

A Perfect Work: Trials and Sanctification in the Book of James

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Introduction

Nobody enjoys the trials of life, yet the Bible consistently urges us to find them valuable. In the book of James we find the most straightforward and challenging of all such statements: “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials” (1:2).¹ I cannot be the only one who, as a young believer, choked on this strange exhortation. Surely joy is our response to things we eagerly desire; how can “trials” be considered desirable? Is James merely using hyperbole? No, James means what he says. Trials are truly something to rejoice in, not because they are desirable in themselves, but because they lead to a most desirable outcome: They lead to our sanctification. How James connects trials and sanctification is the topic of this essay.

Before I begin my analysis of James, some explanations are in order. First of all, my use of the word “sanctification” needs to be clarified. I have no intention of exploring the Bible’s use of the word “sanctification” (*hagiasmos*). James is very much concerned with the believer’s growth into Christian maturity, and modern theological dialogue tends to borrow the word “sanctification” to refer to that process, a term that James himself does not use. I will argue, however, that James makes a strong contribution to our *concept* of change in the Christian life—to our concept of sanctification.

Second, while I will focus on the first

twelve verses of James, I will regularly highlight the connection between these verses and the coherent picture of sanctification that unfolds in the rest of the letter. Given the history of James studies, however, I need to say something about my use of the word “coherent” and the assumptions I am making. Normally, a careful interpreter approaches an epistle looking for two important and related things: (1) The situation(s) of the readers that the author addresses; and (2) The flow of thought that gives unity and coherence to the author’s individual statements. Some commentators, however, argue that we should downplay James’s letter-like opening and treat the book as an example of wisdom literature, something like a New Testament version of the book of Proverbs. If James is indeed a book like Proverbs, then it lacks the very things the interpreter is most eager to find: (1) a situation that the author addresses and (2) coherence.

Martin Dibelius takes this line of thinking to an extreme. In James 1:4-5, for example, James repeats the word *leipō*, “... that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom...” Normally, such a repetition would suggest a coherent connection in the author’s mind between the “perfection” in verse four and the “wisdom” in verse five. Dibelius argues, however, that since we know in advance that there is no coherence between the isolated ideas in

the book, James must have deliberately repeated the word to create an artificial connection between ideas that were in fact unrelated. James moves from a saying on trials to a saying on prayer with a “catchword link.”² In this line of thinking, the genre dictates that we should not only stop looking for coherence, but that we should also deliberately ignore whatever indicators of coherence we find. I think James Adamson is more persuasive than Dibelius: “We have too long been hampered by two misconceptions, first that James lacks unity and coherence, and second that James’s concept of Christianity is peculiar and unorthodox.”³

This paper assumes the unity of James. The following conclusions were reached after examining the whole book and will guide the approach undertaken in the rest of the essay:

(1) What James has written is not *personal*, but it is *purposeful*. James presumably writes to a number of churches with which he has limited personal contact, and the letter has none of those personal comments that mark Paul’s letters to the churches he founded. James wrote in order to address problems that he knew the churches were facing.

(2) The letter is not *tightly argued*, but it is *coherent*. James is clearly not starting with a premise and working his way step-by-step over five chapters to a conclusion. Furthermore, the connections that exist between his ideas are often left implicit. Yet it would be a mistake to neglect the real focus and coherence of the letter. James is clearly a man who has read the prophets and wisdom literature, and his work has a certain generality befitting a pastoral letter written to many churches. James has by no means thrown together a disconnected set of proverbs.

The Testing of Your Faith

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when

you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance” (1:2-3).

What is Faith?

James does not share the current popular conception of “faith” as a vague belief that things will be all right. He does not even share the popular Christian conception that “faith” just means believing in Jesus. For James, faith includes a distinctive set of beliefs with specific content. To be sure, the message we are to believe begins with the truth that Jesus is the Christ, a truth that James neither explains nor defends, but merely assumes. James highlights the aspects of that message that directly address our predicament, our destiny, and the choices we face. He tells us that the human soul is in peril of death (5:20) and the adverse judgment of God (4:12), and it needs to be saved. Such salvation is available (2:21); God will justify (2:24) and be gracious to (4:6) the one who responds to Him (4:8). In contrast to the judgment awaiting the unredeemed, those who come under God’s grace stand to inherit the crown of life (1:12) and a place in God’s kingdom (2:5) at the return of the Lord (5:7-8). This inheritance is valuable beyond measure; therefore, even though believers may suffer much in this life, their future hope makes them rich (2:5) and exalted (1:9). These are the truths that a person with “faith” will believe.

This set of beliefs, this faith, confronts us with two striking implications:

(1) If the gospel is true, then the most important events of my life are still ahead of me (belonging to the end of the age), invisible to me now.

(2) Nevertheless, now is the time when I must decide whether I actually believe this message. The important decisions of today all hang on whether I believe what the gospel

says about my tomorrow.

Faith under Trial

By its very nature, therefore, faith will be tested by the circumstances of life. We will be forced to decide whether the gospel's intangible truths are substantial enough to affect how we live today. In discussing this testing, James uses two related terms: "Consider it all joy, my brethren, whenever you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces perseverance."

The Greek word *peirasmos* and its related forms sometimes refer to explicit attempts to entice and seduce someone to evil; in such contexts we usually translate it as "temptation."⁴ James, however, seems to be using it with its broader sense of "a trial, something that tests what we are made of." In the context, *peirasmos* is used in parallel with *dokimion*, a word that emphasizes the idea of testing, and so "trials" seems the best translation. The issue, however, is not quite that simple. In the larger context (1:13), James uses the verb form *peirazō* in the narrower sense: God does not "tempt" anyone. One might reasonably argue that James is saying, "Rejoice in temptations, but do not blame them on God." It is unlikely, however, that James is denying that the *peirasmois* of verse three come from God.⁵ He later uses Abraham's offering of Isaac as an example of faith at work, and surely James knows that God is described there as having "tested" Abraham (LXX Gen 22:1, *peirazō*). We would do better to see James qualifying the broad use of *peirasmos* in 1:3 by denying that it includes the narrower meaning in 1:13; that is, God *tries* our faith, but we should not interpret that as God's attempt to *tempt* us, i.e., to seduce us into evil.

Scholars often compare James 1:3 with

1 Peter 1:7 and discuss the derivation of *dokimion* in both.⁶ It is sometimes argued that James emphasizes the process ("testing") and Peter the favorable outcome ("proof"). Several explanations are proposed for this difference, some involving the idea that James and Peter are in fact using two different words. A definitive answer may be impossible. The difference between James and Peter can be exaggerated, however. Peter may be emphasizing the favorable outcome, but the testing process is not far from view. James may be emphasizing the process, but a favorable outcome is clearly part of his picture as well; one does not rejoice in *failing* the test. A good translation in both James and Peter is "the proving of your faith." This captures both features of this word in James's usage: it is a *process* that results in *proof*. The idea of proof, genuineness, is at the heart of the *dokim-* word group. The *process* of *proving* the genuineness of our faith results in "perseverance"; indeed, as we will see, perseverance is the proof of genuineness.

James, then, has a concept that faith—the rich set of beliefs about the need for salvation and the inheritance of the redeemed—is proved in the midst of trials. What does that look like? We can begin to answer that question by considering the rest of James's letter. While I cannot write an entire commentary on James in the space of one article, three points will at least present the general direction of my thinking:

First, while James is not writing to a specific set of people, neither is he writing vague exhortations to generic Christians. A strong note of warning sounds through the letter, suggesting that James is at least generally aware of real spiritual problems in the churches to which he is

writing. He uses phrases such as: “do not be deceived” (1:16); “be doers and not just hearers who delude themselves” (1:22); “if anyone thinks himself to be religious... his religion is worthless” (1:26); “quarrels and conflicts among you” (4:1); “you adulteresses” (4:4); and “you double-minded” (4:8). James is not writing about trials in a vacuum; he is writing to churches where faith is under trial.

Second, wealth is a big issue in James because wealth is often an issue that forces believers to confront the claims of the gospel. For example, James rebukes those who would fawn over a rich man in the assembly and yet ignore and dishonor a poor man (2:1-7). Why? Because believers should be nicer? Because charity to the poor is a religious duty? No, the issue is more fundamental. We toady to the rich because we value money; we want to be associated with those who have it; and we even hope that some of it will come our way. (Tell me that you would not take notice if Bill Gates joined your church and started tithing.) In contrast, a poor man has nothing that can do us any worldly good. No prestige, and certainly no money, will come to us. James must remind his readers what their faith tells them about who and what is truly valuable: “...did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?” (2:5). Who is truly rich? The unbelieving rich of this world, who will lose everything and enter into judgment? Or believers, poor though they may be, who stand to enter into the riches of eternal life in the kingdom of God?

