

The early church faced significant persecution. For many, it meant the loss of their jobs and means of supporting themselves and their families. For others, it meant the rejection of their families and friends, or it meant torture and death. Many were questioning where God was, why was he letting this happen, and was it worthwhile to remain loyal to Jesus Christ.

**What would you want to say to these early believers to encourage them?**

**James writes to Christ-followers who were struggling with this tension.**

**James 1:2-4 (NIV)**

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, <sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. <sup>4</sup> Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

**Why is our natural tendency to shrug off these words as being too idealistic?**

**If we remember that these words are actually written by God through James, and that God is very serious in what he speaks to us, how might we view these words differently?**

**What perspective is God adding here that could allow us to embrace suffering differently?**

**God tells us that suffering will occur but that he can take the suffering this world throws at us and turn it into something that accomplishes his divine purposes.**

**How does suffering make us mature and not “lacking anything”?**

**Hebrews 2:10 (NIV)**

*In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.*

**How was Jesus made perfect through his suffering?**

Have there been times in your life when you felt tempted to abandon God due to the suffering you were experiencing?

Have there been times in your life where, in hindsight, you see that God used your trials to strengthen your faith in him and to make you more mature?

**God continues to speak through James:**

**James 1:5-8 (NIV)**

*If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. <sup>6</sup> But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; <sup>8</sup> he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.*

**In the midst of this discussion on suffering, what prayer request is blatantly missing?**

**Why should we ask God for wisdom when in the midst of suffering?**

**Why does James stress the issue of not doubting?**

**How do we know if we are headed in the right direction?**

**There are some questions, similar to discerning God's voice, which we need to ask in discerning God's leading:**

- 1) Have you been seeking direction through the Bible?
- 2) Have you been asking for wisdom?
- 3) Is there unity in the Spirit within the family of God on this direction?
- 4) Has God opened a way for you to head?
- 5) Is there a sense of peace once you've made your decision?

If we believe God is giving us the wisdom we need, how will we approach the situation differently?

### **Summary of Daniel 3:**

King Nebuchadnezzar made a statue of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on a plain in Babylon. Everyone, when indicated, was to bow down and worship the golden image or be thrown into a blazing furnace. Choosing to stay loyal to God, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down to the image and were consequently reported to King Nebuchadnezzar. The king once again issued the instructions to them about what they were to do and added the ominous end note, *"But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"*

**Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were three young Hebrew men who were taken captive as slaves from Israel and brought to Babylon.**

**What type of frustrations could they have potentially had with God during this time?**

**If they bowed down to the golden image under duress, could anyone have blamed them?**

**Why were they willing to suffer by being burned alive, instead of insincerely bowing before a statue?**

### **Their response:**

#### ***Daniel 3:16-18 (NIV)***

*Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. <sup>18</sup> But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."*



- 1) Was their decision consistent with scripture?
- 2) Do you think they had issued some prayers up to God as they were being taken before the king?
- 3) Was there a unity in their spirits to the course they chose?
- 4) Did they believe God would prepare a way?
- 5) Did they have a sense of peace about their approach to this moment of suffering?

What is so powerful about their statement in verse 18?

How do you think standing together helped them through this trial?  
What lessons can we learn from their friendship?

If God had allowed them to be burned in the fire – would it change your perception of what they should have done?

Would God still be holy, just, and loving had he not rescued them?

How do you feel about God when you are going through suffering or hear about others going through suffering?

If we have given our lives completely over to God, then the question can never be “WHY?” it must simply be, “WHAT?”

“WHAT, God, do you want me to do, as your servant, in the midst of this pain?”

If we ask for WISDOM, he promises to give it to us.



Is there any area in your life where you need to surrender the need to know “WHY” and are willing to simply embrace the “WHAT”?

Spend time praying as a group for the various struggles each one faces and ask God to give his wisdom to know how to navigate through the suffering in a way that will glorify him and build his kingdom.