

WHEN THE GONG GETS TOUGH ...

James 1:1-18

What are some things you enjoy? Coffee with friends, a good show on TV, travelling, a holiday by the beach ...?

James says: *"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds"!!!* This is how James begins his letter. James is one of Jesus' brothers. He is the leader of the church in Jerusalem.

He writes to Christians who are *"scattered among the nations."* Probably particularly Jewish Christians. He calls them the *"twelve tribes"*. They are having a hard time from people outside church and face divisions within.

James wants to encourage them to remain faithful and to live godly lives.

So he says: *"² Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."* (1:2-4)

What does he mean?

Cecily Paterson shares her experience of having an autistic son on:

<http://vimeo.com/38188291>

1. Maturity

Cecily hasn't been having an "enjoyable time." It has been a real struggle but she tells us how God has used this suffering. Cecily is very honest about herself in the interview and in her book. She says how difficult it has been. It has been a constant struggle with many tears.

She tells about how the suffering has made her more mature, how she has learnt to really love. She said she "needed to be healed of a lot of not loving." Her daughter was easy to love and makes her feel good. She was seen as a good mum. But real love is when there is no 'feel good' personal benefit, it is loving someone who is hard to love. It is about unconditional love.

She learnt how to really help other people, how to acknowledge their pain rather than saying something trite to "make it all better." She also learnt about trusting God not her own strength, to believe in God's goodness in spite of her trials. She describes how God has used this difficulty to make her more mature in these ways.

That's why James says, *"² Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds."* (1:2) - because God is using the trials for our good, not to harm us, to make us more mature, more like Jesus.

At times Cecily would tell God, "I've learnt my lesson. I don't need to go through any more of this." James says, *"Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."* (1:4) Often we have to persevere trusting God even when don't see why.

Our aim in life is often to be comfortable and happy or to get rid of our problems. But God's aim for us is to be holy, to be more like Jesus. He uses the trials we face to mould us.

2. Wisdom

"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." (1:5)

The sort of wisdom Cecily looked for was how to help her son and make him better. She saw doctors, psychiatrists and speech therapists to get their advice. Certainly we should pray for wisdom in practical issues that face us. Pray about decisions in life and how to deal with problems.

But later James tells us the sort of wisdom that God gives:

"If you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such 'wisdom' does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ... But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere." (3:14-17)

So the kind of wisdom God promises here is how to act in a godly way in our relationships. See how Cecily did learn how to really love, to give unconditional love to her son.

We need this sort of wisdom particularly when there is conflict and difficulties because it is so easy to react in the wrong way. Often we are just interested in solving our problems but God is interested in our godliness. We need to be praying for wisdom in difficult times but we need to be ready for his wisdom, to be open to the things God is wanting to change in us.

A boy asks his Mum to help with his homework. What he means is tell me the answer so I can go out to play. The wise parent will help him to work the answer out for himself. The parent has a different agenda to the boy. We need to be open to God's agenda, not just be focussed on our own interests.

Here is a great promise here for the person who truly wants God's agenda, who wants to know God's will: *"⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."* (1:5)

God is generous - more ready to give than we are to ask.

He gives to all - anyone who truly wants to know his will.

Without finding fault - he doesn't hold our failures or ignorance against us.

Sometimes in a class or in a meeting we don't dare ask a question because we feel it's silly or that we should know answer. But we should have no fears in asking God. God promises that wisdom will be given to you. He will be there for us in our troubles.

3. A warning and a promise

a) A warning:

"When you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. ⁸ Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do." (1:6-8)

He says the person who doubts won't receive anything!! What does it mean to doubt? James calls it as being "*double-minded*." (v.8) He tells us what that means later in the letter: *"You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? ... Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded."* (4:4, 7-8)

So to be double-minded is to be undecided, uncommitted in our Christian life, not really wanting God's agenda, just wanting the best that this world gives. In Jesus' words it is to be trying to "serve two masters", God and the world. It's when we don't whole-heartedly want to do things God's way, when we don't really trust that God's way is best. That sort of person won't be given wisdom. If we don't really want God's wisdom he won't give it. But if we do really want his wisdom he generously gives.

b) A promise

"Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him." (1:12)

Usually in the Sydney to Hobart yacht race there is a storm. Some boats drop out of the race and pull into Eden. Others persevere. They hold their course all the way to Hobart and tie up at Constitution Dock.

God calls us to be like that, to persevere through difficulty, to hold our course of living his way - by Godly wisdom. The storm is not there to destroy us but to mould us, to make us more mature and to draw us closer to God.

God promises a blessing to those who persevere. They will be given "*the crown of life*." In the Greek games the winner of a race was given a crown of leaves, a symbol of success. Leaves soon wither but the life God gives is forever. To focus on our heavenly reward can be a great strength to persevere faithfully through suffering.

Conclusion

What is it you want in life: happiness and comfort, pleasure and worldly success? Just to solve your problems? Or above all do you want to honour God and live his way? Do you really want his wisdom so you become more mature? Are you single minded in this commitment to God or are you "double-minded"?

Times of trial will test our resolve, but God is always ready to help us if we want to live his way.