Third, trials, therefore, are not necessarily hardships. The rich of James’s day, it is true, brought suffering upon many (2:6-7; 5:4-6). But the rich may try your

faith just by attending the assembly. They may be a trial simply because, in a worldly sense, they have more to give than lowly widows and orphans. In fact, they may be a trial by the example they set, by the worldly ambition they may incite in the heart. In all of these situations, the worldview of believers is under trial. Do the rich understand the salvation of their souls to be their real need? Can the transitory riches of this world amount to real wealth, or is that only found in the eternal promises of the gospel? How can they say that they “believe” the gospel preached by the apostles if they refuse to accept any of its implications for their values, goals, and lives?

Staying the Course

Perseverance (NASB “endurance,” from *hypomonē*) is a major theme in the New Testament, starting with the teaching of Jesus (see especially Luke 8:5-15). In the face of whatever obstacles, pressures, and temptations they may encounter, believers are called to persevere in the faith. In 1:3, James describes perseverance as resulting from the proving of our faith; in 1:12, he implies that persevering under trial is the proof itself. These two ideas fit well together and demonstrate how James conceives of perseverance: Perseverance is the inevitable result of genuine faith under trial, because such faith stays the course and thereby shows itself to be genuine.

In a way, perseverance as a test of faith is easy to understand. A man shows his unbelief clearly if he walks away from the faith, saying, “I’ve changed my mind; Jesus is a fraud.” James, however, seems to have a more subtle concept of perseverance. Nowhere in his letter does he warn his readers against abandoning the

doctrines concerning Christ. Unlike the book of Hebrews, where the author genuinely fears that his readers will walk away from belief in Jesus as the Christ, James shows no such fears for his readers. He is not worried about people abandoning their religion; he is afraid that they are refusing to act on the implications of that religion. James is sometimes criticized for his lack of Christological material; Luther is well known to have complained about it.⁷ But we need to recall that James addresses a specific situation, and that he is apparently not concerned about the doctrines of his readers. Instead, he is worried about the values, attitudes, and actions that ought to be resulting from those doctrines. James fears that his readers are abandoning the faith in everything but name.

If my friends “persevere” in calling themselves my friends over the years, and yet ignore me, refuse to help me, and gossip about me, what does their persevering “friendship” really mean? They may call themselves my friends, but they act instead as my enemies whenever they are faced with a choice. Such is James’s concern for some who claim to have “faith.” Their religion tells them that Jesus is the king of God’s kingdom, but they live as if the kingdom were not real and did not impinge on their practical living. The hope of gaining citizenship in that kingdom makes every believer rich, but James sees many of his readers living as if only people with money are rich. If people fail to live according to the gospel, then what do they mean in saying they “believe” it? If people live contrary to the gospel, then their professions of faith are vain and meaningless. For James, true perseverance means following the implications of the gospel wherever they may lead. If I will

not live out the implications of the gospel, then I have not “persevered,” however long I may hold to the Christian religion.

Perfect and Complete

“And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (1:4-8).

Lacking in Nothing

So far James has used the word *hypomonē* (“endurance, perseverance”) once, asserting that it is the desirable outcome of the process that proves our faith. Although I have looked ahead in the letter to suggest that James has a concept of perseverance deeper than just “remaining a Christian,” his opening comments in verse three use the term without clarification. The clarification begins with verse four. In order to see the nature of James’s argument, it is helpful to discuss two issues of translation. First, the use of the word “let” (in “let endurance have”), although acceptable as a translation of a third person imperative, can be misleading. James is not saying that perseverance would have a perfect result if only we would “allow” it to do so. What would that mean? Can we somehow sabotage a genuine, from-the-heart perseverance in faith and keep it from having any impact on our lives? No, I regard the imperative

as explaining what must characterize “perseverance,” if it is truly to be a faith-affirming, joy-producing aspect of a believer’s life. “Perseverance is to have a perfect work,” he says. Perseverance is meant to have a certain result, implying that if this result is lacking, then one’s faith is not genuine.

