

Faith that Works - Session 1

Trials and Temptations- James 1:1-18

Introduction

Why did James write his letter? To whom did he write?

Read James 1:1.

- When James wrote his letter he was the Bishop of Jerusalem. So what does James mean when he says he is a slave or servant (depending upon your version) of Jesus?
- To whom is he addressing the letter?



The “twelve tribes” is one of the names with which Jews referred to their nation of Israel in the Old Testament. Although ten of the tribes were lost during the diaspora after the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The dispersion of the people began around 740 BC and continued for about 20 years. It is believed that those sent away were assimilated into their new communities and never returned. In New Testament times, the term became associated with the Christian church. Apparently the Jews that were not living in Jerusalem, but who had embraced the teachings of Jesus and his apostles, were facing a lot of difficulties that tested their faith. James was writing to them.

Trials of Life

Trials and troubles are not contemporary problems. They have always been part of human life. They are connected to free will, are part of human nature, and are impossible to avoid. Whenever we face them we have three choices: endure them, run away from them, or welcome them. Notice in James 1:2 that James doesn't say “if” but “when.”

- What kind of trials did the Jerusalem Christians face during the times of James? (Read Acts 7:54-60, 8:1-3, 12:1-4, and 21:27-36)

Read James 1:2-4. The word in Greek used here for trials (temptations in KJV) is *peirasmos*. It means testing through experience, adversity, temptation, and discipline. The Greek word used in verse 2 for joy is *chara*. This word is translated as calm delight and gladness.

- According to Van Wick, trial does not refer to seduction to sin, God has a definite purpose for trials. Read Deuteronomy 8:2-5. What are trials intended to accomplish?
- What does James say about our reaction to trials in life? What are the advantages of reacting as James suggests?
- Think about a trial that you have faced in your life. At the time, how did you react? What lessons did you learn from that trial? Knowing what you know now, would you react differently next time?
- When your faith is under siege these verses may give you additional insight. Read 1 Peter 1:7-9, Zechariah 13:9, Malachi 3:2-3, Daniel 11:35. Why do you think this analogy is used when describing the testing of our faith?

Hang in There

Read James 1:2-4 and 1:12

It is tough to hang in there when things are bad, scary, or dangerous. Yet over and over again we see the words endurance, perseverance, and patience used in the New Testament for Christians. The Greek word used for complete in verse 4 is *holokleros* which translates as complete, entire, whole, having all its parts.

- Using a dictionary, look up the definitions of endurance, perseverance, and patience. How are these words similar? How are they different? Why do you think these character traits are valuable for Christians?
- How do Matthew 5:11-12, Romans 5:3-5, and 1 Peter 1:6-7 support James' view of trials as blessings to be received with joy?
- What does it mean for you to be mature and complete in your faith?
- According to verse 12, what is the reward of perseverance?
- Read the following verses and discuss the value and types of various crowns: 1 Corinthians 9:25, 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, 2 Timothy 4:8, 1 Peter 5:4, Revelation 2:10. Why is the metaphor of a crown appealing for people at this time in history?

Wisdom

The definition of wisdom is *the discipline of applying truth to one's life in the light of experience—knowledge applied—insight*. We cannot be wise in times of trouble if we do not have experience of similar trials in the past. Wisdom is practical not theoretical.

Read James 1:5-8.

- How do Proverbs 4:5-13 and Proverbs 9:10-12 connect to James 1:5-8?
- There is an African proverb that says, “When an old man dies, a library burns to the ground.” How does this connect to the meaning of wisdom?
- Why should we pray for wisdom, not just perseverance or patience? What effect does doubt have on prayer? (See also Mark 11:20-24, Hebrews 11:6)
- What do 1 Timothy 2:8 and Hebrews 11:6 have to say about **how** to ask God?
- How is the Bible a source of wisdom?
- What does James mean by “double-minded?” How does an unstable faith affect one’s choices and decisions during times of trial? Give an example from your own experience?

Rich or Poor

Economic circumstances in ancient cultures were often considered a measure of God’s approval of a person. If you were rich—God favored you. If you were poor—he did not. Jesus was very clear that this was untrue, and James points out the advantages and disadvantages of both.

Read James 1:9-11.

- How can poverty be considered an honor? Why would a rich person be described as in a low position?
- How is each person’s place in life a trial? What are the trials and temptations of a poor person? A rich person?
- How does Jesus set an example of these values? Read 2 Corinthians 8:9.
- Why do both rich and poor need Jesus? Why should both be grateful for their place in life? How can both consider their trials a joy?

The Character of God

The writers of the Life Change study say “Godly practice can be grounded only in a true perception of God’s nature and our own.” Have you ever heard some say, “It’s all God’s fault” or “God made me this way” when something bad happens or when they succumb to temptation? How would you describe God’s character to someone who felt that way?

Read James 1:13-15.

- Why do people sometimes blame God for their temptations?
- What does James say is the true source of our temptations?
- James describes the path as follows: Desire leads to sinful actions which leads to death. Describe how someone might feel desire but avoid the sinful actions. (See Matthew 6:13 and 26:41, and 2 Timothy 2:22 for help)

Desire → Sin → Death

- What does Psalm 119:133 tell us about how to resist evil?

- What is the only way to avoid death once the sin has happened? (See Isaiah 59:2 and 1 John 1:5-7 and 5:11-13 for help)
- There is an alternate path that James describes back in James 1:2-4: Faith leads to trials that test it and through perseverance we reach spiritual maturity. How does this path help you to value the role of trials in your life?

Faith → Trials → Spiritual Maturity

Read James 1:16-18

- How are the Christians to whom James is writing being deceived? (Hint: look at verse 13) How have you witnessed this yourself?
- What kinds of gifts does God give us? (See Matthew 7:11, Luke 11:11-13, John 3:16, Acts 2:38, Romans 6:23, and James 1:5)
- What do these verses tell you about the character of God?
- How does the “word of truth” give us birth? How does this connect to Psalm 119:105?
- What are the “first fruits”? (See Leviticus 23:9-14) The first fruits were offered as a sign that the whole harvest belongs to God. If we are first fruits, what does that signify?

Look at the photo on the first page of this lesson. You see a golden apple surrounded by barbed wire. How does that photo capture the message of this lesson?

Commitment

This week I will apply what I learned from this lesson on trials and temptations by taking the following action:
