

Turning the Crap of Life, Into the Fruit of the Spirit

Journey Through James: A purpose for problems

Life Questions:

What does the Bible have to say about your life today? What can you do to deal with the issues of life in a way that would make them go away? Is there a purpose for problems in your life?

A journey through James is a study of the book of James from the Bible. In a simple sense, it is the Bible in a simple and thought provoking way. This study helps to examine the book and find the simplest answers to the most complicated questions of life. It is meant to be a simple understanding of a simple book to help you face the things coming at you.

James 1:1-8

1:1 Greeting to the twelve Tribes James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.

2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.⁴ But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.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.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.⁷ For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

NKJV

1. It isn't me anymore . . .

James starts off with an interesting introduction; he calls himself a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. The original word means to be bound to someone – we think of it as a slave, which is a modern interpretation. That isn't a positive word. Slave never means something good. For centuries, even today, people in slavery would not be thinking themselves as being in a good place. But for James, it was because the master he serves isn't an earthly master, but the God Himself. Paul tells us in

Gal 2:20-21

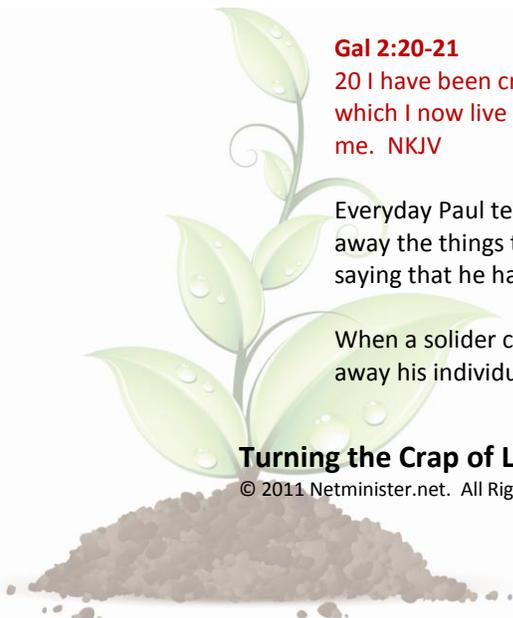
20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. NKJV

Everyday Paul tells us that we should put our own flesh to death. Not take our own life, but put away the things that are not Christ in us. When James calls himself a bond-servant or slave, he is saying that he has given up his rights to serve another.

When a soldier comes into the service, he is sent through boot camp. The purpose is to take away his individuality. He wears the same thing as everyone else, gets up at the same time, goes

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to bed at the same time all because the point is to make a team of men work together as a single unit. That soldier has given up his rights, and he protects our rights by serving sometimes with his life, others. That is the call of Christ in our life.

When this is the starting point, everything becomes significantly easier, because it isn't me that you are attacking, it is the one that I serve, Christ.

In ancient times, messengers would deliver information throughout a kingdom, they worked under the power of the King. They stood with the authority of the King because the King had sent them out. That is how our life must be in Christ. If we truly want to understand how to deal with a problem, then we must first understand that our service, means that we act with the will and purpose of another.

Now does that mean that you aren't in control? Of course not, you have made a choice. Just like a soldier you have chosen to serve when you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior. You choose to give up your rights. When you try to do what you want, then you put yourself into a situation where problems are going to be even worse. Why? Because if you want the solution to your problems, you did a great job getting yourself into the problem, but chances are you cannot get yourself out of it.

Take for example when you were younger and you got your first car. Nothing was going to stop you. Until one night you hit something that did moderate damage to your car. Now unless you are a body guy, have your own shop and can repair, paint and dry the work out within a few hours you are going to be caught. Can't fix it yourself because you don't have the expertise. That is where Jesus comes into your life.

He (Jesus) was just like us, but with a big difference, He overcame the problems we face. And He is more than willing to help. Being a Christian means being Christ-like or in the likeness of Christ, so that means being under Him. Serving Him with your life. Not a 9-to-5 job, but a lifestyle of service.

People fight this. Tell a wife that she is suppose to submit to her husband. Tell a deacon that he is suppose to submit to the authority over him. Tell a man or woman to submit, and you are going to get a fight. But submission means allowing another, in this case One that knows a lot more than all of us combined, to give us what we need to achieve His goals, not our own. That is tough. And to make matters tougher you have to continually do that – daily, for me sometimes moment to moment. Serving another means allowing His goals to be ours, even when we don't understand.

