



Helping people encounter God in His Word



For use on Sunday September 7, 2003

Introduction

Reality Check: When Life Requires A Balance

“Trial Offers: When Trials Come to Visit”

The ringing of the phone jolted Melanie awake. She quickly glanced at the clock, “1:00am,” she thought, “Did I hear Jamie come in?”

The ringing continued and Melanie groped for her glasses, threw back the covers and lunged at the phone with an unexpected urgency.

“Hello?” she said nervously as she answered the phone.

“Excuse me, Ma’am. This is Officer Tedman of the Jamesborne police. Is this the Bahn home?” said the voice on the other line.

“Yes, Officer, I’m Melanie Bahn. What’s wrong? Where is Jamie?” Melanie asked with her heart in her throat and her anxiety climbing.

“Ma’am, I am afraid to say that there has been a car accident and we traced the car from the license plate to you,” said Officer Tedman.

“An accident?” asked Melanie in a panicked voice, “How serious? Was anyone killed?”

“Ma’am, I am afraid to say that there were some fatalities in this accident, but we haven’t been able to identify everyone involved in the accident. All the victims have been transported to General Hospital for treatment of their injuries,” replied Officer Tedman.

“Oh, my God!” said Melanie in shock, “What hospital was that again?”

“General Hospital, Ma’am,” said the officer.

“I’ll be there as soon as I can. Can you tell me anything about Jamie?” asked Melanie desperately.

“I’m afraid I cannot, Ma’am. None of the teens in the car had identification in their clothing. I apologize that I do not have any more information. If you can come to the hospital, then I believe we will know for sure Jamie’s condition,” said Officer Tedman.

“I’ll be there as soon as I can!” said Melanie with urgency.

“Ma’am, I am sorry, just one more thing,” said Officer Tedman.

“What!?” shouted Melanie into the phone with fear and anger.

“I was wondering if you needed me to call a cab to bring you to the hospital? I know that this is a very difficult time when your child is involved,” said Officer Tedman with tenderness.

Melanie was startled at the officer’s tenderness and more calmly said, “No thanks, Officer. I will call my ex-husband and ask him to pick me up. I know he will want to be there.”

“What is his name, ma’am?” asked Officer Tedman.

“Curtis Colton,” replied Melanie.

“Thank you. Again, Ma’am, I am sorry,” said the officer with compassion.

“Thank you, Officer. I just pray my baby is okay,” said Melanie with tears in her eyes.

“I am praying as well, Ma’am. If there is anything that you need, please feel free to call the station and ask for me. Goodbye,” said Officer Stedman.

“Thank you, Officer. Goodbye,” said Melanie as tears began to flow down her cheeks as she quickly dialed her ex-husband’s number. She thought to herself, “God, Oh God, why did this happen? What are you doing? I lost my marriage and now possibly my son. Why are you doing this to me? Let Jamie live! Please just let him live!”

Do you think Melanie could have joy when facing a trial like this? Why or why not?

Observation

What do you see?

James 1:1-4 *Trials and Temptations*

¹James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations:
Greetings. ²Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many
kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.
⁴Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not
lacking anything.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

¹⁶Be joyful always; ¹⁷pray continually; ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances, for this is
God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

- **Record your first impressions from what you read.**

Interact with the passages

- Circle the command “consider” in James.
- Underline “joy,” and draw an arrow from “pure,” to “joy.”
- Put a square around “face trials,” and draw an arrow from it to “consider.”
- Circle “because you know.” Write a “C” above it that stands for causal.
- Underline “testing,” “develops,” and “perseverance.” Draw arrows showing the progression of thought from “testing,” to “perseverance.”
- Put a square around the command “must finish its work.” Draw an arrow to “perseverance.”
- Highlight “you may be.” This phrase describes purpose. Draw arrows to “mature,” “complete,” and “not lacking anything.”
- In Thessalonians, highlight the 3 commands, “be joyful,” “pray,” and “give thanks.” Draw arrows to the adverbs or prepositional phrases that describe “how” or “when” these commands are to be implemented.

Interpretation

What does it mean?

Experiencing trials allows God to shape His follower's character and build dependence upon Him as the sole foundation of joy, peace, and serenity even in the waves of uncertain circumstance.

Insights

- In James the “pure joy,” is the object and placed first for important emphasis.
- The term “trials,” can mean either outward travails or inward temptations.

