

## Plucking Tangerines from Bitterbark Trees

The Book of James #2

James 1:9-18

*Therefore let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Who, for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despised its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from evil men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

As Waldo Sexton is my witness, I'm convinced that the ultimate proof of residence in Indian River County, Florida has absolutely nothing to do with cheating on the eye exam at the DMV in order to get your driver's license. It has nothing to do with being elected as the Indian River Lagoon Underwater Litter Remover. And it has nothing to do with knowing that you have to order the Cream Spinach at the Ocean Grill. Instead, it has everything to do with knowing how to correctly classify the various citrus species in the Rutaceae family that are placed in the order of Sapindales, all of which happen to be orange in color. Translation? Just because they are round, orange, edible and fruit doesn't make them all "oranges." They are unequally yoked.

Thou shalt never call an orange sweet. It's tart. Thou shalt never confuse an orange with a mandarin. Mandarins are the small and sweet natural jewels that will satisfy your sweet tooth and save your soul. And, most importantly, thou shalt never under any circumstances classify Tangerines, Clementines, and Satsumas as anything other than specific types of mandarins. If you memorize those three commandments of Indian River County, your proof of residency application has a greater chance of being accepted in the eyes of her citizens. If you forget them, or - even worse - confuse them, then the odds are high that someone with the last name of Peterson, Sexton, Graves, Schacht, Fetzer or Banak will correct you rather quickly.

You'll find a lot of citrus trees in our county, some of which stretch as far as your eye can see. What you won't find are Bitterbark Trees. You'll have to sojourn to the savannahs of South and Central America to find those. If you feast from the bark of one of those bad boys, you'll find your day going south really quick. The thing about Bitterbark Trees is this: they would grow well in our climate. All some ole slick would have to do is follow the Brazilian Pepper Tree model for hijacking Indian River County in order to spoil the land. And if you walk with Jesus long enough, you'll find out that's exactly what seems to happen in our lives. You walk with the Provident Gardner specifically because you know the type of fruit he produces provides nourishment for your soul. And you operate under the assumption that you'll never find any Bitterbark Trees in His groves. And then you wake up one day only to find that someone has not only planted a Bitterbark Tree right smack dab in the middle of the grove you help tender, but that individual has used highly charged ammonium nitrate to fertilize them to the point you now fear for the fruitfulness of the grove itself.

Well I want to suggest to you today, church, that not only must you not fear the Bitterbark Tree in your Mandarin Grove, you need to learn how to pluck Tangerines off it in order to continue to profit from their nourishment. When last we gathered at the river, James commanded us to be joyful in our trials. Today, as you'll see, he tells us how to be victorious in them. Turn with me there to James 1:9-18.

*<sup>9</sup> Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. <sup>10</sup> But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. <sup>11</sup> For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business. <sup>12</sup> Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. <sup>13</sup> When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; <sup>14</sup> but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. <sup>15</sup> Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. <sup>16</sup> Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. <sup>17</sup> Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like*

shifting shadows. <sup>18</sup> He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

### Requirements for Plucking Tangerines from Bitterbark Trees (Living Victoriously in Trials):

#### 1. The Right Kind of Ladder (9-11)

- **Never Play “Reverse”:** (1) If you children ask you to play the game “reverse,” tell them no, no, no every day of the week and twice on Sunday. (2) It’s one of the most popular games for families and kids will advertise it as such. (3) But don’t fall for it. (4) It’s the game that from the moment your alarm clock rings, till the moment you go to bed, your kids get to be in charge of you. (5) Take out trash. Clean room. Brush teeth. If they order it, you have to do it.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Living victorious in trials requires you to see trials from the viewpoint of God. And how he sees them is exactly the reverse of the way the world works: those whose circumstances bring them “low” are in a “high position.” And those who live their lives on a pedestal that never seem to get knocked off are in a “low” position.
- **Textual Emphasis: Polarity Reversal:** (1) Biblical writers often taught spiritual concepts through polarities because it helped people remember: light vs darkness; sheep vs goat; loss vs found; pride vs humility; high vs low; (2) Same thing here but adds reverse to the polarities: Humble circumstances (those things that bring you low) = high position; Rich circumstances (not wealth; but living on the perch with no concept eternity/final judgment = humiliation (playing the fool and oblivious to it); (3) Has nothing to do with finances. The whole chapter is about trials.
- **App:** God must think so highly of me then because these things keep happening. That’s exactly right. That’s why Jesus’ beatitudes are empathic. Blessed are they and only they...