You have to surrender your right to solve the problem first! Without you giving up that right, you aren't going to be able to find a solution. And since you aren't the expert, and neither am I for that matter, you need professional help and fast.

2. Hunker down

Storms have been in the news lately. Lots of people who have lost loved ones, homes everything in some cases to the destructive power of natural disasters. When tornados come through you are told to go to a safe place, somewhere on the lowest level of a home with no windows, a basement is best – abandon vehicles and mobile homes. If you live where tornados are present,

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you can quote it by heart. During the storms, there isn't anything you can do but hunker down and wait.

I hate waiting. Hate it more than probably anything in the world. Scientist tells us, because they have the time to find this out that the average person spends 45 to 62 minutes waiting everyday. Behind cars in line, for the elevator, at the store, we all spend time waiting. But there are times when waiting is all that we can do.

When the problems of life come to you, you don't have an answer, James tells us to start out by counting it all joy. What is up with that? Is he saying praise God joyously when I have problems in my life? Are you serious? Do you know what I am going through? Do you know how I am hurting? Did God read this before He put it in? What was He thinking?

We should be joyous – notice not happy, not excited, not enraptured – but counting it as something to be joyous about because life is full of challenges but by the trial you are facing, the problem you are dealing with God has a plan. Do I understand it? Nope. But just like a football player that executes a block and moves a specific way may not understand or see the whole play, his actions are critical to the success of the play.

If you have ever sung in a choir, then you know that each area sings only one part of the whole. Only the audience experiences all the pieces together. That can be hard to understand if you are only hearing your one part. Being a bass singer, you don't get the lead often, so you end up only hearing a small part of the total. You trust in the song writer, the arranger, the instrumentalist or band, and the leader to have a grasp that what you are doing works together. Why? Because you cannot sing your part and listen to the whole song at the same time. You are either listening to everything or your part. That is how life is, we sometimes, most of the time honestly, only get to hear our part in this life. Never realizing the fullness of the melody or the soaring parts until we listen to the whole song, that is heaven.

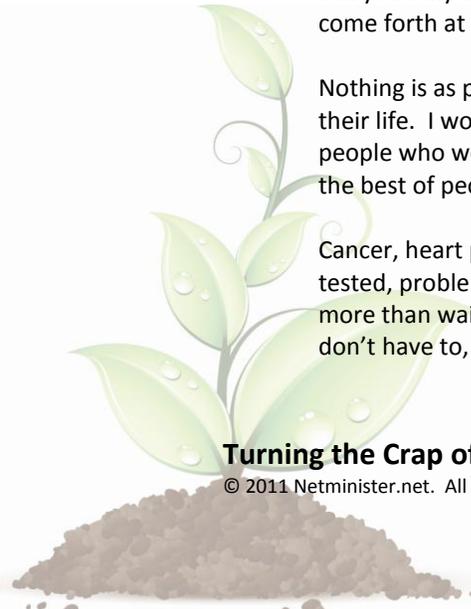
Matt 5:12

12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. NIV

Rejoicing can only come when you have surrendered your life to Christ, following His lead and doing your part of the song of life. Because rewards are not always in this life. Trouble is coming, with or without Jesus as your Savior, problems are coming your way. Only with Christ can you fully understand your place in the choir, your part in the song, and the rhythm that will come forth at the end.

Nothing is as powerful as the words of someone that has gone through a tremendous tragedy in their life. I wonder if I would have the power to speak the words of wisdom and comfort that people who would realistically be given a pass to be angry. Only in the worse times do we see the best of people.

Cancer, heart problems, disasters all are things we aren't prepared for by our nature. But we are tested, problems come our way because they produce patience. UGH, if there is anything I hate more than waiting, it is patience. No one ever proudly says they are praying for patience. We don't have to, it is provided because it is necessary.



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The Message bible says these verses in another way:

2 Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. 3 You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. 4 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.

People see patience. They see it, you see it. You know people that have patience and for many times in your life you have probably said how you wish you had their patience. How you wish you could react the way they do to problems. Well it is available.

God isn't punishing you with problem or trials, far from it, He is building you up as His messenger. Don't you want to be one that people can ask, "how did you deal with that?" Only by God's help! That is how you deal with it, with anything, with everything in life – with God's help! We see a person's true colors when they are tested, that part of you that comes out when the body is tired, the mind is tired is exactly why soldiers are trained so much. Because when everything else fails you depend on what you know – and when you know Jesus you can start there! That patience is seen. Everyone sees it, it draws people like a sponge draws water.

