

Let's open our bibles to the earliest epistle ever written, the book of...

James 1:1-11

"Finding The Proper Perspective"

The book of James is all about practical Christian living. In many ways it's like a NT book of proverbs; it converts the principle into the practical. As you survey the scriptures you discover all kinds of principles concerning how you're to act, or perhaps react, how you're to speak, what your attitude should be toward sin; principles on prayer (& our prayer lives)... All of which are great (principles are great), but how do I take that, & make that practical? How do these things translate in real time into my life? That's what James is all about. He's a "pull no punches" kinda guy, the essence of his letter is, "If you call yourself a Christian, than *this* is what your life should look like."

As for who James was, though he doesn't say it specifically, there are clues that lead us to believe that this is the same James who was the leader of the early church found in Acts Ch 15 to whom the dispute over circumcision was brought & he settled it w/scriptural resolve. What that *also* tells us is that this is the James, the ½ brother of Jesus... (Same mom, different dad ☺, James' dad was Joseph, Jesus' Father was God).

It's interesting that throughout the entire ministry of Jesus on the "pre" side of the cross, *none* of His brothers believed in Him (John 7:5). James, Jude, none of them (of course every believer can testify to the fact that family members are always the hardest to reach). I kinda wonder if they didn't grow up w/a bit of bitter resentment. Can you imagine trying to live in Jesus' shadow, having Him as your older brother ☺? You wonder how many times those boys heard, "Why can't you be more like Jesus!" ☺ "Why don't you follow your Brother's example, He obeys the 1st time?"

Be that as it may though they didn't believe on Him initially, ultimately you find them in Acts Ch 1 there in the upper room awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit along w/the rest of the disciples. What made the difference? The Resurrection.

In 1st Cor 15 we discover that Jesus appeared to James after His resurrection, which understandably removed all doubt from his mind concerning who exactly his big Brother was... After that James went on to excel in the faith, becoming a key leader of the early church.

Again, when it came to the word of God, James didn't mess around. Out of 108 Vs he issues some 54 imperatives! He didn't suggest-he commanded! He stressed the balance between belief, & behavior; faith & works. As we mentioned last week if your faith toward God hasn't changed your life, than it hasn't saved your soul.

James wants us to understand that the essence of Christianity isn't only to be *believed*; it's to be *lived*. It's been said, "The true seed of *saving faith* is verified by the tangible fruit of *servicing faith*."

I mean, hey, it's neat to memorize the bible, to discuss & philosophize Christian principles, but if it never translates into practical Christian living what's the point? Jesus would say it like this, "*But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?*"¹ James is gonna get all over that.

The idea is that of leading us into spiritual maturity. Listen, not everyone who grows old, grows up. There's a big difference between age & maturity, just because a man or a woman has been saved for 10, 15, 20 yrs that's not necessarily any indication that they're *mature in the Lord*. Conversely just because someone is young physically, they may be way more mature spiritually than those who have decades of time on them in this world. James wants to bring us into maturity; spiritually.

1st thing on the list is that of turning trials, to triumph. If that's to happen we need to obey 4 imperatives, "Count", "Know", "Let", & "Ask", We're to have a joyful outlook, an understanding mind, a surrendered will & a believing heart, notice...

Vs 1

Just real quick I would have you note that James considers Jesus & God one & the same. You cannot be a "bond-slave" of 2 different masters, so by the very fact that James calls himself a bondservant of God along w/the Lord J.C. that demonstrates the fact that James considers God & Christ co-equal. 1 God, 3 Persons (The Father, the Son & the Holy Spirit).

One of the things that's really awesome about the opening sentence of this epistle is the obvious humility found in James, the ½ brother of Jesus. He was a blood brother to Jesus...think about that. If it were me, though I'd be no doubt humble in *letting* you know, I'd make sure you knew that, somehow & in some way. But James doesn't name drop or pull rank. He simply identifies himself as James, who had J.C. as his Savior to Whom also he became a bond-slave.

The bond-slave was a person who was in a position of permanent servitude to another by their personal choice. The law stated that you could have a servant for up to 6 yrs, at the end of the 6th yr they were to go free. But if the servant said, "Hey, I love my master (he takes care of me, provides for me, is good to me) I don't want to go free."

¹ The New King James Version, 1982 (Lk 6:46). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

At that point the master would bring his servant before the judges or elders of the city, he would cause his servant to stand at a door, take an awl & pierce his ear w/it & that signified that he would be his servant for life.

James is saying, “Hey, I love my Master, J.C. so much that I never want to have a life that I consider ‘my own’ again. I want my life to belong fully, whole-heartedly to Jesus, both now & forever.” As for you & me, we should have the same conviction. Jesus has been so good to us, He’s loved us, laid down His *life* for us, guides us, provides *for* us, takes care *of* us; we want our lives to belong fully, whole-heartedly to Him. We are no longer our own, we’ve been purchased at the price of His shed blood & now we exist for Him, it’s our agenda to carry out His desires. God doesn’t exist to serve us, we exist to serve Him...

