

Faith in Suffering

James 1:1-12

James 1:1, “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.”

This is how James’ letter to Jews scattered around the world begins. We are about to be presented with a series of tests, a means to measure how we are doing in our faith. But who is this James?

We know of James, the brother of John, but he has already been martyred by the time of the writing of this letter.

In Mark 6:3 we read, “Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.”

Jesus had brothers and sisters, and James was one of them. It is James, the half brother of Jesus, who is the author of this book.

James introduces himself as a “servant” of God and the Lord Jesus. The word here for servant means one who has sold themselves into slavery. James is saying he is a slave to God and to Jesus. Can you imagine your sibling making such a claim about you?

Paul writes about his visit to Jerusalem in:

Gal. 1:19, “I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord’s brother.”

Jesus’ brothers were in the Upper Room when Mathias was chosen to replace Judas in Acts 1. In Acts 15 it was James who oversaw the Jerusalem Council. And according to the Jewish historian Josephus, James was martyred in the year 62 AD.

As we work our way through James, we will look at one or two of the tests of our faith each week that James has written about in his letter.

David wrote about the testing of his faith when he writes in:

Psalm 17:3, “Though you probe my heart, though you examine me at night and test me, you will find that I have planned no evil; my mouth has not transgressed.”

Faith is more than a profession of belief. In 1 John we are given a number of things that should define our faith:

1. Obedience 2:3
2. Not love of the world 2:15
3. A righteous life 2:29
4. Avoidance of sin 3:6, 9
5. Love for fellow believers 3:14

The first test that James considers is:

- I. The Test of Perseverance in Suffering James 1:1-12
 1. Response to Suffering vs. 2

James 1:2, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,"

In English "Consider it pure joy" sounds like a recommendation, but it isn't. In Greek it is in the imperative sense which means that it is a command. Other versions translate it "Count it pure or complete joy." So, we are to count trials joy.

This goes against everything our world would say about trials. A Christian with the wrong perspective won't count trials as joy, but we, true followers of Jesus are commanded to count trials as joy. Why?

Remember what John says about trouble?

John 16:33, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

2. Benefits of Suffering James 1:3-4

James 1:3-4, "because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

James' readers know that testing produces perseverance! They know it! Now you know it. Peter affirms this belief in:

2 Peter 2:9, "if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment."

John MacArthur in his commentary on James provides 8 purposes for the Lord's allowing trials to come into our lives. They are:

1. To test the strength of our faith.
2. To humble us, to remind us not to let our trust in the Lord turn into presumption and spiritual self-satisfaction.
3. God allows us to suffer trials in order to wean us from our dependence on worldly things.
4. To call us to eternal and heavenly hope.
5. To reveal what we really love.
6. To teach us to value God's blessings.
7. To develop in His saints enduring strength for greater usefulness.
8. To enable us to better help others in their trials.

These are all positive results of enduring a trial or suffering through a trial.

Some of you may know that I have a strange hobby of running 100-mile races. The answer to your first question is no, typically I don't take a break to sleep, but you can, and I have once.

When I go to a race, I know without any doubt there will come a point in the race that I will suffer. It begins at the starting line and lasts until the finish line. OK, only exaggerating a little

there, but I know I will suffer. There comes a point, usually around 1-2 in the morning when I think of how comfortable and warm my bed would be at that moment. There is a time in each race when I think about how nice and comforting my other hobby is: reading. I think of how nice it would be to be in my comfy chair just reading.

Ultra runners know when we go into a race we are going to run until we meet ourselves. Everything that brings us to that race is stripped away and we come face to face with who we really are and we find out if we are willing to push through the pain, through the fatigue, to stay the course to finish the race.

The Christian Walk is exactly the same. When we are suffering, we come face to face with who we are and how strong we have become to endure the pain of life's race. Paul writes in:

Hebrews 12:1-3, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

God isn't asking us to do anything that Jesus wasn't willing to do Himself. Not only was He willing, He did it, going to the cross, enduring the pain and the shame of the cross to finish the race God set before Him. Will we finish the race God sets before us?

3. The Proper Response to Suffering James 1:5-11

A. Wisdom from God vs 5

James 1:5, "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."

This is one of the most beautiful promises in Scripture. If you lack wisdom all you have to do is ask! That's it!

