

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

James 1:5-12

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. Today, we'll continue to read James chapter 1, verses 5 to 12.

The theme of James 1:2-12 is the benefits of trials. By nature, we all desire smooth and peaceful lives, but James tells believers that it is through trials that we gain benefits. Spiritual growth requires undergoing trials; if life were always smooth and easy, our spiritual life would not grow, which would be a true disaster. Therefore, James says that we should count it all joy when we fall into various trials, because the testing of our faith produces patience. And if we let patience have its perfect work, we will be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

"Perfect" refers to the height of our spiritual life, translated as "mature" in some versions like the NIV, and "complete" refers to the breadth of our experience. In every aspect of life, we can have mature spiritual experiences, so that we may be lacking in nothing. To be perfect and complete is the goal of every believer's growth and the good will of God for each believer. Now let's learn from verses 5 to 7 about how to pray in trials.

Verse 5: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him."

In trials, we all pray to God; this is the first benefit that trials bring us. People who have smooth and peaceful lives are not easy to pray to God urgently. Only when the environment is not favorable and we fall into trials do we urgently pray to God. When we pray to God, what should we ask for? The mistake that most believers make is to ask God to quickly end the trial. I believe that many believers have had such experiences. If, in such an environment, we repeatedly pray to God, but the environment remains the same, gradually causing people to lose faith, James tells

us that this is because we lack wisdom, and we have asked for the wrong thing. In trials, we need to ask God for wisdom so that we can understand God's will, that is, what lessons God wants us to learn in trials.

Once we know that we are walking in God's will, we can face every situation calmly and with a smile, and obey God's guidance with joy in our hearts. God is the one who gives generously to all without reproach, and God will answer our prayers in His mercy and compassion, giving us wisdom to understand His will. Just as Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." What we most need in time of need is wisdom to understand God's will.

Dear brothers and sisters, if you are currently facing difficult situations, whether physical illness, work difficulties, or fractures in family relationships, you should temporarily set aside these circumstances to pray to God for wisdom. This will enable you to understand God's will behind these circumstances, especially the lessons God wants you to learn. God is the one who gives generously to all without reproach. When you pray to Him, He will surely give you wisdom.

Verse 6: "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind."

This verse from James teaches us the attitude of prayer: we must ask in faith, without doubting. What does it mean to ask in faith? Faith is our capacity to accept. When we pray for wisdom and understand God's will, we must accept it in faith, without wavering. Our difficulty lies in our own thoughts and preferences; we hope that God will act according to our desires. For example, when you are in a challenging environment, you may hope God will remove it, but God's will may be for you to learn to coexist with that environment. Can you accept this in faith, asking God for sufficient grace to continue gathering, serving, and worshiping in that environment, rather than asking for God to remove it?

The apostle Paul provides a wonderful example in this regard. In 2 Corinthians 12:7-9, he says, "And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

A messenger of Satan attacked Paul, adding a thorn in his flesh, likely an undignified illness that made him lose face while serving the church. Paul prayed three times for God to remove this thorn, but God's will was for Paul to serve Him with this thorn, and He provided Paul with sufficient grace—enabling Paul to serve God even with his illness.

Once Paul understood God's will, he joyfully boasted in his weaknesses to demonstrate the perfect power of God. Note here that God's power did not heal Paul but enabled him to serve God and the church despite his illness.

Dear brothers and sisters, faith is accepting God's arrangement in every circumstance without doubting. Recognizing God's arrangement is always the best, even though circumstances may cause suffering or inconvenience, or result in material loss. We willingly accept it without doubting. Doubting occurs when we hesitate between God's arrangement and our own desires. And those who doubt are like the restless sea waves, constantly changing and driven by the wind. Such people are unstable in all their ways, and their restless tossing makes it impossible for them to find peace.

Verse 7: "For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord."

James unequivocally declares that such a person should not expect to receive anything from God. From verses 5 to 7, we observe principles of prayer in faith. When we find ourselves in trials, our prayer should be directed towards God. We

do not need to seek understanding or help from others; we must come directly before God and pray to Him. The content of our prayer should be seeking wisdom from God to understand His will. The attitude of our prayer should be to ask in faith and accept all of God's arrangements without doubting. According to these three principles, the generous God will answer our prayers. If we do not adhere to these principles, we should not expect to receive anything from God.

Moving on to verses 8 to 11, James tells us that after praying and understanding God's will, we must obey and not be double-minded.

