**James 1:2-4 UNEXPECTED BLESSINGS 4/26/2020**

Disappointments and hindrances abound during these days. Many are facing financial hardship, as well as a enough inconvenience to last for the next ten years. It may seem disrespectful to speak about this when so many people are hurting, but I wonder if you have experienced any blessings during this time of quarantine? Our culture has those trite sayings that we use to stay positive: "Making a silk purse out of a sow's ear;" "Glass half full..." "Every dark cloud has a silver lining." I will have to admit there are times when I just can't find the good amongst the bad. However, I believe there is a difference when it comes to seeing God's blessing in the midst of a difficult trial. James alludes to this in chapter one, verses 2-4: *"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."* JOY? Really? There must be a difference between my definition of "joy" and God's. When I think of "joy," I think of happiness, rejoicing, celebration, ie. weddings, grandbabies, Superbowl victories, etc. I looked up the word "joy" in Strong's Concordance to find out what God meant when He inspired those words. **Joy =** *chara* (Greek) *cheerfulness or calm delight.* Joy is the emotion expressed by the person who recognizes God's blessings in the midst of a trial. It emanates from the knowledge that God is sovereignly in control, even when the world seems to be spinning out of control.

I was thinking about the hidden blessings, "the silver linings" in the dark cloud of this quarantine. As I begin to think along those lines, I begin to sense the hand of God at work in my circumstances. I also began to understand the feeling of Joy that can be experienced during trials. Let me share some of those blessings and perhaps it will motivate you to list some of your own.

**God's timing.** My daughter in Kansas City was scheduled to have a baby about the time the stay-at-home order went in to affect. A two week early delivery allowed my wife to go and help for a week, visit her elderly mother, and make it home with a few days to spare. She was also able to accompany my 90 year old father back to Colorado for a visit with us. Due to the shutdown my father got stuck here. This extends a two week visit to three months, if not more. At first, this caused some anxiety, until we found out his fellow assisted living residents are indefinitely locked in their apartments 24/7. Then we decided this was not such a bad place to be. He is still sharp of mind and mobile, so it would have been torture to be locked up, and we have enjoyed the visit. We check cows together, run errands, and ride back and forth to the field together. We have spent more time talking and playing games than any time since childhood, and he has learned things about us that he never knew. As we look back now, we can see that God's timing for all these things had a purpose.

**Spending.**  Although there is a dark financial cloud coming with this shutdown, we have experienced a lower cost of living. We have not bought much of anything other than food for over a month. Our local grocery offers curb-side pick up, so that whole operation is carried out in a very organized manner. When my wife needs a break from the constant cooking, we go through a drive-thru for a hamburger or pizza, but have cut back on our usual eating out budget.

**Organization.** My wife is a very organized person. She was born with that personality. I have had to learn it, partly to stay married and partly to be able to operate a business. During the shutdown, I have developed better habits, as trips to town for supplies are rare. I have become adept at keeping a list of items needed, and try to consolidate trips even more than I already did.

**Evaluation.** Have you done some thinking about the things in life that are really necessary? Rationing and scarcity tend to cause us to evaluate the things we can and can't live without. Rice is hard to find. Duh - China, rice - I can live without rice. Clean water, shelter, companionship, beef, those are things I don't want to live without. I am more keenly aware of God's provision each day as I evaluate the things I can do without and the things I really need.

**Technology.**  Another blessing is that we were forced to learn new technology in order to communicate with family and friends. Our church has developed the capability to live stream sermons, catalog recorded message videos, and host online Bible studies with members. *Zoom* is a common utensil in our toolbox now. We are keeping in touch with our children and grandchildren more often. We now schedule a special twenty-six person family call for all of the grandkid's birthdays. We may never have thought of that without being introduced to Zoom. (Although singing happy birthday together is a total mess.) My wife meets on line with all the children in our church's Wednesday night kids club every week. She has also figured out how to give piano lessons on Facetime, Zoom, and Skype. Our latest bull sale was successfully done remotely using virtual technology. The use of these technologies has made this quarantine much easier than it would have been 30 years ago.

**Family.**  Aside from staying better connected with our children and grandchildren, we have been able to spend more time with our youngest son who is a Senior in High School. Without sports, friends, activities, or meetings we have spent more time together. We feel like we already had an OK relationship, but we have had some important conversations and actually become better friends during this time of being stuck at home. Apart from the shutdown, these last days with him at home would have whizzed by and been gone before we knew it.

**Blessings.**  These are but a few of the silver linings I've found in our time of testing. Can you list some unexpected blessings of your own? The words "count it" in James 1:2 mean, "to consider." I believe you will find that the dark cloud isn't quite so dark when you "count it all joy;" consider with calm delight God's blessings in the midst of this trial of faith. James understood that God did not design evil, but He uses it for our good and His glory. Unexpected blessings abound when we take time to truly consider God's goodness in the midst of our testing.