

## REWRITING THE SCRIPT

### JAMES 1 v 2-4

**Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.**

If you could write the script for your Christian life, how would it read? It might run something like this; ‘I want to live a Christian life that is easy, free from all difficulties and challenges. I don’t want any sickness, defeat, failure or bereavement. I want to enjoy my Christian life to the full and be successful, always overcoming temptation, doubt and fear. I want to give people the impression that I can cope with any situation I have to face in my life. I want to live as long as possible and then after I’ve had a full and exciting Christian life here on earth, I will be quite happy to die and go to heaven where I will be with God and all his saints for all eternity’. What a great script. It reads so well; it couldn’t be improved. We would all love to be able to live our lives according to this script. But there’s just one problem. It’s not reality. The kind of life I have described may meet our requirements, but it’s not what the Christian life is really like. How do I know? James tells me in James 1 v 2-4. Eugene Peterson in ‘The Message’ paraphrases it; **“Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colours. So don’t try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way”**. It may be the case that you are feeling let down because your Christian life hasn’t lived up to your expectations. The reason for this is that you began your Christian life from the wrong premise. Somebody, maybe an evangelist, foolishly told you that when you became a Christian all your problems would be immediately solved and that you would be able to live a trouble-free life. But your life hasn’t turned out like this. You are still being tempted, you are still having health issues, you are still facing family problems, and you are still experiencing down times; life for you at the present time is a struggle. The situation is so bad that you are on the verge of giving up on the Christian life. It’s just not working for you, at least not in the way you had hoped. Listen carefully to James chapter 1 v 2; *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds”*. James rewrites the script. The Christian life was never intended to be lived according to our ideal script.

James begins by giving advice about trials. His readers were living in perilous times. There was the constant possibility that they were going to have to face trials. A trial is ‘the experience of having our faith put to the test’. James assumes that the natural effect of trials is to shatter faith. In the course of my pastoral work, I often meet people who tell me a sad tale about their lives. They say something like this; “I used to attend church regularly and had a strong Christian faith, but ten years ago my daughter was killed in a road accident and five years ago my wife died from a terminal illness, and after all that I couldn’t see the point continuing on with my Christian life”. Faith can easily collapse in the fierce and nasty storms of trouble,

disappointment or disillusionment. It's easy to say that we have faith in God when everything in life is going well and our faith is not being tested. What happens when circumstances mock our belief, when the cruelty of life denies God's fatherly care for us, when God's silence calls in question his almighty power, when the sheer haphazard jumble of events challenges the possibility of a Creator's ordering hand? Trials are God's way of testing us out to see what our faith is made of. James 1 v 3; *"because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance"*. The word 'testing' refers to the process by which silver is refined by fire. Psalm 66 v 10 says; *"For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver"*. Trials are the means by which faith, tested in the fires of adversity, can be purified of any dross and strengthened. Trials don't determine whether a person has a Christian faith; rather trials strengthen the Christian faith a person already has.

What is the intended outcome of the testing process? James 1 v 4; *"Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything"*. The Revised Standard Version has 'steadfastness'. The New International Version has 'perseverance'. The word occurs frequently in the New Testament. It indicates the quality required by Christians as they face adversity, temptation and persecution. It means 'staying power'. Other words that describe it are 'endurance' or 'stickability'. This quality is not a meek submission to circumstances, but an active response to circumstances to prove the genuineness of the Christian faith. We must respond to trials with joy because they are working in us to produce a deeper, stronger and more certain faith. RVG Tasker wrote; **"A Christian must have staying power, and this can be developed only in the face of opposition"**. As testings are endured a Christian becomes more durable. When Joni Eareckson Tada was 17 she dived into Chesapeake Bay and broke her neck. Since then, she has been confined to a wheelchair. In her book 'A Step Further' she wrote; **"As I look back, I am convinced that the whole ordeal of my paralysis was inspired by God's love. I wasn't the brunt of some cruel divine joke. God had reasons behind my suffering and learning some of them has made all the difference in the world"**. Some of the finest Christians I have met are those who have endured most trials. What mature and well-developed Christians they were. How would you write the script for your Christian life? In the light of what James tells us, maybe it's time for you to re-write the script.