Verse 8: "He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

Our conduct is based on our thoughts. A double-minded person desires to obey God's will on one hand but is unwilling to let go of their natural preferences on the other. As a result, their thoughts are inconsistent, leading to an unstable path where they vacillate between different directions—building up and tearing down alternately. Such a person finds it difficult to grow spiritually. Although they may undergo many trials, they suffer in vain without producing the fruit of patience.

Dear brothers and sisters, if you reflect on your past spiritual growth, have you encountered situations where you couldn't move forward because you were double-minded, unable to choose God's best will for you? In such times, you must earnestly negotiate with God regarding that matter, surrendering your sovereignty, and obeying God's guidance without being double-minded.

Continuing with verses 9 and 10, James uses wealth as an example to help us understand how to obey God's arrangements in our circumstances.

Verses 9-10: "Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away."

The lowly brother should rejoice in being exalted; this is relatively easier for saints to achieve. However, the rich should also rejoice in being humbled, which is more challenging. If we understand that all circumstances are permitted by God and arranged through His hands, designed for our benefit to test our faith, so that our lives may be made perfect and complete, lacking nothing, then we can rejoice whether in poverty or wealth.

Our ultimate goal is not the comfort and enjoyment of this life but the maturity and perfection of our spiritual life. If we can consistently hold on to this belief, we will not be swayed by changes in our circumstances, because they will surely pass away, just like the flower of the grass. Whether a person is humble or rich, their time in this world is brief. Like the flower of the grass, all plants bloom, but their flowering period is very short, especially that of herbaceous plants.

Verse 11: "For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits."

James uses an illustration familiar to those in the land of Israel where rainfall is sparse and the sun's heat is intense. After a brief rain, wild grass immediately sprouts, grows, and flowers until the sun rises. Then, when hot winds blow from the southeast, the grass encounters dry heat and quickly withers, and its flower wilts. This is a well-known sight in Israel. The psalmist also compares people to wildflowers in Psalm 103:15-16, "As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more." People are like wildflowers; driven by hot winds, they vanish. Isaiah 40:6-8 elaborates further, "All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever." Here, Isaiah emphasizes the breath of God and His word, which endure forever.

James refers to these passages to warn against relying on earthly riches. Those who trust in wealth are like flowers on the grass; they cannot withstand the scorching sun and hot wind. They quickly lose their beauty and disappear. We should not rely on these transient and uncontrollable things but instead obey God's will and accept His arrangements in our circumstances.

Verse 12: "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."

The term "temptation" here is better translated as "trial" in the sense of testing or proving. In Greek, the same word is used for both trial and temptation, though they have different meanings in Chinese or English. Trials come from God for our benefit, allowing our faith to be tested and producing perseverance. Therefore, we must learn to endure trials.

Temptation, on the other hand, comes from Satan with the goal of causing us to fail and lose faith. When faced with temptation, we should flee. Although the Greek word can mean both trial and temptation, in this context, it specifically refers to trials permitted by God. This verse instructs us to endure trials, hence it should be translated as "trial," not "temptation." Both NIV and ASV translate it as "trial," not "temptation." This verse concludes verses 2 to 11: We are to remain in God's arranged environment and endure trials, which brings blessedness.

James now explains why those who endure trials are blessed: because after being tested, they will receive the crown of life, a promise from God for those who love Him. Verses 3-4 tell us that if we persevere through various trials, our lives will grow and become perfect and complete, lacking nothing. This ensures that when Christ returns, we will receive the crown of life—what a marvelous promise!

Paul, after a lifetime of fighting for the truth, declared in 2 Timothy 4:8 before his martyrdom that a crown of righteousness was reserved for him. Peter, who served the church all his life and shepherded God's flock, also taught fellow elders to follow

his example, assuring them of a glorious crown when Christ returns. Similarly, James teaches us here that by remaining in God's arranged environment and enduring various trials, we too can receive the crown of life, a promise for those who love the Lord.

Our love for the Lord is the motivation for enduring trials, and the crown of life is the result of enduring trials. Dear brothers and sisters, following the Lord is a matter of life. We don't need to establish great ministries or become famous figures. Instead, if we simply love the Lord and are willing to endure trials in the environment He has prepared for us, our lives will naturally grow and mature. When Christ appears, we will receive the crown of life—what a wonderful promise!

Let's pray together: Lord, thank You for Your promise that blessed are those who endure trials, for after they have been tested, they will receive the crown of life. Lord, grant us wisdom that when we encounter trials, we may understand Your will behind them and help us to willingly obey, staying in this environment so that our lives may be perfect and complete. When You come again, You will grant us the crown of life. Bless my daily life, I pray in the holy name of Jesus Christ. Amen.