

This week our reading in the book of James tackles the problem of how to handle the major 'ups and downs' in our lives: the ones that cause us real pain and hardship and can attack our faith. James refers to 'many trials' in verse 2 but he was probably thinking mainly of the persecution of first-generation Christians. He was martyred soon after writing this letter. {NB notes go onto two pages this week.}

Read James 1: 1-12.

1. Our response to many kinds of trials. James 1: 1 – 4.

- "Consider it pure joy"! Which seems bonkers until we see what James is not saying and what he is saying:
 - He is not saying suffering is good. Suffering is inherently bad, an alien intrusion into God's world, it was not there at the beginning and it won't be there at the end. (Genesis 1: 31 and Revelation 21:4).
 - He is saying that the process of facing trials brings us to maturity and makes us complete (v. 4). But becoming more like Christ and increasingly courageous for Him will be hard work, disruptive & costly
- To get from the trials of verse 2 to the maturity of verse 4 there is an important bridge: 'perseverance', also translated, patience, endurance or steadfastness from the Greek 'hupomonē'.* Specifically, it is a perseverance in faith; and a co-operation with God in our growing up.
- Corrie ten Boom was in a concentration camp for hiding Dutch Jews during the 2nd World War together with her sister, who died there. 'The Tapestry Poem'** became particularly special for her, helping to keep her faith alive in God who knows the end from the beginning. This kind of faith requires wisdom

2. The wisdom that is a spiritual gift. James 1: 5 - 8

- James isn't talking about wisdom generally but about a Wisdom which informs our understanding of the need for perseverance when we face trials, so that we mature instead of becoming embittered.
- This Wisdom doesn't give answers to 'why the suffering'? Nor does it give us practical solutions.
- It is the Wisdom spoken of in **Proverbs 3: 5-6**, for which we need to ask and which God will always give generously – as long as we receive His gift whole-heartedly and truly stop relying on ourselves. Armed with this Wisdom we can face trials with joy – knowing they are the way to Christian maturity.

3. The Christian's status is unaffected by poverty or wealth. James 1: 9 – 12

- Supposing we have a relatively untroubled life - have we no chance of reaching Christian maturity? No! :
- The 'brother in humble circumstances' can rejoice that now his status is that of an adopted child of God. The rich brother, if he realises the transitory nature of material possessions, rejoices that the anxiety to amass wealth is no longer of importance in relation to the 'crown of life' promised to those who love God
- The path to maturity is likely to be slower for the rich as it is so hard to stop being distracted by material things. But the only route to true happiness is through holiness and that involves the painful process of having our sin dealt with.

4. The Christian Life is a bit like riding a bike uphill:

- When the going gets tough we can either give up or take a deep breath and set our legs to work. But it's much easier to do a cycle ride in a group where we all pull one another along.
- Similarly, if we are facing trials and struggles as a Christian, it's much easier to face them together in a group, all supporting one another.
- Also, the Christian has the power of the Holy Spirit to help us through the tough times. God is always there for us to take the heavy end of the burden – if only we will trust Him to do it.

Ponder Points.

1. Paul also had something to say about perseverance in Romans 5: 1- 5.
2. When we ask the Lord for something. Do we have doubts we will really receive our request?
3. * Tony Earnshaw has written a poem on 'hupomonē' which is reproduced on page 2.
4. ** This poem starts: 'My life is but a weaving, between my God and me' and goes on to describe how God skilfully weaves a mixture of dark and bright colours together which look a complete mess, until the loom falls silent, the tapestry is turned the right way up and the glorious picture is revealed! 'The tapestry poem' is on the web.
5. The 'crown of life' in verse 12 is not a sign of royalty, nor a prize. It is a gift from an approving, divine Giver.

HUPOMONE

When trouble's all around
Hupomone
When help just can't be found
Hupomone
When life is getting tough
and you feel you've had enough
Hupomone

When you feel that no one cares
Hupomone
When you see no answered prayers
Hupomone
When you feel washed up and dry
When you're merely getting by
Hupomone

When you're overcome by doubt
Hupomone
When you're tempted to opt out
Hupomone
When you've waited twenty years
and you're still not getting near
Hupomone

When there are no instant cures
Hupomone
When no pain's as great as yours
Hupomone
When it's hard to force a smile
When life hardly seems worthwhile
Hupomone

It's the kind of staying power
Hupomone
That gets you through your darkest hour
Hupomone
Keeping on when all seems loss
It's the way you bear your cross
Hupomone

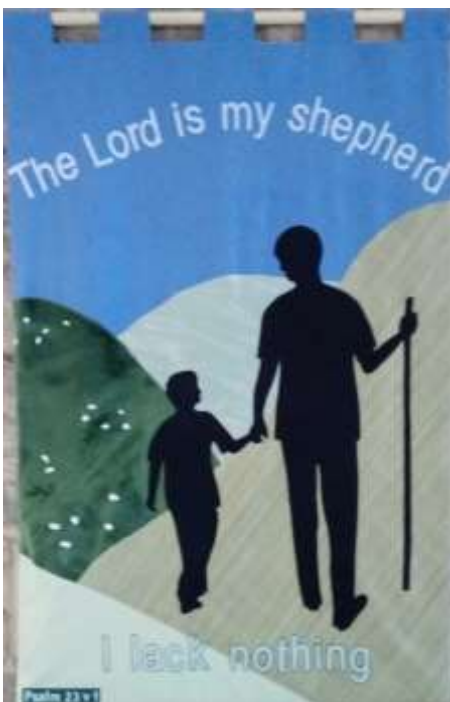
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Hupomonē (Gk) = endurance, patience, spiritual staying power

Link to "When trials come" by Keith and Kristyn Getty, a song with words you may find helpful:

<https://www.gettymusic.com/when-trials-come/>

The banner at All Saints Church, Swanage



Lord, we thank you that when we put our trust in you, we will not want for anything we really need.

Thank you that you are always there for us, whether we're walking by peaceful waters or walking through a deep dark valley.

Thank you that you are leading us safely home, to receive the crown of life that you have promised to those who love you. Amen.