Second, James says that perseverance is intended to have an *ergon teleion* (“perfect work”) in the believer’s life. “Perfect” is another potentially misleading translation; it seems to suggest a moral perfection that is not James’s intent. A clearer (if perhaps pedestrian) translation might be “perseverance is to have a *fully-developed* work, so that you might be *fully-developed* and complete, lacking in nothing.” *Teleios* refers to “arriving at the goal,” “becoming all that you were intended to be.” An adult is a child that has become *teleion* (as in Heb 5:14); an oak tree is an acorn that has become *teleion*. “Mature” is often a good translation. For James, it is faith that must mature. Faith must arrive at its appointed goal, so that believers are not deceived (1:16), are doers and not just hearers (1:22), have a religion that is not worthless and defiled (1:26-27), have a faith that can truly save them (2:14), demonstrate the wisdom from above (3:17), and strengthen their hearts (5:8). According to James, faith is immature and incomplete if it has not yet persevered under trial and grown thereby.

We can see the concept of a perfected, fully-developed faith by considering the story of Abraham in the light of James’s discussion in 2:21-24. Abraham heard the promises concerning his son Isaac, and he believed them. But later God tested Abraham, requiring him to act on his belief by offering up Isaac. James says, “faith was working with [Abraham’s]

works, and as a result of the works, faith was *perfected* (from the verb *teleioō*.)” Faith has been completed and fully-developed when the believer faces the implications of that faith and acts on them. An untested faith may be genuine, but it has yet to manifest itself in its shaping of the believer’s mind and actions in observable ways.

The world in which James’s readers live provides the arena in which faith can become “perfect” through action. Left to themselves, they would undoubtedly choose a life without troubles or even difficult choices. But this is not an option. They live in a world where rich people have all the power, including the power to make their lives miserable, and where riches seem to promise to make life fulfilling now. Their even poorer brethren seem at best negligible and at worst obstacles to fulfillment. Jealousy and selfish ambition are tearing their assemblies apart, as each “believer” vies with the others for power. Under such pressures, the believers must decide what their inheritance in the kingdom of God means to them. To turn away from the desire for riches and find contentment in the promise of God is a life-changing, faith-maturing kind of decision. The doctrine that Jesus is the Christ takes on a personal significance that has been forged under pressure.

But What If You Do Lack?

In this section of the essay, I connect v. 5 “if any of you lacks wisdom” with v. 4, “perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” Unlike the approach taken by Dibelius mentioned above, I understand that the repetition of “lack” is crucial in showing the flow of James’s thought. Not all scholars agree that these verses should be connected, and I sympathize with their

reservations. Two aspects of vv. 5-8 can give the impression that they stand alone in James's thought: (1) the meaning of "wisdom," and (2) the nature of James's teaching on prayer.

First, there is some question about what James means by "wisdom." In the popular preaching that I have heard, the assumption is often made that James is talking about divine guidance. We are told that if we do not know God's will in a certain situation—if we "lack wisdom"—we should ask God for guidance, believing we will receive it.

But it is unlikely that James means "divine guidance" when he refers to "wisdom" in v. 5. In chapter three, James describes "the wisdom from above," and he defines it entirely in terms of the godly behavior of the wise person. I would summarize James's argument in this way: Not many of James's readers should become teachers because of the caustic power of the tongue, the organ that reveals the state of the heart beneath. If any would claim to be wise, then let them remember what a godly wisdom looks like. Having accepted the implications of the gospel, wisdom has abandoned jealousy and selfish ambition, and so promotes peace. In other words, wisdom is the fruit in the life of a mature, tested Christian, the only sort of person who should be a teacher. Moreover, in 1:5, James describes God as giving this wisdom "generously and without reproach." It is difficult to conceive how God could justly reproach us for not having His divine guidance in advance, but He could certainly reproach us for not having wisdom, that is, for being fools. The tenor of James's letter shows that he fears exactly that for many of his readers; their worldliness suggests that they are

ungodly fools. James 1:5, then, is the first of several gracious and redemptive comments James makes. James knows that the maturing process has not, in fact, happened for many of his readers. They should be growing in maturity and wisdom, as they struggle with the implications of their faith in the midst of their trials. The difference, for example, between God's wealth and the world's wealth should be clearer to them, since life has been forcing them to confront those very issues. But what if that is not happening? What if his readers are indeed fools? What should they do? They should turn to a gracious God and ask Him to give them wisdom.

