

James 1:9-18

What does it mean to be in humble circumstances (v. 9)? To be financially poor.

What does it mean, as a believer, to be poor and yet have a high position? Poor in the eyes of the world but in a high spiritual position, i.e., righteous before God. Materially poor believers can derive joy from focusing their thinking on their spiritual riches. Ephesians 1:3: *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us (right now) in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.* Irrespective of our financial position, we are all heirs – joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17).

To the poor believer, James offers them hope.....by trusting in Jesus Christ, they have a standing before God that is equal to the richest saints. The redemption price for the poor man's soul was exactly the same as that for the wealthiest sinner.....not payable in silver and gold.....but bought with the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18, 19). Every saved person can rejoice because his/her name is written in heaven (Luke 10:20).

What can the poor person do for Christ? He/she is in the unique position of being able to minister to other poor people. **Who is your peer ministry group?**

What does it mean that the rich man (believer) should take pride in his low position (v. 10)? He knows that his possessions and wealth end at the grave where he is no better than anyone else. Death levels the playing field.

What are some of the real-life warnings for the rich man (vv. 10-11)? Don't put your trust in things. They will fade away. Riches are worthless in the face of death and judgment. Hold onto your shiny things loosely. Don't let them become an idol. Jeremiah 9:23-24: *"Let not the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me."*

Application: **Which camp do you fall into—rich or poor? How should that affect your attitude toward life?** Philippians 4:12; Proverbs 30:7-9.

What does it mean to persevere (v. 12)? Stand firm under trials; do not yield to temptation to depart from the will of God. Stay the course. Walk by faith not by sight. Persevere as empowered by the Holy Spirit; it is not about trying harder in our own strength. Our motivation should be to demonstrate our love for God and to glorify Him alone.

We do not have to walk this "perseverance road" by ourselves. We have help. The following verses describe how God supports and walks with us:

- Jude 1:24.....He is able to keep you from stumbling
- Philippians 2:13..... It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose
- Philippians 1:6..... He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion
- 1 Peter 1:3-5.....Through faith you are shielded by God's power
- 2 Corinthians 1:21...Now it is God who makes....you stand firm in Christ
- 1 Corinthians 1:8.....He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ

What is the reward for persevering under trial (v. 12)? The Crown of Life. **What is the crown of life?** Eternal life with Christ. **What two things do you have to do to receive the crown of life?** Persevere and love God.

What does it mean to love God? *"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me"* (John 14:21). We love God by our attitudes and actions. Obedience is key.... but the love of God must precede obedience.

Application: How do we react when various forms of testing come into our lives? Do we complain bitterly against the misfortunes of life, or do we rejoice and thank the Lord for them? Do we advertise our trials or do we bear them quietly? Do we live in the future, waiting for our circumstances to improve, or do we live in the present, seeking to see the hand of God in all that comes to us? Do we pray asking God to remove the trial or do we pray asking God to glorify Himself in the midst of the trial. Do we indulge in self-pity and seek sympathy or do we submerge ourselves in a life of service for others?¹

Just as holy trials are designed to bring out the best in us, so unholy temptations are designed to bring out the worst in us.² **When we are tempted to sin, where does the temptation not come from (v. 13)?** God often tests but He never tempts.

Then, where do temptations come from according to James (v. 14)? The evil desire within us. Our old, evil, fallen, unregenerate, sinful nature. *"Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it"* (Romans 7:20).

Application: **What are some examples of temptations you face?**

In vv. 2-4 James gave us a progression for *trials* in life. What is the progression that He gives us relative to *temptation* in vv. 14-15? Temptation progresses from our own evil desire (lust), to enticement, desire, sin and finally death. The whole process of lust conceiving and bringing forth sin is vividly illustrated in the incident of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:1-5). Do we allow evil thoughts to linger in our minds or expel them quickly?

What is meant by death (v. 15)? Spiritual death (separation from God). In Adam's case -- physical death also.

Application: What are some practical solutions to dealing with temptation?

- Memorize Scripture (Psalm 119:11).
- Walk closely with God (John 14:23).
- Control sensory input – Movies, TV, computer, etc. Prime access points are eyes and ears.
- Guard your heart (Proverbs 4:23).
- Answer to an accountability partner (Hebrews 10:24).
- Watch where you go and who you go with (1 Corinthians 15:33).
- Make a covenant with God (Job 31:1).
- Flee from temptation (2 Timothy 2:22).
- The common denominator in all the above solutions is prayer. We must lay a foundation of prayer covering every aspect of our lives.

What can we know about God based on vv. 16-17? God is the source of every good and perfect gift. God never changes. God's goodness is a constant. There is no variation with Him—His nature remains the same. Shadows from the sun shift, but not the One who made the sun. He always does everything for His own glory and His creatures' good. He doesn't renege on His promises.

What are some examples of good and perfect gifts God gives us? The Holy Spirit. The Word of God. The greatest of God's gifts for believers is the gift of new life in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-6).

How did God give us birth (v. 18)? Through the word of truth in either oral or written form. God reveals himself through the Word of God and we respond. No one comes to the Lord independently of the Word of God. Apart from the Bible we would not know the way of salvation. The Word of God is described in its fullness in Hebrews 4:12: *"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."*

Can you identify a particular book of the Bible/passage/verse that was instrumental in your salvation?

The Bible is supernatural in its authorship and supernatural in its impact.....*"so is my word that goes out from my mouth. It will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it"* (Isaiah 55:11).

What is God's purpose for giving us birth? To bring glory to Himself.

What does first-fruits mean (v. 18)? Just as the first fruits of the harvest in Israel were a special offering to God (Deuteronomy 26:1-11), the early Christians were first-fruits.....a pledge/a foreshadowing of the full harvest to come down through the centuries.

¹ William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 2220.

² Ibid.