

No Pain, No Gain

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I remember during my school years while I was taking Criminal Justice, we had to run around the block a few times. The school had this as part of our learning. If someone was going to be part of law enforcement, being in good shape was critical. When they told us that we had to start running at school, I started to run at home. The reason for this was I didn't want to embarrass myself. I could run fast for only a short distance until I started to sound like a wind storm because I was breathing so hard. I knew I had to run a little more each time to build up my lungs. I would run through the cemetery until I couldn't stand it anymore. I thought running through a cemetery would give me more encouragement. I remember one instructor telling us that we should run until it hurt and he said, "No pain, no gain". When we finally started to run, I actually did very good. When the classes were over, I stopped running. I don't like pain. I can no longer run far. Many of the Church family have had to do therapy of some kind and I'm sure they understand what plays a big part of therapy – pain. We may not like it, but some pain is required for healing. The Christian life can contain pain as well. We don't like it, but it will come our way. We either cause pain by making bad choices or we're hurt by other people's choices. Other times pain or suffering just happens. Sometimes, we may think life is unfair because a Christian should be able to be protect by the pains of life. Some may think that Jesus went to the cross so we can enjoy an easy life on this earth. Jesus went to the cross for our sin and when we turn our life over to Him, He forgives us our past sin, we become justified and redeemed, we are then promised eternal life after our time on earth is over. Jesus never told us life would be all peaches and crème. I wish it was, but that's not the case. Jesus' half-brother James gives us some insight on this "no pain, no gain" part of our Christian walk.

Let's turn to James, which we'll be looking at for the next few months, and let's read this in James 1: 1 – 8, "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greeting. Consider it

pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given you. 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. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do. (NIV)”

This is one of the early letters in the New Testament. James, the half-brother of Jesus was the leader of the Christian Church in Jerusalem. They believe this letter was written after Stephan was killed and there was persecution against the Church. James is writing this letter to Jewish Christians in Gentile areas. The New Testament Church was new and since they were very different from Jewish tradition and were different compared to the pagan culture at that time, many Christians were going through suffering. They're young faith was being tested to the limit. So, James is writing this letter like a manual for Christian living. So, James starts off by giving his title – a servant / slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. James doesn't say he is the Bishop of the Jerusalem Church or General Superintendent. James has humbled himself to the point he won't even call Jesus his brother, but gives Jesus the title Lord. This made me think a little this week. I'm a pastor, but I'm also a servant / slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ as well. In fact, we can go a step further and say all in the church has the same title as well. This title sets the stage for this letter in that it shows how we should view our relationship with Jesus. The Church today likes to use the term “friend” and that's ok. However, the early Church liked using servant and slave to describe their relationship with Jesus. When I hear servant / slave in the New Testament, it reminds me of someone who is truly dedicated in serving the Lord no matter what happens. They were a servant / slave to Jesus even during trials and sufferings. The early Church saw it as an honor to suffer for Jesus because Jesus had suffered for them. I think sometimes when we think of Jesus just as a friend, we can become upset with Him when trouble comes our way. If Jesus was our friend, why would He allow bad things to happen to us. James addresses this

issue here because the Church at that time was suffering greatly and it would only get worse as time went by.

So, James starts off in verse 2 by saying, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds (NIV)". KJV has "fall into divers temptations". I was confused by this since divers to me is people who dive into water. Anyway, divers means "all kinds" in old English and the Greek term that is used here means "all kinds" as well. KJV has "temptations" and NIV uses "trials". The Greek term is "peirasmos" which means test, trial, and temptation (Strong's Concordance). In other words, James is saying, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face all kinds of trials, tests, and temptations". That makes it sound better, doesn't it? Plus, James doesn't say "if", but whenever trouble comes your way. James is telling the church these trials, tests, and temptations of all kinds will come their way at some point. James is not preaching "health and wealth" gospel that is so popular today. You can be the best Christian in the world and at some point, you will have to face trials, tests, and temptations. That is the part of life on this earth – our very temporary home. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5: 45 that it rains on the just and unjust. Just look at Job. God allowed Satan to test Job with many trials, tests, and temptations and Job was a righteous man. Jesus had to go through trials, tests, and temptations as well when He walked this earth and while He was on the cross dying for our sin. So, we should expect trials, tests, and temptations of all kinds in our life. Many of you have already gone through much testing.