Patience requires that we hunker down in the storm. Give it time, learn. Don't rush it, God is teaching you something, look for it! Look for what He is teaching you. No it isn't easy, no it isn't fun, but it is the part you have – people are listening for that part in the song that is yours to sing.

When it is finished, that trial that you face, that problem you have, then you can know. You can sit back and listen to the whole song. People come up and ask you for answers because they have seen Christ through your hard time. That is complete, perfect, lacking-nothing patience that is finished. Like an athletic or a performer who has worked tirelessly for their moment, you too have had your moment that Jesus is perfecting your patience so that the world will know.

When the storms end, people come out of their safe places – your safe place is with Jesus. That is how a mother tells the story of her fallen child. How a father tells of the bravery of his son. The ability of a family to see a disease through their family – all of it, the song of life is sung. Your part may be in the safe place right now. Hold on. Jesus is working your patience, let Him, so that others can listen, and know Him.

3. Keep focused

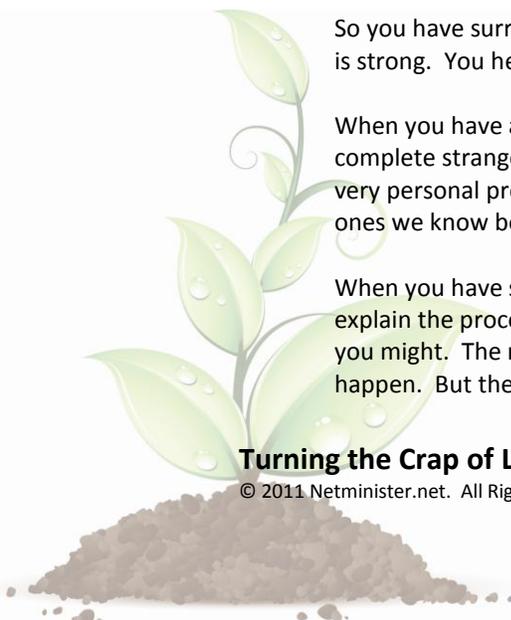
So you have surrendered your life to Christ, everyday – you have hunkered down and the storm is strong. You hear it tearing your life apart. Stay with Jesus.

When you have a problem, who do you go to? Probably friends, maybe family, but never just complete strangers. No one has ever stopped me on that street to ask me how to deal with a very personal problem in their life – maybe they have for you, but we tend to gravitate to the ones we know best.

When you have surgery, there is typically someone that comes in ahead of time and begins to explain the procedure to you in sometimes rather unnecessary detail. Me, I don't want to know, you might. The reason they are telling you this is to prepare you to know what is going to happen. But the biggest thing is to let you know that pain, problems, etc are part of the process

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but that they pass and this is the end result everyone is looking for. Now in the middle of the pain, you may begin to wonder if they knew what they were talking about.

Several years ago I worked for a company that provided a specific service that generally changed the universe of the people we worked with. Imagine going in one day to work and being told that everything you know, doesn't apply anymore – everything is new. Wouldn't be too happy about that would you? Most people aren't. So much so that one of the technicians had prepared a chart showing approximately the moment when the company would think they had made the worst mistake using us. It was a period that they would want to go back to the old way, forget this stuff – we will do it the way we know. Generally, she was correct many times to the day that this would happen. Knowing that ahead of time meant we could show them this chart when all hope seemed to have vanished – to renew their hope that now things will start to get better.

Because they trusted us to know when the bad parts would come, they trusted us to know when the good times would start. Their faith in our effort would increase. Even though the process was still hard, they understood that we understood what they were going through and we would see them through. Unless they give up.

Such is the case with this verse, that if we lack wisdom, ask God. Ask Him! Have you ever just asked for wisdom from Jesus? Have you ever said Lord I don't know, I need your help? Because not only will He give us that wisdom, but He gives it liberally and without reproach.

So what is knowledge/wisdom? It is the ability to know where this situation is going, the thorough, practical knowledge of God! Some people, maybe you, think that God isn't a practical God. Why don't you find out for yourself. Ask Him for knowledge, tell Him you lack the wisdom to understand why the storm is getting worse.