Second, another piece of evidence that might suggest that 1:5-8 is unconnected with the previous discussion of "trials" is James's exhortation to pray. James's words sound like a typical, stock exhortation to believe that your prayers will be answered. At first glance, this seems to have little connection with rejoicing in trials. Given my understanding of the preceding verses, however, it makes sense that James would qualify his promise of God-given wisdom. Is wisdom given automatically to whomever asks? No, God's response depends on what has led to the lack of wisdom in the first place. Is it mere immaturity, or is it rooted in a stubborn refusal to believe what God has promised? That is the issue that leads James to make the qualification. When James's readers ask God for wisdom, they must decide again whether they believe, as Hebrews 11:6 puts it, that God "exists and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." God will give wisdom to fools, but not to fools who refuse to believe.

Our High Position

“But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position; and let the rich man glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with a scorching wind, and withers the grass; and its flower falls off, and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away” (1:9-11).

Two points should be made about this section. First, in light of the above discussion, this section has a stronger connection to what precedes it than is initially apparent. In the midst of the trials of James’s readers, perseverance should be fostering wisdom, a new and mature perspective on life. One way this new perspective will manifest itself is in their attitude toward the rich. Even if the believers are poor, they understand that their position is exalted in comparison with the rich, who will lose all that they have in the end. Rather than envy and pursue the rich, believers will rejoice in their own exalted status as heirs of a great kingdom.

Second, unlike some commentators,⁸ I do not think that James is contrasting the brother of humble circumstances with the rich *brother*. There are two alternative explanations for the absence of a noun with the adjective “rich”: (1) James expects the word “brother” to be understood from the first clause, or (2) the adjective “rich” is being used as a noun itself, “rich (one).” The second alternative is just as plausible as the first, since rich (usually plural but sometimes singular)⁹ is often used alone as a noun. Which explanation fits the context best? In his letter, James reminds the believers that the rich drag them into court (2:6), blaspheme the name of Christ (2:7),

withhold pay from their laborers (5:4), and put to death the righteous man (5:6). This suggests that James conceives of the rich not as their brothers, but as enemies of the faith. Not every rich person is an unbeliever, but given the cultural situation of the time, James uses his rhetoric to make a legitimate generalization: the rich are persecutors and unbelievers. The commentators who reject the idea that James means “rich unbelievers” are put off by the idea that James would sarcastically tell the rich to “glory” in their downfall, but that should not surprise us; chapter five has a very similar ironic tone. Verses nine through eleven are James’s (first) reminder to the brethren of the way God inverts the scales: Those who seem to have it all will be brought low, but those who seem to have only God in this life will be exalted in the end.

Who Are the Blessed?

“Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (1:12).

Who is truly blessed? Who is truly fortunate? Who is truly to be envied? These questions are addressed throughout the Bible: in the Prophets and the Writings; in the teaching of Jesus; and here in James. James 1:12 is arguably the key statement in the entire book of James. It is not the rich who are to be envied; it is the man who has real faith and knows it is real because it has been tested and approved. The crown that is life has been promised to those who love God. How do we know who loves God? They are those whose faith has been proven through their perseverance under trial.

This, then, is the culmination of James’s

opening exhortation: “Consider it all joy when you encounter various trials.” I would paraphrase 1:2-12 as follows:

I know that your difficulties seem sorrowful, but I urge you to see them as the testing of your faith and to rejoice in them. After all, the process that proves the genuineness of your faith results in your persevering in that faith, and that is highly desirable. I do not mean that just “being a Christian” for a long time means anything. True perseverance is the kind of wrestling with the truth that ultimately brings about the completion and maturity of your faith; it makes you wise. Now, many of you may recognize that you have not been living out your faith in this way; you are not wise, but fools. Take heart; ask God and He will graciously raise you up to the wisdom you lack. But there is no cure for the folly rooted in stubborn unbelief. You still must decide that God exists and that He keeps His gracious promises. Now in your particular trials, let me remind you of a profound bit of wisdom that many of you have been forgetting: it is believers, even if they are poor in this life, who truly have everything, and those who seem to have everything in this life will lose it all in the end. After all, who are the truly blessed ones? Those whose faith has been tested and proven, those who stand to enter into eternal life. *This* is why we rejoice in the testing of our faith: a tested and matured faith is the mark of citizenship in God’s kingdom, a prize above all else.