#### 2. The Right Kind of Harvest (12)

- **Two Kitchen Items that Teach Two Important Spiritual Lessons:** (1) Microwave and the Crock Pot; (2) You can make some good meals in the microwave. My Spagetti Os will knock your socks off; (3) But if you want to be as close to heaven on earth, you cook with the Crock Pot; (4) Lasagna cooked in that puppy tastes so good it will make you want to slap your momma.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** We want microwave Christianity because we are conditioned by instantaneous gratification in all areas of life. God, however, cooks with a crock pot, the result of which is deferred gratification. To live in victory, you must understand this. It’s not: “Your Best Life Now.” It’s: “Your Best Life When the Roll is Called up Yonder.”
- **Textual Emphasis: Perseverance and the Crown:** (1) James, as part of the Jewish Diaspora that amalgamated into the Roman Empire, knew the Olympic Games well. He borrows terminology from them here. (2) One particular Olympic Game: Obstacles were so immeasurably difficult that it wasn’t becoming to the spirit of the games to award for 1, 2, 3. But to those who persevered and finished the race specifically because it was so challenging. (3) Award was a crown.
- **Application:** Looking ahead towards an ultimate prize is God’s way of showing us how joy, endurance, and perseverance equate to victory. They’re not just concepts. They are the necessary motors that lead to the prize at the finish line.

#### 3. The Right Kind of Education (13-15)

- **Computer Passwords and Childhood Phone Numbers:** (1) (803) 592-3331. That was my childhood phone number. I remember it today. I’ll remember it tomorrow. I’ll remember it till the day they bury me in my boots; (2) But the password to my online accounts don’t work so well. (3) I don’t remember them today. I won’t remember them tomorrow. (4) Here’s why: they always tell you they are too easy to guess so you have to come up with some weird one. (5) But every time you come up with a weird one, you get a message saying it doesn’t meet their qualifications. (6) You need a PHD in computer programming just to make a password that you will forget.

- **Main Idea of the Point:** We learn from the School of Bent Knee that God will always test. But he will never tempt.
- **Textual Emphasis: The Difference Between Testing and Temptation:** (1) One of the hardest questions for believers is this: what constitutes a test from God and a temptation from Satan? (2) What makes it difficult is that the devil likes to take spiritual concepts and reverse them. (3) God tests for the purpose of approval (Abraham and Isaac). He might show you a weakness but does so because he desires you to be stronger in that area. (4) Satan tempts in an area of weakness or point of failure in order to entice.
- **App:** God in his test and Satan in his temptations often draw from the same well. But the difference is in the goal: one is designed to show approval, the other to entice.

#### 4. The Right Kind of Tools (16-18)

- **Oh You Can't Get to Heaven Bible School Song:** (1) Do you ever go to sleep and wake up in a cold sweat because you are haunted by a Vacation Bible School song you can't get out of your head? Me too. (2) Here's the one: Oh you can't get to heaven on roller skates cause you'd roll right by those pearly gates...Oh you can't get to heaven in a rocking chair, cause the chair won't get there....And you can't get to heaven in a limousine, cause the Lord don't sell no gasoline.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** The main tools of heaven are the tools of trials and tribulations. They are perfect gifts that come from above because they make you depend on Jesus.
- **Textual Emphasis: Good Gifts That Come from Above:** (1) We often think of God's gifts as those that flow from the Holy Spirit. And we should. Gifts such as: acts of service, encouragement, teaching, etc. (2) But here is one of the, if not THE, most important keys to living victoriously in the midst of trial: the trial is itself a gift from above. Why? Because it's designed to show approval. Not harm. Or tempt.
- **Application:** When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed. When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost. Count your many blessings, name them one by one. And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.