

January 4, 2008 Temple Baptist Church, Jamestown, ND
TITLE: GROWING PAINS, James 1:1-12 (*Growing #1*)

One of the joys of being a parent is seeing the growth in ones children. We use marks on doorframes to measure height and pictures to compare changes in appearance. As children mature, we not only observe physical changes, but also changes in how they reason, communicate, make decisions, interact with others, become more independent. **Maturity is the goal we have for our children, not just on the outside, but also the inside.**

The growth to maturity is not always easy, for the children or other family members. It can be physically painful as our bodies adjust to sudden growth spurts, but it can be painful emotionally and socially as well.

The Bible says that **God is also interested in our maturing**. Maturity is not something that is complete until our last breath, for **God is changing us**, His Word says, **into the likeness of His Son** (Romans 8:29).

Maturing happens as we properly face life's difficulties, some of our own making and others that are just part of life. **God uses those experiences to help us mature, from the inside out**. In the next few weeks we will look at how God uses those challenges to help us grow in integrity, obedience, faith, influencing others and following His Word. We will look at people from the Bible to better understand and appreciate how God is working in our lives.

For now, let's turn in our Bibles to the NT book of **James**. This book is written to **faith followers of Jesus Christ who are going through intense persecution because of their faith in Him**. The NT books of Hebrews, 1 and 2 Peter and Revelation are also written to people going through great difficulty because of their faith. **James gives his readers some eternal perspective that helps them (and us) in current situations.** (Read James 1:1-12.)

- Trials remind us our faith is most important.

What are some trials or difficulties that we face in life? (Audience participation.) Are there any trials or difficulties that we are experiencing in our community or nation? James links *trials* (vs. 2) with the *testing of your faith* (vs. 3). If you are like me, you want to choose the path of least resistance, but that doesn't mean difficulties don't find us. They find all of us. The question is, *How will I respond to them?*

A couple years ago we watched a video clip of Harry Lehotsky, when he was diagnosed with cancer. Harry and I went to seminary in Sioux Falls together. God used him to touch the lives of a lot people in urban areas of Winnipeg, people others had simply written off as impossible. Do you remember Harry's

response when he found out he had cancer? The first reaction was, *Why me?* Then he said, *Why not me?*

James says that **trials are a sign that my faith is being tested**. He writes that I can respond with joy, because the testing of my faith will lead to perseverance and perseverance will lead to maturity . . . if I don't throw in the towel. **I must let perseverance complete its work.**

How many of you have gotten so frustrated with difficulties with a subject in school, a sport, a job, a marriage, that you wanted to quit? We all have. Some things we can change easier than others, like a class or a job. Others we have no choice. **Perseverance** has as its root meaning a single-minded devotion. It is not sitting back and letting life happen. It is **embracing life and continuing in the direction we know we must go despite the difficulties.**

James says, *Take a step back and see what God wants to do in your life to mature who you are.* When you look at the big picture, you can respond with joy. Peter shares similar words about rejoicing in the salvation to come. *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.* 1 Peter 1:6-7

Please **write a difficulty in your listening guide that you are personally experiencing**. If all your presents, your possessions, your job position were taken away, do you have a faith in Jesus Christ? If so, you have something nothing can take away. Trials remind us that our faith is most important.

- Trials force us to see our need.

Does having faith mean one no longer has needs? Absolutely not. It reveals that **we have needs that we can't possibly fulfill on our own**. We need God's direction, His wisdom, for so many things. (Read vss. 5-8.)

Who has what we need? God. For what are we to ask Him? **Wisdom**. Why ask for wisdom? Why not just ask Him for what we need? (Audience participation.) It's not that we shouldn't ask for our need, but if we ask for wisdom His perspective may reveal that we are asking for the wrong thing. Our need is for Him and His direction first of all.

In our *Experiencing God* study we were challenged in this area. *Lord, help me to see things from Your vantage point. Help me to see where you are at work.* That means we **must adjust our life so that we can join Him in what He is doing**. It's not easy, but it's what is ultimately best for us.

