

James 1:1-4
May 19, 2024



CONVERSATION STARTERS

What are some highs or lows you experienced this past week?

What Scripture has been shaping you recently?

Where have you seen God moving in your life this week?

What did you hear in today's sermon OR read in today's passage that you would like to discuss?

What did you learn about yourself in today's sermon/passage?

What did you learn about God in today's sermon/passage?

What convicted you as you listened to today's sermon OR read in today's passage?

MAIN POINT

Joyful trust in God will see you through every trial.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What pressures threaten to squeeze the joy out of life for you?

Which of these has had the greatest impact on your life up to now? How have you learned to deal with this struggle, if you have?

James wrote what is considered the earliest letter in the New Testament. He wrote to Jewish believers, providing practical principles for living the Christian life. From the earliest days of the church, believers have experienced trials that tested their faith, but James teaches that we can rejoice during those trials because of the growth and endurance God is working into our lives.



UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

 *ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JAMES 1:1*

The book of James is actually an epistle or letter. What purpose does this type of literature serve in the larger context of the Bible? What makes the type of letter James wrote different from the letters Paul wrote?

What do you know about when this letter was written? If you don't know much, how can you learn?

When you thumb through the New Testament, it is divided by types of literature: Gospels, History (Acts), the Epistles (or letters) of Paul, General Epistles, then Prophecy (Revelation). James falls into the category of General Letters, which were given to the church as a whole as opposed to the more occasional letters Paul wrote to various churches about specific issues. This is why Paul's Letters were named after the recipients of the letters. James had a broader audience in mind. As best we can tell, this letter was written around AD 49, but as with all New Testament letters, the contents apply to the whole church—past, present, and future.

Who was the letter's intended audience? Read Acts 8:1-4. Why were the recipients "dispersed"?

How does their situation relate to the status of the church around the world today?

James's audience was scattered because they were persecuted. Members of the Jerusalem church were driven to different parts of the world because of increasing persecution. Today, Christians are persecuted all over the world for their faith in Jesus Christ. More and more, hardship and suffering press in on Christians at home and abroad. The book of James is not a letter from the distant past with themes irrelevant to modern problems but one that speaks to all of us about a very common theme—how to live as Christians.

 *ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JAMES 1:2.*

What's your initial reaction to this verse?

When have you felt joy in the middle of a difficult situation? Why?

What emotions did you experience during your most recent trial?

How can we appropriately process our emotions in the middle of a trial?



James advised those facing trials to approach them with joy. When trials are rightly faced, they are avenues to spiritual growth; when faced wrongly they become temptations to evil. James did not say trials should make us happy or that we should look forward to them. Rather, James wrote with a deep realization that life's pressures have a way of strengthening our character and faith. In other words, they help us develop perseverance.

 *ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JAMES 1:3-4.*

During your most recent trial, how did you see God walking with you?

How have you been encouraged by the endurance of others during trials?

Perseverance or “endurance” is not the goal but the means of reaching the goal. The goal is to become mature and complete. A physically mature adult who behaves at the level of a young child is not a mature adult. Likewise, a Christian who is mature in the knowledge of the Scriptures but whose behavior does not match his or her profession of faith is not a mature Christian. Endurance is self-authenticating; we grow in endurance by staying the course of faith and not being swayed by trials. Proven character follows naturally from the believer who has remained faithful through trials. Enduring trials causes us to grow in faith, and such growth is a testimony of faith's authenticity.

In what ways do you currently need encouragement during a trial?

Who in your life holds a godly perspective in hard circumstances? What can you learn from them?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Would you say you typically have a joy-filled attitude? What prevents you from being joyful?

Do you think joy is given, or is it something that we must pursue? Explain your answer.

Think about the last trial you experienced. Was it filled with joyful thanksgiving or despondent gripe? Why?

Who in your life is going through a difficult time right now? How can you let him or her know that you are willing to listen and encourage?



PRAYER

Close your time together by sharing prayer requests, praying for each other, and the group.

Praise God for this grace-filled and practical letter. Ask that He would use our time in James to change us, challenge us, and conform us into the image of Jesus.

LOOKING AHEAD

*Encourage your group to look ahead to next week's scripture passage as we continue our new study, **Faith and Works: A Study of James.***

May 26, 2024 --- James 1:5-8



COMMENTARY

James 1:1-4

James was one of Jesus' biological brothers (Matt. 13:55; Gal. 1:19). He did not believe in Jesus as Messiah during His earthly ministry (John 7:3-5). After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to James (1 Cor. 15:7). Then he believed. Later James wrote the letter we are now studying. By the time of the council described in Acts 15, James seems to have become the recognized leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13-21). He was known as "James the Just" because of his reputation for piety, purity, and steadfastness in obedience to God. He died as a martyr in A.D. 62. James began his letter by identifying himself as a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. James had gone from believing, "Jesus is the brother I grew up with in Nazareth," to "He is the Lord Jesus Christ and I am His willing slave." Jesus' resurrection spoke powerfully to James! Jesus' resurrection speaks powerfully to us also, even when we are under the pressure of trials. Jesus, the Sufferer, endured the trial of the cross knowing God was working out great purposes. For the joy set before Him, Jesus endured the cross (Heb. 12:2). Jesus' resurrection shines light on the path through trials.