- The word “testing,” is a passive participle and the passive sense has the idea of “approved after testing.”
- The phrase “must finish its work,” really is the Greek words “perfect work.” It is used in the OT idea of a right relationship to God expressed in undivided obedience and an unblemished life.
- The term “complete,” refers to the entirety of all the Christian virtues.
- In Thessalonians the “be joyful,” is a present tense command and the present tense indicates a continual attitude of rejoicing.
- The “continually” gives a sense of something that was continually or repeatedly done like the continual service or ministry of an official, or the necessity of paying taxes.
- “In every circumstance,” includes trials and persecutions that the believer encounters.
- The term “this,” likely refers to the three commands being unified rather than just the last command.

Answering Questions of Interpretation

1. What exactly is “pure joy?” What is the root of joy? What does it look like? How does it compare and contrast “happiness?” How does joy, the fruit of the Spirit, come into existence through a trial? Can people fake “joyfulness?” Why or why not? If so, how could we tell?

2. How does perseverance in faith make our faith “work perfectly?” What does it mean to have wholly completed faith? What does the context of James 1:1 mean for the readers? How does this relate today if we are not being scattered by persecution? What does perseverance in faith mean in an American context where the focus is on “the pursuit of happiness,” “not lacking any material thing,” and “tolerance” instead of persecution?

3. How does one “always,” “continually,” and “in all circumstances” do what Thessalonians commands? What part does the Holy Spirit play in this? What part does the believer play in this? What can one do to yield continually to the Spirit’s movement? What role does the church, and other believers, have in encouraging and developing dependency upon the Spirit? Why does it appear that few are truly yielding to the Spirit’s movement today?

Application

What do I do?

Am I undergoing a trial or temptation currently? If so, in what areas is my faith being tested? If not, when was a time you sensed your faith being tested and what areas of your faith were tested? How well have I allowed joy to be evident throughout the trying time? What specifically makes it difficult for me to depend on the Holy Spirit to help me experience joy? What does joy from the Holy Spirit look like when I undergo these trials and temptations? How can I continue to be joyful? What steps do I sense I need to take? Write down your impressions.

James wrote to encourage people to persevere through their struggles with trials. How important is an encouraging community of faith when someone is struggling? How has a community of faith helped me when I have had a struggle or trial? Do I know someone who is struggling with a trial currently? What role does God want me to play in helping encourage someone as they undergo a trial? What do I see that God is doing to develop and mature their faith? How can I communicate that to them and not sound trite or overbearing, but encouraging?

Correlation

How do we work this into our Home Group, Family, youth group, ministry, class, small group?

Core Competency: Joy

Creed: I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Commentary: This week we have focused on the core virtue of Joy. Joy is an internal virtue because it is the fruit of the Spirit, and cannot be manifested through human means. Our desires and actions to control or to alleviate fears in difficult trials add not joy, but frustration and weakness in those circumstances. We must continually admit our fears and relinquish our desire to control things to the Lord and willingly submit our thoughts, desires and actions to Him fully. Only total dependence upon the Lord and walking with the Spirit through the trials and temptations do we genuinely experience joy. Joy is evident when God is completely in charge of our hearts and minds.

God is faithful and has the power to walk us through the tough times we face because His character, given to us by His Spirit and through faith in His Son, produces His fruit. The fruit of the Spirit, as seen in Galatians 6:22-23, gives the believer assurance, purpose and contentment that God is near and they are with Him even when circumstances appear to be threatening.

Question: Have you had a trial in your life that you sensed joy through it? Describe how you had joy through the trial. How do you sense God made your faith grow through that trial? Has it been easier to have joy through trials since that previous experience? Why or why not?

Kids Corner: Items Needed – Blocks

Say: I have faith you can build a tower with 5 blocks. You must continually try to build the tower even if someone knocks it over. (*Assign another child to knock the tower over 5 times.*)

Say: (*After tower built*) I knew you could do it! My faith that you could build the tower is affirmed, or made true. It was frustrating to build because it kept getting knocked over by someone else, but with persistent effort you did it! Our faith is similar. Sometimes circumstances seem to frustrate us or knock us over, but when we rely or lean on God, He helps us through those tough times and can give us joy through them. We need to let God help us through tough times so we can display joy and have our faith become stronger!

Memorize: James 1:2,3



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