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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“DO WE TRUST GOD?”

James 1:2-18

God is good *all the time*. All the time God is good.

Some of us are struggling to trust that God is *always* good. We know it in our minds and say it with our lips, but our hearts are not so certain. Life has been a series of struggles, and we do not see the good coming out of it.

Some of us know that God is constantly good, but only in an abstract way. Our personal resources have enabled us to skirt around the edge of trouble or, on our worst days, to tough it out. We have never come to the end of our rope, and our faith has yet to be sorely tested.

Some of us feel it deep in our bones that God is good all the time. It is not that he has made our lives comfortable. It is that God has gone through the wringer *with* us, and he has given us beauty for ashes, courage for fear, joy for grief, hope for despair, and life for death.

■ The Lord is speaking to us through James 1:2 {TNIV}: **“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds.”**

Just hearing this command is no guarantee that we will do it.

Some here do not **“consider it pure joy”** because we have not learned to {2 Co 10:5} control of our thoughts. We are {1:7-8} **“blown and tossed by the”** winds of trial, **“double-minded, unstable in all”** we do.

Some here do not *want* to choose joy. Maybe we are afraid that letting go of our anger, resentment, or despair will somehow “let God off the hook” or open us up to worse trials.

■ A Christian of integrity obeys verse 2 in light of verse 3: **“because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.”**

The Holy Spirit does not command joy *because* we **“face trials”** – he commands it *when* we **“face trials.”** Hardship has no inherent value; yet in God’s hands it is an effective instrument for developing our perseverance. The more developed our perseverance is, the better we can stand firm in future hardship.

■ But perseverance is not the ultimate objective. Verse 4 {TNIV}: **“Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”**

○ Perseverance is an indispensable means to a greater end: completion and wholeness. {Ro 8:28-29} **“In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”** And the **“good”** for which **“God works”** is our recreation in **“the likeness of his Son,”** so that we become like Jesus in thought, word and deed.

Do we trust that God is good even when life is hard? Do we accept trials as his chosen tool for growing our perseverance? Are we trusting God’s goodness and allowing perseverance to *“finish its work”* in us?

☼ Rejoicing over God’s good work within us in times of trial is the substance and evidence of real faith.

- ☑ U.S. money bears the imprint, “**In God We Trust**”.
- But *which do we trust more: God, or the Mammon* which bears that statement? {Lk 12:16-19, NLT}

“A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. In fact, his barns were full to overflowing.” [He was among the 1%.] **“So he said, ‘I know! I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. I’ll have room enough to store everything. [I will] Eat, drink, and be merry!’ “But God said to him, ‘You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get it all?’”**

- I hear echoes of this parable in James 1:9-11 {TNIV}:

Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. But the rich should take pride in their humiliation – since they will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.

- “Money is” *not* “the root of all evil.” But Scripture does warn that {1 Ti 6:10} **“the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”** {Mt 6:24} “[We] cannot serve both God and Money.” {1 Ti 6:10} **“Some ... eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with**

many griefs.” Haven’t we seen it happen again and again?

☑ {Life Application Study Bible } **“Professing to trust God and to be his people, [many believers] cling tightly to the world and its values. Possessing all the right answers, they contradict the gospel with their”** foolish service to, lust for, and trust in money.

It is easy to say we have faith in God even as we put greater stock in the money we so casually assume comes from his hand. (Sometimes, it does. Sometimes, it does not.)

- But *what if we lose it all?* Will we say, with Job, {Job 1:21} **“The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD”?** Do we trust God enough to {Mt 6:20} **“store up for [ourselves] treasures in heaven”** even when we have little treasure on earth?

- Or *what if our stash gets bigger?* Will we hold on loosely? Will we realize our abject poverty before God, and him give extravagant praise for his undeserved mercy and kindness? Do we trust God enough to {Mt 6:33} **“seek first the kingdom of God”?**

☼ A righteous relationship with money and possessions is the substance and evidence of real faith.

God is *good* all the time. All the time God is *good*.

- Part of what we are saying is that God loves us. {Ro 5:8} **“God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners,”** {Ro 8:7} **“hostile to God”**

and unable to please him, “{Jn 3:16} **“he gave his one and only Son,”** the Christ, who {Ro 5:8} **“died for us.”** Jesus took on human flesh, lived as a servant, died, and rose again that we {Jn 10:10} **“may have life, and have it to the full.”**

We say God is good. But *do we really believe that his intentions toward us are to liberate, enlighten, heal, release, protect and bless us?*

■ In 1:13 James exhorts us: **“When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.”** God claims to be perfectly righteous, God forbids us to sin, and God has announced that {Ro 6:23} **“the wages of sin is death.”** Any God who would do this and then tempt people to sin would be a monster. So to blame God for our sin might be the ultimate denial of his goodness.

No one has ever told me, **“God is tempting me”** in those exact words. But some have said it in paraphrased form.

☑ Consider the woman who unexpectedly ran into her old flame. Old feelings were rekindled, sparks flew, and they entered into a sexual relationship even though he was already married. This woman knew that adultery is a sin but wanted my assurance that their affair was the exception. She explained it this way: “I didn’t go looking for him. God brought him into my life. God wants us to be together.” She was saying, in essence, **“God is tempting me.”**

This kind of thinking is all too common. When professing Christians deliberately sin, isn’t it generally

because we think sin will give us a better result than God will?

The woman who sought my assurance wanted to be happy. She believed that happiness depended, not on God, but on her old flame. That is why she was willing to commit adultery. When push came to shove, she did not trust the goodness of God.

The same thing is true of us when we knowingly lie, cheat, covet, are stingy, refuse to forgive, bully others, or commit injustices of any kind.

*Do we trust that God is our greatest good? Are we confident that {Jas 1:17} **“every good and perfect gift”** comes from him? Do we trust God’s goodness enough to resist those things that do not come from him?*

⚙ Obedience to God in thought, word, and deed is the substance and evidence of real faith.

It is not enough to say “God is good *all the time.*” But by the grace of God, *we can* live out our faith on the bad days as well as on the good.

It is not enough to say “In God we trust.” But by the grace of God, *we can* live out our faith in regard to money and possessions.

It is not enough to say “God is *good* all the time.” But by the grace of God, *we can* live out our faith in righteous and holy relationships with God, self, and neighbor.