus, the brother of Jesus wrote the first letter preserved in the New Testament. He addressed this short letter of 108 verses to Jewish Christians living outside of Israel. In his letter, James reflected themes in Old Testament wisdom as well as the Sermon on the Mount. In our focal passage, James discussed divine resources available to Christians enduring economic, physical, and spiritual trials.

What lessons may twenty-first century Christians learn from James about wisdom from life's trials?

First, James prescribed for Christians a thoughtful response to the trials of life (James 1.2-4). The Bible never promises Christians immunity from trials. James wrote that Christians should expect trials – “whenever you experience various trials” (James 1.2). In the OT, the term “various” described multicolored coat. Trials may come to Christians in various colors – economic, health, job, family, and persecution.

How should Christians respond to trials? Complain? Grumble? Depression? James commanded (“consider” is a command) to respond to trials with joy. Is joy a natural response to trials? No. Is joy a delusional response to trials? No. James explained that Christians could experience joy in trials because of three positive results trials may produce in our lives: endurance, maturity, and purpose. Biblical endurance is the ability to bear up and be faithful under a load. Endurance produces “maturity” or “integrity”—the literal meaning of the translation “full effect” in the *Christian Standard Bible*. As one noted preacher commented, “Bumps are what we grow on.” Christians do not rejoice in events; Christians rejoice in what God accomplishes in our life through trials. A tested Christian possesses strength for the long journey, matures through the trial, and demonstrates healthy integrity in life. A common witty-ism state, “A Christian is like a tea bag; he is not worth much until he has been through some hot water.” James reminded believers that trials might have positive consequences for life.

Second, James highlighted divine resources available to Christians during trials (James 1.5-8). James both encourages tested Christians by underscoring the divine resources available in the

context of trials as well as describing the giver of the divine resources. God provides wisdom, prayer, and faith as divine resources to help in trials. Wisdom does not answer the *why* question; wisdom grants insight into responding correctly to trials. God invites tested Christians to keep on asking (present tense) for divine wisdom (described in 3:17). Prayer, rather than educational degrees, instructs believers in the proper response to trials. Faith consists of trust in the nature and ability of God to provide His resources in trials. God gives liberally, generously with singleness of motive (the emphasis of James). James highlighted the importance of faith in the practice of prayer.

James 1.12 is a precious promise that provides strength during trials. God's promise of a "crown of life" reminds Christians enduring trials that believers win. A "crown" is a reward. The New Testament utilized the imagery of "crown" in three ways. First, Paul described the churches he founded as his crown (Phil. 4.1; 1 Thess. 2.19). Second, a crown is a reward for Christians faithful to the Christ – "a crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4.8). Third, James promised a crown to believers who endure trials with faithfulness – a "crown of life" (James 1.12). James likely has in mind the imagery of a victor's crown awarded in athletic contests. Faithful believers receive a crown of victory, namely eternal life.

Third, a tested Christian may become a tempted Christian (James 1:13-17). A Christian that faces trials in his or own strength, unaided by the divine resources, may experience those trials as temptations. Our English versions translate the same Greek word as trials (1:2) and temptations (1:13). If believers do not respond to a "trial" with divine wisdom, the trial may become a temptation. Our English word "pirate" derives from this word. God is not the source of the piracy. James places responsibility for temptation on each person – "each person is drawn away." The piracy begins within our heart, our desires births sins. God does not even have a shadow of darkness with him (v. 17). We bear responsibility for how we respond to "trials" and "temptations."