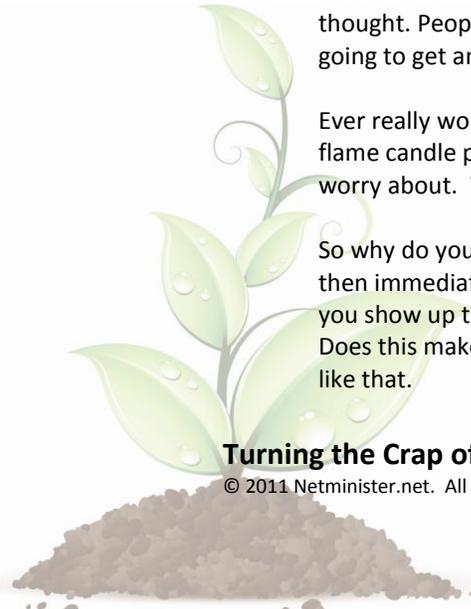
In music, you can ask to listen to the whole song, maybe you cannot pick out your part, but you understand quickly if your part is removed that the song is incomplete – missing something. Ever prepared a meal only to realize that you left out an important ingredient? The meal is not the same is it? Without you the song is incomplete.

So ask God for help. The way the Message puts it is . . .

5 If you don't know what you're doing, pray to the Father. He loves to help. You'll get his help, and won't be condescended to when you ask for it. 6 Ask boldly, believingly, without a second thought. People who "worry their prayers" are like wind-whipped waves. 7 Don't think you're going to get anything from the Master that way, 8 adrift at sea, keeping all your options open.

Ever really worry about something? I mean really worry about it. Like did I leave the burning flame candle precariously close to the tank of gasoline? That would constitute something to worry about. What good does that do? NONE!

So why do you worry that God is not listening to your prayers. Why would you ask God for help then immediately start doing your own thing. Have you ever had someone ask you for help then you show up to find that he has already done the job you were asked to do? Poorly I might add. Does this make you mad? Do you ever want to help this guy again? Probably not, but God is not like that.



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He tells us that we are not insulted for asking. God doesn't make fun of our lack of wisdom, instead he relishes the opportunity to help! He really enjoys it. Do you enjoy doing something? If so, how much do you enjoy the chances you have to do it for others? God is that way with us, He loves to help! He wants to help, but He cannot help if you aren't listening or if you are proceeding to do it yourself.

I can't help you build a deck if you have already built it wrong. Now we will have to take the wrong work down – which will take longer, cost more and be more labor intensive than if we had done the job right at first. That is the key with God, just ask.

Don't know how? It's easy, "Lord, I don't know what to do. Your word says that if I lack wisdom I can come to you for it. Jesus, I need wisdom and your word says you will give it to me." That is not a magic incantation, but a purpose of admitting that we need help, that I don't get this song, it sounds terrible to me, but help me understand all the parts.

God wouldn't help me, I have done (insert whatever horrible thing you think you have done that would keep God from helping you here). Really? Doesn't seem to say He only helps those who are perfect. In fact, if you read the whole Bible, God usually uses some of the most screwed up people you could imagine, not the ones that seem to have it all together!

When we worry, when we let things get between us and our relationship with God, there is the problem. We are double-minded – meaning that we have our mind in two places (Yes God can help, but I should do this myself). How can you help someone like that? We have to stay focused on the wisdom He provides. It doesn't change from day to day. God is not going to change His mind because He didn't foresee what happened just a moment ago – it wasn't a surprise to Him even if it was to you!

Simply put, if you are on the fence you aren't getting anything. Without your feet being on one side of the other you can't go anywhere. Sitting on the fence keeps you from moving, worrying about how you sing keeps you from being able to sing the part you have been given and causes the whole song, just like your meal, to be missing something important.

Are you trusting God today? What is your plan B? If He cannot help, then your situation is hopeless, only because I know He can. He has helped me, helped friends and family and He is waiting to help you. Want to give Him a try? So you have but the storm is still raging, hunker down, remember storms to pass. So hold onto what you know to be the truth and ask in faith. He has been there and done it, He has the scars in His hands and feet to prove it.

Final Analysis:

Telling people how to handle problems is always easy when you aren't in the problem. Giving advice is simple, taking it, applying it to your life – that is hard. If you aren't facing a trial or problem, prepare yourself. Like an athletic or performer, your time is coming – your part is needed to complete the song. Are you ready? And if you are in the midst of it now, God isn't going anywhere. Hold onto Him, His word, His people. Don't let worry or doubt come into your mind – weed it like a garden, keep the weeds out so that your faith can flower. I am praying for you as you read this. Ask others, but ask God first, I know you will be amazed at what He does, even for someone like me.

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