James wrote to the twelve tribes dispersed or scattered abroad. These were Jewish believers who gathered in house churches in cities and towns throughout the first-century world. James probably called them the twelve tribes to signify they were the renewed Israel enjoying and expecting fulfillment of God's promises in Christ. James and these believers knew about trials. As with every generation since, first-century believers faced hardships. "Trials" translates a Greek word that, depending on its context, refers either to hardships that test us or to inner urges and enticements to sin. In James 1:13, the verb form refers to enticement to sin. In James

1:2 the word refers to hardships that test us. James and his fellow believers had probably lived through the early persecution of the church in Jerusalem and beyond (Acts 6:8–8:4; 9:1-2). Many knew humble circumstances socially and financially (Jas. 1:9). Some experienced oppression and mistreatment by powerful people (2:6). They were familiar with sickness (5:14) and other afflictions. Years after he wrote his letter, James faithfully faced trial of martyrdom. James instructed his fellow believers to consider it a great joy when they went through various trials. James did more than suggest joy—he commanded it! God wants and commands us to choose joyful attitudes when we go through trials. This probably challenges every one of us. It may seem inconceivable to some of us. Is it even possible to be honest about the difficulty of a great trial yet have great joy at the same time? Yes. Because joy is based in God, not in circumstances. Paul was in prison and yet rejoiced (Phil. 1:14-18; 2:17-18). He rejoiced in sufferings (Col. 1:24). He said to rejoice always (1 Thess. 5:16). The young believers in Thessalonica received the gospel with joy even though they suffered severely for doing so (1:6). Peter said we are to keep on rejoicing as we share the sufferings of Christ (1 Pet. 4:13).



1:3. We have a definite reason for joy in our trials: the testing of your faith produces endurance. The hardships we all face aren't the end of the story. The testing process purifies and strengthens its object. Metal workers use fiery furnaces to refine and shape metal. The goal is for the metal to meet standards of purity and strength for its intended use. Similar to metal undergoing the testing process during trials, faith and trust is already in us; the trials burn out the dross and impurities. Faith is confidence in and dependence upon God. Faith prods us to obey God no matter the pressure or no matter how draining the difficulty. The wisdom He gives (Jas. 1:5) helps us to trust and yield to His loving heart (Rom. 8:28-30).

We already trust that God's Word is true and we already depend upon Him. If we did not, we would not be Christians at all. Yet, our trust can be purer and deeper, less contaminated by pockets of selfishness. In 2 Corinthians 1:8-10, Paul described a trial he experienced and what he learned in it. He did not name the trial explicitly as persecution, threats, illness, or something else. Whatever it was, the trial was severe.

Remember that Paul was an apostle, a man of faith who preached and taught about faith. Still Paul went through a terribly difficult trial. My friends whose college-age son died a few years ago have experienced trials. In the furnace of emotional pain they leaned upon God who is with them, upholds them (Isa. 41:9-10) and promises that victory, not death, is the final word for their son (1 Cor. 15:54).

We have been speaking of faith as trust in God. We need to add that it is active trust in God. Faith expresses itself actively in deeds of obedience (Jas. 2:18-26). Trials make it more difficult to obey. During them we're pressed, weary, and spent. Without burning off the dross our faith would be soft and weak. With purified faith we are strengthened for whatever life brings next. Peter and John experienced this in Jerusalem soon after Jesus' resurrection. They spent a night in jail because they preached Christ (Acts 4:3). The next day they stood firmly for Christ even when pressured by threats not to preach Christ any more (vv. 17-22). This was all part of the "testing" process. When Peter and John returned to their friends, they all joined together in prayer (vv. 23-31). They prayed in faith for the boldness they needed to continue preaching. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and went right on preaching the Word. More persecution followed, and again they obeyed God. This brings us to the matter of the endurance the testing of faith produces. Endurance is a necessity of true Christian faith. If we are true believers, we endure to the end (Matt. 24:13). We do not believe for a while, then stop; trust for a while, then turn away; obey for a while, then go our own easier way.

1:4. God intends for endurance to do its complete work in us. Sometimes trials come like ocean waves. In writing and sending his letter, James was one believer coming alongside others to encourage them to continue steadfastly in faith for the long haul. After receiving James' letter, the believers surely read it aloud and repeatedly during their gatherings. Then they probably encouraged one another to endure. God intends something very similar for us. God gives us help through other Christians. God often gives wisdom (Jas. 1:5-8) and strategies through fellow believers. By His wisdom we discern whether to wait or act, whether to be silent or speak, and what to say or do



when it is time. We can become God's hands and feet in giving practical help as brothers and sisters faithfully endure trials. We can also help one another stay focused upon the goal of our trials. According to James, the culmination or end goal of the endurance process is for the believer to be mature and complete. What type of maturity or perfection is in view here? Is it maturity in faith we are able to realize in this life? Or, is it perfection that will only come beyond the present age? Mature or perfect translates teleios. James used teleios elsewhere of God's good and perfect gift (Jas. 1:17), the perfect law of liberty (v. 25), and the perfection of not stumbling at all in what a person says (Jas. 3:2). In each case, absolute rather than partial perfection was James' meaning. Thus, in the second portion of James 1:4, James probably intended to lift his readers' eyes toward the full maturity of our hearts, minds, and souls as God's ultimate goal for us.