What is the measure of wisdom God gives to those who ask Him? Generously. What is the one condition (vs. 6)? Not doubt that He can do it. The one who rides the fence as to whether the Lord can give the wisdom asked of Him will receive . . . nothing. He simply goes through the motions of asking.

James is **not talking about having great faith**. Most of us are like the man who came to Jesus, requesting that He heal his son (cf. Mark 9:24-27). *I believe. Help my unbelief*, i.e. help my faith to grow. That man was not double-minded. He was honest. His heart was pure. We, too, need to ask. *Help me, Lord, to grow in faith, to ask for Your wisdom*. Trials force us to see our need for the Lord. Please take a moment and pray to the Lord, giving that difficulty to Him, asking and believing He will give His wisdom. Jesus shares these words with His followers before His betrayal, arrest and crucifixion. *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* John 16:33

- Trials make us consider our position.

Read vss. 9-11. This past six months many of us have lost 30-40% of the value of our investments, the funds set aside for retirement. If our boasting has been in the performance of our IRA or pension plan, we're no longer boasting. (Someone said that if we had all given that amount last summer, we could build the building for cash.)

Although it has not affected us as much in ND, the drop in the housing and financial markets has affected the prices of commodities, energy and jobs. **Even we who don't think of ourselves as rich or trusting in worldly wealth are seeing how much we do trust in it**. The Bible says that the rich person who trusts in his riches is already fading away just like flowers that lose their beauty and wither so quickly. How should the poor person, the person in humble position respond? **Boast**. Why? **Because of his position . . . in Christ. He is a child of the King**.

Perhaps we've brought on our own difficulties by choices we've made, yielding to temptation. Peter writes to those who are justly receiving punishment for their own misdeeds. *How is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.* 1 Peter 2:20 Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:12 & 13 that we should not flippantly think we are immune to temptation, because that kind of pride leads to our falling. **God gives us His word that He never allows anything we cannot face, so that we need not yield to it, but escape the temptation**. Jesus taught us to pray that we not be led into temptation, but delivered from evil and the author of evil (cf. Matthew 6:13). James has some very practical counsel in verses 13-18 about the source and result of temptation if we choose to go that way. We need not go there or stay there. John reminds us

of the promise of forgiveness and cleansing that comes when we confess our sins to the Lord (cf. 1 John 1:9).

Trials make us consider our position. **Do you belong to Jesus Christ . . . or are you living by your standards and will?** If you are living for yourself, confess your sin to the Lord, yield to His rule in your life, walk in His ways with His people. The Bible says that Jesus paid for that sin with Himself. He understands our weaknesses because He was tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. *Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.* Hebrews 4:16 Trials make us consider our position. **Let's live in His grace.**

- Trials inspire us to focus on our reward.

Read vs. 12. **The trial is a test to see if we will persevere, keep pressing toward Jesus Christ and live as forgiven people because of Him.** There is the **blessing of God** when we do and the crown of life that not even death can take away for those who love Him.

How is your love for God right now? Jesus reminds us that love means we obey what He says, keeping God's commands (cf. John 14:15; 15:9-14). **How are you growing in your love relationship with the Lord?**

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. Romans 5:1-5 (cf. 1 Peter 4:12-13)

When you and I trust Jesus Christ, we have a crown of life that nothing can take away, no sickness, no loss of job, no suffering, no difficulty, no war. That is what inspires us to keep on going. Focus on your reward in Christ.

Conclusion. Our faith in Him, need for Him, position in Him and reward from Him. **Difficulties and trials are growing pains, growing pains in us and,** Paul writes in Romans 8, **growing pains in the world as it moves toward the time when Jesus returns.** In the next weeks we'll look more specifically at how God uses the different tests in life to mature us for Himself . . . and for our joy. **Let's thank God for His continuing work in us and His moving all things to their completion in Him.** (Pray.)