

"God's Love Story Sermon Outlines"

by Doug Hamilton

Section 37: The Testing of God's Love Story (James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1 John)

There is a saying that goes something like this, "You cannot tell the strength of the teabag until it is placed in hot water." It is the steaming hot water that applies an external pressure which ultimately releases the flavor of the tea from the bag. It is the same for the person who has embraced God's Love Story in their hearts, for they will be placed in the hot water of personal trials. Through the eyes of three New Testament writers the theme "The Testing of God's Love Story" will be explained. The three writers are Peter, James and John.

Using the first chapter of the Book of James, we learn much about how God's Love Story can be tested. James exposes nine strategies in order to hang onto to the hope of God when the trials of this life are pressing us.

1) We must face the struggles of life with JOY (1:2-4).

1:2-4 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; ³ Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. ⁴ But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

- Often when we are being tested to hang on to God's Love Story, we end up in a distressed mood. We feel nobody on earth knows how we feel at that very moment. James was saying that when trials come our way that we should be rejoicing, for they are opportunities for personal growth towards patience in our lives. We must face the trials of this life with JOY!
- *1 Peter 1:6-7 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷ so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;*
- Counting it all joy allows us to hang on to God's Love Story when we are being tested. It is the first step of making sure we are in a good position to overcome.

2) We must face the struggles of life with WISDOM (1:5-8).

1:5-8 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. ⁷ For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. ⁸ A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

- There is a certain wisdom which we are to seek when the trials of this life come. We not only are to ask for this wisdom, but also expect for it to be given it. What is that wisdom? Is it the wisdom to avoid all future trials? Is it the wisdom to know the Bible better? No, for it is the wisdom to understand how we are going to glorify God in the midst of the trial.
- Trials in Christians' lives are to be viewed as rungs on a ladder to further glorify God. They are opportunities, but often we consider them obstacles. As Peter would confirm, trials are about glorifying God. *1 Peter 4:16 but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to*

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be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. We must always view our trials with a thirst for the wisdom to glorify God in the end.

3) We must face the struggles of life with HUMILITY (1:9-11).

1:9-11 Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: ¹⁰ But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. ¹¹ For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

- The flower and the grass share the same field, the same sun and the same rain. The flower is tall and beautiful, but the grass is green and low to the ground. One stands up proudly and the other low with humility. When the summer heat and drought arrives, the proud flower withers away, but the grass turns brown and awaits the next rain. The first dies and the second perseveres. In the same way we are to be humble and low to the ground in humility for our own good concerning the testing of our faith.
- We must follow Jesus, our example of humility. *1 Peter 2:21-23 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,* ²² *WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH;* ²³ *and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;* We must also face our trials with humility.

4) We must face the struggles of life with VICTORY (1:12).

1:12 Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

- James referred to a *crown of life* for those whom endure temptation. The word he used for crown is *stephanos*, referring to the ancient olive-branch head piece of the champion athlete. They believed when Caesar would place the crown on the head of the athlete and that the goddess Nike had her hands on it as well, for they were victorious. By the way, the Greek word for victory is *Nikos*, derived from the name of the goddess (1 Cor 15:55-57).
- Christians are victorious, a crown of victory in the eyes of God. We are not to cave into the trials of this life. Peter says of Jesus in *1 Pet 5:4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*
- It is our faith in Jesus Christ that gives us this victory to overcome the world. *1 John 5:4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.*
- We face the struggles of this life with victory on our minds for we are more than conquerors. That is one of the ways we hold strong to God's Love Story.

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5) We must face the struggles of life with RESPONSIBILITY (1:13-15)

1:13-15 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: ¹⁴ But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. ¹⁵ Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

- Often times when coping with our temptations and failures, we do not take responsibility for our own actions. Some actually go as far as to say that God was tempting them to fail in their weakness. James said our failures through trials come from the fact that we nurture personal lusts.
- We must face the struggles of life with the understanding that God does not desire for us to fail. He allows temptation to come into our life for an opportunity to succeed. Have the attitude of Peter from *5:10 After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.* God wants us to face our trials with personal responsibility.

6) We must face the struggles of life with CONSISTENCY (1:16-18).

1:16-18 Do not err, my beloved brethren. ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. ¹⁸ Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

- What is the *good gift and perfect gift*? Is it Christ? Is it the Bible? Is it perfection itself? It is not any of those things, but the trial itself. It is the trials of our lives that we see the consistency of God. He does not change (Mal 3:6), but the variance is with us. We struggle with the world and as a result struggle against God. *1 John 2:15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*
- We must have the proper perspective when it comes to God's love. God is consistent and calls for us to be consistent in our perspective of Him. *1 John 1:5 This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.* The analogy is that God is pure light with no darkness at all. That is symbolic of His consistency in goodness. It is with that tenacity we face the trials of our lives. We must have consistency in these struggles.

7) We must face the struggles of life with COMPOSURE (1:19-20)

James 1:19-20 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: ²⁰ For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

- We like to be in control of things, but in trials we have no control, otherwise it would not be a trial. This often times causes us to lose our composure. We say and do things in

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harshness and haste; we end up running our mouth instead of listening. James reminded us that we should slow down in our talking and double-up on our listening. It is all about composure.

- We have to learn to trust God in moments of trial. We must make sure that we demonstrate composure by “*casting all your anxiety on Him*” (1 Pet 5:7). We must have composure as one who “*know they have eternal life*” (1 John 5:13). We need to have the composure to “*be patient unto the coming of the Lord*” (James 5:7). We need to make sure we are facing the trials of our faith with composure.

8) We must face the struggles of life with PURITY (1:21)

1:21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

- The last thing a Christian needs while facing a trial is an impure life. God did not save us from our sins in order to continue in them. We do not want to take a guilty conscience and consequences of an impure life.
- The apostle Peter said in *1 Peter 4:1-2* *Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ² so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.*
- The apostle John confirms in *1 John 3:9-10* “*No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious...*”
- We must face the struggles of our lives with purity. Without it we do not have a chance of hanging on to God’s Love Story.

9) We must face the struggles of life with ACTION (1:22-27)

1:22-27 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. ²³ For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: ²⁴ For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. ²⁵ But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. ²⁶ If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. ²⁷ Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

- Anyone can talk a good game, but action is an entirely different thing. James used the illustration of a man who looks into a mirror, observes the flaws and simply walks away without correcting them. The *perfect law of liberty* calls for us to see our deficiencies, strive to correct them and then press on in our relationship with God.
- What does James describe as *pure religion* in God’s eyes? It is not what we say, but how we act. It is about helping the needy in this world, like widows and orphans. It is living a life of purity for God. It is about facing the struggles of our live with ACTION!

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- James would go on to say in 2:15-17 *If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? ¹⁷ Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.*
- John communicated this very clearly in 1 John 3:16-17 *We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. ¹⁷ But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?*

In Conclusion:

Jesus never said that being a Christian would be easy. In fact He referred to it a "daily carrying our cross" (Luke 9:23). Trials will come, but we must face these struggles with joy, wisdom, humility, victory, responsibility, consistency, composure, purity and action. All of these strategies are necessary if we plan to hang onto the story of God's love.