Implications for Sanctification and Assurance

In the light of the first twelve verses in James, (at least) two important implications emerge. Over the years Christians have proposed many different models for the process we call “sanctification.” Some of those models strike me as being somewhat incoherent, with little connection between the faith that saves and the resulting sanctification. Just as if someone

said to me, “Stand on your head, and I will give you a dollar,” God tells me, “Believe that Jesus rose again, and I will inject you with something that makes you ‘good.’” In that scenario, sanctification seems like an unrelated prize (or perhaps burden) that happens to accompany belief. This model, since it can suggest no natural connection between belief and sanctification, tends to drift toward seeing sanctification as *optional* as well. God saves those who “believe”; the next step of reforming one’s behavior may or may not be taken by the believer.

The model James articulates is very different. The “works” that emerge through the testing of our faith are intrinsic to the very nature of faith itself. We believe that God is good, and in the midst of life we have the opportunity to act on that belief. We believe that the crown of life awaits the faithful, and in the midst of life we must decide whether that crown is more valuable than the things of this world. Sanctification is not an extra benefit/obligation tacked onto faith; sanctification is faith becoming itself.

This perspective can be difficult to see if we assume (which James does not) that “faith” is simply “believing that Jesus is the Christ.” Under that assumption, it might seem logical to argue that there is no connection between belief and sanctification.¹⁰ But to James, believing that Jesus is the Christ means believing that His kingdom will truly come to pass and that citizenship there is valuable beyond anything else. Such a faith confronts the believer with a choice that cannot be avoided: Do you believe that Christ’s kingdom is the treasure God says it is? That choice is made in the midst of real-life situations.

Some theological traditions have

resisted the idea that assurance of salvation should or could be tied in any way to our works, i.e., to the way we live our lives. This is often done for very good motives. Those traditions are trying to help us avoid the self-righteousness about which Paul warns us so eloquently and focus our attention on the work of Christ on the cross. This is a worthy goal. But James will not allow us to divorce assurance from our works. Instead, as shocking as it might sound to some, James makes a case for assurance through sanctification. Faith is a real decision to believe what God has proclaimed and promised. The reality of that decision, however, is hidden in our hearts until life forces us to act on our beliefs. Why are trials something to rejoice over? Because anything that makes us act on what we really believe forces our hearts out into the open. To see our own faith emerging as a real, vital force in our own life is a blessing because the crown of life goes to people with such faith.

The connection between assurance and sanctification is sobering; salvation comes to those who have a living faith. But this should be sobering, not terrifying. We are not being asked to prove our worthiness for salvation; salvation is a gracious gift to real people with real weaknesses, yet people who also have a real commitment to the truth. God is not testing our moral perfection; He is testing our faith. As a Christian of many years who has talked to many other Christians about their experience, I think I know something of how God accomplishes His testing among us. One person sees the irrevocable shattering of a lifetime dream and must ask himself, "Can I trust God? If my only success in this world is to find a place in God's kingdom, am I a winner or a loser?"

Another person falls into the moral failure she has always condemned in others and must finally ask herself, "Will I submit to the humiliation of grace? Will I admit that I have just as much need for forgiveness as anyone else?" These trials represent turning points for the soul; ideas to which I once submitted in theory I am revisiting in practice, in the hard light of real life. We do not go through such times easily or gracefully. The journey of faith can look bad at times, as it did for some of James's readers. But James reminds them that God is gracious: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (4:8). One day you will look back on these troubled times as the best days of your life, the days when you began to know yourself as a believer and to learn wisdom.

ENDNOTES

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the NASB unless otherwise indicated.

² Martin Dibelius, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976) 77.

³ James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 20.

⁴ For examples of *peirasmōs* and *peirazo* referring to "temptation," see Matt 4:1, 1 Tim 6:9. For the meaning "testing," see John 6:6, Heb 3:8.

⁵ Contra Adamson, 70.

⁶ For discussions of the lexical issues, see F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961) §263.2; Walter Grundmann, "*dokimos*, et al.," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 2:255-260.

⁷A brief discussion of Luther's views is found in Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Epistle of James and the Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986) 20-21.

⁸Some commentators who opt for the "rich brother" in 1:10 are: Adamson, 61; James H. Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978) 146; Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 68. An argument for the "rich unbeliever" is found in Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 77.

⁹For the plural of *plousios* used substantively, see Mark 12:41, and Rev 13:16. For the singular, see Matt 19:23, and Luke 16:21.

¹⁰For an argument asserting that there is no logical connection between faith and how we live, see Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free!* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989) 27-29.