




# Trouble

We all face troubles in our lives. “Troubles” include difficulties, problems, opposition, trials, anxiety, pain, suffering, loss, grief, etc.

1. What kinds of troubles do *you* think about?

## Reality of Trouble

What does the Bible say about the reality of trouble and suffering?<sup>1</sup> The causes of trouble and suffering are numerous and complex, but are generally traced to the conditions of the *fallen* world – a world out of harmony with God.<sup>2</sup> The major cause of trouble and suffering in this world is sin,<sup>3</sup> either directly or indirectly.<sup>4</sup> All people, whether good or bad, face trouble in this world.<sup>5</sup> Christians face *some* troubles *because* they are followers of Christ.<sup>6</sup>

 As Jesus told his disciples, “In this world you will have trouble” (*John 16:33*).

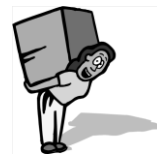
Trouble in this life is unavoidable. So how can we deal with it? Trouble provides opportunity. Opportunity for what?<sup>7</sup> The Bible says God uses trouble and suffering for his good purposes.<sup>8</sup>

## Facing Troubles

Much could be said about facing troubles, but we will focus on one passage, which is similar to other passages in the New Testament. Read James 1:2-4.

2. Why should believers “consider it joy” when they face trials? (*1:3-4*)

The testing of the believer’s faith produces perseverance<sup>9</sup> (*1:3*), but perseverance is not the final goal. Perseverance must finish its work (*1:4*).



<sup>1</sup> For more discussion on suffering, see the article ‘How Can a Good God Allow Suffering?’ on the ICF website.

<sup>2</sup> The world is ‘fallen’ because of humanity’s rebellion against God (*Genesis 3*). As a result of ‘the fall of mankind,’ evil, trouble and suffering entered the world of human beings.

<sup>3</sup> ‘sin’ may be defined as ‘any attitude or action that is opposed to God’s authority and moral will.’ Trouble may result from our own sin or the sin of others (including humanity in general). Jesus never sinned but he still suffered.

<sup>4</sup> It is obvious that human sin is the cause of much trouble in this world. Great trouble also results from ‘natural forces or conditions,’ which can sometimes be traced to irresponsible human activity. How does the present physical world (with its earthquakes and hurricanes, etc.) relate to the original (pre-fall) creation? This is disputed among theologians. In any case, sin has affected the ‘whole creation’ which is under God’s judgment (*Romans 8:20-21*).

<sup>5</sup> Actually, no one is ‘good’ relative to God (*Romans 3:1-12, 23*) but even fallen humans differ in their morality. While much trouble can be avoided by wise and godly living (*Proverbs 13:21*), all people face trouble in this world.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Christians may suffer ‘for [Christ]’ (*Philippians 1:29*); ‘for what is right’ (*1 Peter 3:14*); for ‘the kingdom of God’ (*2 Thessalonians 5:5*); and for the ‘gospel’ (*2 Timothy 2:8-9*).

<sup>7</sup> Trouble and suffering reminds us of our mortality and need, and helps lay the foundation for a new way of thinking, living, praying and hoping. Trouble and suffering may help the non-Christian see his/her need for Christ.

<sup>8</sup> Some of God’s purposes can be found in the following passages: Hebrews 12:7-13; 2 Corinthians 1:3-7; 4:8-10; 1 Peter 1:6-7; 4:12-19; Acts 28:8-9; Philippians 3:10; Matthew 5:10-12.

<sup>9</sup> The word ‘perseverance’ (*hupomonē*) comes from the idea of ‘remaining under.’ A person who successfully carries a heavy weight for a long time develops strength and endurance. The word used for ‘testing’ (*dokimon*) is also used for the process of refining gold. The trials in our life are meant to refine our faith – to prove it genuine and purify it.

3. What is this “work” and what does it mean?<sup>10</sup> (1:4)

Paul and Peter had similar teaching (*Romans 5:3-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7*).<sup>11</sup>

4. James’ instruction is easier said than done. What practical things can we do to apply this teaching to our lives? (both in the midst of trials and in preparation for them)<sup>12</sup>

## Asking God

Read James 1:5-8. James says, “If any of you lacks wisdom,<sup>13</sup> you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you” (1:5, *NIV*).<sup>14</sup>

5. When we “ask God,” we need the proper attitude (1:6). How would you describe this attitude? How does it contrast with the attitude of “the doubter?” (1:6-8)<sup>15</sup>

## God’s Promise

6. Read James 1:12. How does James encourage believers who are facing trials?<sup>16</sup>



## Reflection/Application

- Are you experiencing difficulties, trouble or suffering? If you aren’t now, you will in the future. How will you handle it? What are you trusting in? Where will you find help? The Bible says, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (*Psalms 46:1*). Have you entered into a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ?
- Brothers & sisters, how do you respond to troubles in your life? Reflect on today’s passage, Romans 5:1-5; 8:18-39; 1 Peter 1:3-9, and similar passages. Ask God to put these truths in your heart, deepening and strengthening your trust in him and his good plans for you. Share your troubles with a trusted brother or sister, and ask God for strength and victory.

<sup>10</sup> To make us ‘complete’ – perfect in character (conformed to the image of Christ). ‘Not lacking anything’ – wholeness, completeness in spiritual integrity. This goal is not completely realized in this life, but believers should be maturing in character (becoming more like Christ) throughout their lives. Trials can aid the process, because they tend to humble us and influence us to turn to God who transforms and strengthens us by the Holy Spirit.

<sup>11</sup> James says ‘consider it pure joy’ (1:2). Peter says ‘rejoice’ (1 Peter 1:6). Paul says ‘rejoice’ (*Romans 5:3, ESV*).

This does not necessarily mean rejoice *because* you suffer, but rejoice *in* your suffering and trials. Why? Because God uses suffering and trials to accomplish good. If we respond in the right way, we will be changed in a good way.

<sup>12</sup> To mention a few things, regularly reading and internalizing Bible truths, regularly praying for the Holy Spirit’s working in our hearts and lives, obediently moving forward in faith, encouraging and praying for one another.

<sup>13</sup> Biblical ‘wisdom’ is not merely intelligence or good judgment. Wisdom comes from God (*Proverbs 2:6*) and is characterized by a proper attitude toward God and his moral will (*Proverbs 9:10; James 3:17*).

<sup>14</sup> Jesus said, ‘Keep asking, and it will be given to you ...’ (Matthew 7:7-11; Luke 11:9-13, *HCSB*)

<sup>15</sup> We must have faith in God; trusting in His character. To doubt is to question His character. Many times, we go back and forth between trust and doubt. The doubter is unstable, like the sea blown and tossed by the wind (e.g., circumstances). Such a person is ‘double-minded’ (*dipsychos* – ‘double-souled’). God wants us to have undivided trust and loyalty. That is why Jesus said the greatest commandment is: ‘Love the Lord your God with *all* your heart, with *all* your soul, and with *all* your mind’ (*Matthew 22:37*).

<sup>16</sup> Those who persevere will receive ‘the crown of life’ – signifying eternal life and its abundant blessings, fully realized at the end of this present life. This puts everything in proper perspective (see Romans 8:18). ‘stood the test’ (1:12) does not mean we can earn eternal life by our efforts (see footnote 9). Eternal life is a gift of God received through faith in Jesus Christ, but genuine faith is evidenced by our perseverance in trusting and loving God.