I think the trouble we get into is when James tells us to consider it pure "joy". I looked up the Greek term hoping for a watered-down definition, but there wasn't one. The Greek term is "chara" and it means joy, gladness, happiness (Strong's Concordance). We have a hard time seeing or enjoying "joy" during trials, tests, and temptations of all kinds. In fact, James says "all joy" or "pure joy" depending on your translation. For us to understand this better, we have to look at verses 3 and 4. James then adds, "because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (NIV)" James saw the bigger picture. He knew that all the tests, trials, and temptations of all kinds that we have to go

through will help our faith to build into patient perseverance. If we look back on our life as a Christian, I'm sure we can see that the only times our faith grows stronger was when tests, trials, and temptations came our way. James saw these things as needed so that our faith can keep building until our faith is mature and complete. James was looking ahead. If we're honest with ourselves, we'll discover that our faith doesn't grow much when things are going well. It's when our faith is tested that we grow in perseverance in faith. I believe it's really hard for us to think this way. In fact, my opinion, it's humanly impossible to have this type of mindset. I don't like going through trials, tests, and temptations of all kinds. Even after reading this piece of Scripture from James, it's hard to find joy in knowing trials and tests will help me to build my faith. How can I have the mindset of James? Tradition has it that James was stoned to death because of his faith in Jesus Christ. I can imagine James doing the same thing as Stephan did when he was stoned in Acts 6 and 7. Stephan shouted as he was being stoned, "Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit" and then "Lord, don't charge them for this sin!". I have a feeling James did the same thing when he was put to death. James and the early Church had a different mind-set about suffering. I'm sure they felt pain and hurt, but they saw a good that can come from trials and test of life. Look at Job. I'm sure he was a better man after his talk with the Lord about all the suffering he had to go through. Plus, maybe James saw further than that. Peter states this about faith testing in 1 Peter 1: 6 – 7, "So be truly glad! There is wonderful joy ahead, even though it is necessary for you to endure many trials for a while. These trials are only to test your faith, to show that it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold – and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold. So if your faith remains strong after being tried by fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. (NLT)" Peter is telling us through the Holy Spirit that testing and trials are needed in our lives for our faith to grow. I heard a teacher say once that tests and trials of life can be horrible and it's only the Lord who can allow something good come out of it which is when our faith has been strengthened through Jesus. In verse 7, Peter tells us that these trials and tests we go through will be noticed at Jesus' second coming. It will bring us

much praise, glory, and honor. This is how James and Peter saw the suffering of trials and tests. However, this is still hard for us to chew on.

James tells us what we must do to have the correct mindset when going through trials and tests of life. James tells us in verse 5, "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. 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. (NIV)" For us to be able to handle the trials, tests, and temptations of all kinds in life, we need the wisdom of God in our minds. God's wisdom through the Holy Spirit will help us to see the bigger picture because if we don't have God's wisdom, our human minds will focus on the negative of suffering through tests and trials. Our minds are good at that and that is why many Christians struggle through tests and trials of life. We have a hard time understanding them. God's wisdom will help our human mind focus on the right things like seeing the bigger picture of life. Paul tells us in Romans 12: 2, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. (NLT)" As I grow older, the more I see this Scripture as being so important in our walk with Jesus on this earth. When trials and tests and temptations come our way, the first thing we should pray for is God's wisdom to change the way we think so we can handle the test and trial in the right way. When God gives us His wisdom, we are able to handle any situation better because we are in the right mindset – not human mindset, but Godly mindset. God's wisdom can help us deal with any situation of life and those situations can help our faith grow in a positive way. It is only God who can bring growth through a bad situation. If you are going through a test or trial, ask God for wisdom and He'll help you to see the bigger picture. The joy of knowing you just grew closer to the Lord through suffering. You'll see life like James and Peter saw life.

NLT Life Application Study Bible. Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, 1996

The Strongest Strong's Concordance. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001