When it says God will give it generously it means He will pour it out on those who truly want His wisdom. If you aren't asking for wisdom to follow, but rather are looking for God to bless the choices you made or the direction you want you are simply out of luck. You will receive nothing.

Rather, if you truly ask for wisdom that you intend to obey you can expect it to flow freely and without condemnation. That is what is meant by the words "without finding fault."

When you seek God's wisdom, He doesn't point out all your bad choices or how you should have made better choices in the past. The heart that seeks after God's will and wisdom is received warmly without judgement by our heavenly Father.

Solomon, the wisest man to ever live wrote about this concept of seeking and obeying God's wisdom. This may be

very familiar to you:

Proverbs 3:5-6, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”

This acknowledges dependence upon God especially when we are asked to ignore our own understanding. Our understanding is limited, God is limitless. Our understanding is flawed, God is flawless. Our understanding comes from a sinful heart with sinful desires. God is sinless and His motives are pure.

So, who do you want in control of your life’s path? Do you want to be in charge with an understanding that is limited, flawed, full of sin? Or will you place God in control? Being obedient to His leading and His plan for your life? He made you; He may actually know your design better than you do.

B. Stable Faith vs. 6-7

James 1:6-7, “But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.”

When you ask for wisdom, you need to be ready to follow that wisdom. If you ask knowing that you are simply going to do your own thing what do you actually expect from God? God knows your heart, He knows

your intent. If you are simply asking for wisdom with the hope of getting out of the trial without obedience you will get nothing.

You aren’t on the path towards God’s will, you are a wave on the ocean being tossed about without purpose. If you aren’t serious or honest with your intent, you fail James’ first test of your faith and as verse 7 says you “should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.”

You are mid-test right now. Be honest with yourself, are you willing to follow the wisdom God would give you?

If you are cheating on your timecard at work and God’s wisdom is leading you to be honest with your time, will you?

If you are living with someone you aren’t married too and God’s wisdom is leading you to be sexually pure, will you wait until marriage?

Paul had a thorn in the flesh he asked God to remove 3 times, but God did not remove the thorn. Will you live with your thorn in the flesh if God doesn’t remove it? Will you live joyfully with it?

These are not easy, but James’s test will reveal where we really are in our walk with the Lord. Where are you?

C. Single Minded vs. 8

James 1:8, “Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.”

If you are struggling to follow God and your desires you are

double-minded, you are unstable, not just part of the time but in all you do.

Joshua assembled all the leaders of Israel at Shechem. He reminded them of all God did in leading them out of bondage in Egypt. He then challenged them to be faithful to the God who brought them this far by saying this:

Joshua 24:15, “But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

Joshua is telling them not to be double-minded and to choose who they will follow. That is the essence of James’ test here. God will not be second, He is either first in your life or He is not. Joshua choose, what will you choose?

D. Right Response Whether Exalted or Humbled vs. 9-11

James 1:9-11, “Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. 10 But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. 11 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.”

What James is saying here to the poor guy is to rejoice in that your circumstances aren’t distracting you from God. And to the rich guy he is saying rejoice when things go bad because it teaches you how you should live with material things that will fade away.

The illustration James uses here with the wild flower fading in the heat, this is what all the material wealth we have will do. Many of us have seen, as our parents age or even pass, how all the things they have accumulated become items we drop off at Good Will or at Common Goods holding no value for us.

Every time we buy something new and it gets a little ding in it I hear Bard declare “Can’t we have anything new?” No, it will all fade away!

What doesn’t fade away is our standing in Jesus! Our hope for eternity doesn’t fade. Our reward in heaven will never tarnish or fade away. So why don’t we put our time into what will never fade instead of what will pass away?

We know that humility is key for a life of faith.

2 Chronicles 7:14, “if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

We must be willing to humble ourselves.

To this point James has given us 5 keys to persevere. They are:

1. Count trials joy vs 2

2. Knowing what it produces vs 3
3. Having a submissive will vs 4
4. A believing heart vs. 5-8
5. A humble spirit vs 9-11

Those are 5 great keys that help us to persevere. There is also a reward.

4. The Blessing of Suffering vs 12

James 1:12, "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."

We've seen the beatitudes in Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount. We've seen the beatitudes in Revelation and now we have one here in James.

If you persevere through the trial, you will receive the crown of life. Perseverance doesn't mean simply continuing to live and having the whoa's me attitude. If there is no joy, there is no victory. That is the point of the first test.