Keeping a Good Attitude in Tough Times Part One

Scripture: James 1:1-12

Key Thought: James tells us that troubles and trials are often more valuable than we think.

# Intro ideas

Ruth Paxson tells the story of a Finnish woman that a missionary home from the field met her on a train and found out her story (LI-VI). She noticed that the woman’s right hand was missing and in its' place was a hook. The interviewer learned that the mystery lady had been a missionary herself to India but had contracted a lung disease and been sent home to die. Upon arriving home in Finland, she had bought a farm, and worked hard on it. She had regained her health, but then suffered an accident. She lost a hand in the threshing machine. The interviewer was amazed as the Finnish woman said, "When my hand was cut off, I immediately looked up to my Lord and said, "Lord, what do you want me to do now that my right hand is gone? What work? I'm not asking why, but what?" In answer to that prayer she had turned her farm into a home for elderly Christians.

J.S. Bach is another example. He lost both parents by 10 yrs. Old. His wife died after 13 years of marriage. Half of his children died in infancy. One died at 20 and one was mentally handicapped. Yet on every composition one of his compositions he wrote - SDG (soli Deo Gloria) which means “to the glory of God alone”

C. These two examples help us to ask, “How is it done?” “How do we keep a good attitude amid great trials?”

# Look for and value the gifts that come to us during trials. Vv. 2-4

## Our tendency is to get angry or depressed in trials

But trials are part of life -- Jesus warned us "In this world you will have trouble. (John 16:33)

Often we get angry at the trial.

a. sometimes we have a right to be angry at the injustice in the situation.  
b. sometimes our anger is the natural anger of grief for our loss.

But often we are angry for lesser reasons.

(1) because things aren't going according to our rosy expectations.   
(2) because we're impatient   
(3) because we're not getting our way   
(4) because the troubles are holding up our schedule.

## Sometimes our attitude is - well nothing good can happen in my life until this is over.

a. ill. a person who can't wait to be sixteen; then they can’t wait to be 18; then they just don’t have a life because they are not yet 21. They are wishing their life away and missing the good things that come with each day.

b. So when we will only look for good when this current trial is over, we miss the good gifts God has sprinkled in today.

## Here are some possible gifts that come to us in trials:

### James’ List

a. perseverance (Gk hypomone) (see DNTT vol 2. p772)The word is sometimes used in a military context about a soldier who stood his ground and did not give way to the enemy   
Matt. 24:13 Jesus -"He who endures to the end will be saved." (also Lk 21:19 similar)

In Lk 8:15 Jesus teaches that the “good soil” people need this characteristic in order to be able to produce fruit.

#### b. maturity (teleioi)

The word has two shades of meaning:

1. moving toward its end, its goal. This idea is reflected in translations using the word maturity (NIV, NRSV).

2. whole, or sound – the word in this sense is used in parallel to the idea of complete. This sense is reflected in translations using the word perfect (KJV and TEV)

c. completeness (GK holokleroi)  
(1) sound, whole, complete

#### d. dependence upon God

ill. - a mother's memory "French Toast" (LI-VI) "Dear God, I thank you even for the stuff I don't like." Her   
son has maintained that attitude.

### A list I made of more gifts that we typically receive during troubles in our lives:

1. A perspective we would not otherwise have come too. A perspective on what is really valuable; a more realistic perspective on the difficulties of life; a perspective on our saving and spending; or whatever.
2. In troubled times, sometimes there comes a time for building relationships that might otherwise not have happened.
3. It may force us into growth in an area of our lives where we needed it but either didn’t recognize it or weren’t doing anything about it. Maybe a time of ill health finally convinces us to quit smoking or do something about our weight.
4. A new beginning in a different direction than we were thinking about before. Many new and very successful careers are started amid troubled times.
5. An inner strength to endure similar hard times. In troubled times we learn faith, prayer, trusting God, leaning on others, standing on the promises, these kind of coping skills that we never think to practice in times of prosperity.
6. A more empathetic heart toward the troubles of others.

# Believing will help us through. vv 5-8

## James says believe and not doubt.

Satan sows doubts …but we don't have to entertain them!

a. What is the difference between honest questions and doubts?   
 (1) Honest questions are good. They seek information or perspective.

(2) Doubts question the truth of what God has said. They also can help us learn but we don’t want to camp there. Eph. 6:16 says that the shield of faith quenches the fiery arrows of the evil one.

## What should we believe for?

### James suggests that we believe for wisdom.

I can think of three kinds of wisdom we particularly need in difficult times.

1. wisdom to see God's way out - I Cor. 10:13
2. wisdom for an eternal perspective
3. wisdom for relationships

### 3. Believe God is with you and is working

#### Trust in the character of God.

God is good. God is love. God is merciful. Even though our immediate experience raises questions, the character of God revealed in his word has not changed. These are basic confessions of both the Old and New Testaments.

#### Cling to God's promises.

1. Ps 10:14 "But you, 0 God, do see trouble and   
   grief; you consider it to take it in hand.
2. Heb. 13: 5 "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you."
3. Jn 5:17 Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."

It is in tough times that we learn to rely on the promises of God.

(to be continued next week)