“To the 12 tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.” So James is the instrumental author, this is his target audience; primarily Jewish believers. Why? Because this letter was written so early (Mid 40’s A.D.) that there wasn’t yet a prevalent presence of Gentiles even *in the body of Christ* yet. At the end of the day what we need to realize is that it’s a letter written to those have come to a saving faith in Christ & as such it applies to us all who name the name of Jesus. Now look at Vs 2.

Vs 2-4

You see, instantly the Holy Spirit through James is seeking to help us find some proper perspective in life. Because trials & tribulation will find us all, James is saying, “Hey, the proper *outlook*, will help facilitate the proper *outcome*.”

But before we dive too deep into that I want to take a quick moment & distinguish trials that God will either bring or allow into our lives Vs consequences of stupidity on our behalf. Too often we go about insisting on our own way, willfully taking a stroll down a sinful path & then we want to act all overwhelmed & under the trial when the consequences of our choices catch up to us. Never forget that the law of sowing & reaping is always in effect & if we sow to the flesh we will of the flesh reap corruption. Everyone likes to dance, but no one likes to play the fiddler, right? Peter made this same distinction when he said, “For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.”² & Again, “... let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.”³

Here’s the point: good choices, good consequences. Bad choices, bad consequences.

² The New King James Version. 1982 (1 Pe 2:20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ The New King James Version. 1982 (1 Pe 4:15-16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Don't cry out like you're the persecuted church if you're walking in sin & have to endure the consequences.

But how are we to respond when we've done a survey of our lives, there's no sin that's being highlighted regarding consequence yet we're still under the pressure of a trial, or a test in our lives? That's what James is addressing here.

1st of all we want to note that trials are not a matter of "if", they're a matter of "when". If you're not experiencing some sort of trial now, you will be before long. It's simply a fact of life. Jesus said, **"In the world you will have tribulation;"** John 16:33 Paul underscored that when he said, **"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."**⁴ Because narrow is the gate, & *difficult* is the way which leads to life...

2 Things that James wants you to know about trials. #1 They're Inevitable, #2 They're Invaluable. They're certain, & they may be sudden, you don't always get a warning that a trial is headed down your hill, you may "fall into" it. That is, it may engage you, or encounter you suddenly & w/out warning.

#1 They're Inevitable, we've already touched on this. David said, **"Many are the afflictions of the righteous,"** Ps 34:19 What kind of trials/afflictions are we talking about here? Well, the word James uses is, "various", it means "many colored" or "manifold". The Greek word is actually the word from which our word "Polka-dot" comes from. **Which is to say we can expect our lives to be spattered & spotted w/tests & trials of all kinds of sizes & shapes. They will vary. It's interesting that Peter used the same word (1 Pet 4:10) when he spoke of the "manifold" grace of God. For every trial we experience God has the grace equivalent to see us through it.**

Now, the key word here in Vs 2 is the word "Count". It's the word that brings us our perspective, it means to "judge" or "evaluate". You wanna come through the test w/flying colors? Then we need to bring the right attitude to the trial, we're to count it as *joy*. Why?

Because it's not pointless, but rather God has a purpose. If God chooses to entrust us w/a trial He has a purpose behind it.

That's where Vs 3 comes in. We evaluate our trials in the light of what God wants to do. We don't rejoice *over* the trial, it's not, "Yippee, I lost my job!" "Oh joy, my spouse cheated on me!" But rather we're to realize that if God saw fit to allow it, than He can use it to somehow *grow* me & *glorify* Himself; & if God wants to cause growth in our lives (which ultimately is to take us & make us like Jesus) than we're all for it.

⁴ The New King James Version, 1982 (Ac 14:22). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

It's all about us laying hold of the proper perspective, the godly perspective. No one joys in the process, but we should joy in the *profit*, or the positive result of the trial in the end. This is where we talk about not wasting our suffering.

If God has allowed you to suffer, or allowed me to suffer, we want God to redeem it, rather than us waste it & benefit nothing of eternal value from it. We could highlight many examples of this particular point but it seems to me that Joseph is a great example of the picture that James is painting here. Hardship, hatred & suffering came upon him in wave after hateful wave. Sold by his own brothers into slavery, framed & falsely accused while in Egypt, thrown into prison for some 3 yrs... None of it of any fault or wrong doing of his own. You know there were extended periods of time whereby he wondered, "Why is this happening to me? God I'm trying to serve you, I've done nothing wrong, I lead my life w/integrity, yet hardship & trial after trial befalls me..." **But one day (years & years & years later) it finally became clear. Though Joseph didn't joy in the process, he was able to joy in God's purpose when He realized that God was allowing him to be humbled that He might exalt him & use him to save Israel from certain death in a time of great famine & be used of God to bless the entire known world at that time.** He said to his brothers, **"But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."**⁵

Joseph God to see God's purpose for his hardships, we may or may not here on this earth. Either way we trust God to take the trials of our lives & turn them in such a way as to bring about *growth* for us & *glory* for Himself.

There are all kinds of ways through which God can benefit our lives through trials. The primary things that James points out here is that they're used to purify our faith & produce patience in our lives. Or to understand it another way God molds maturity into our lives through trials, the testing of our faith.

That word "testing" could be translated "approval" it's a word that speaks of pottery that's gone through the kiln & hasn't cracked, it's "approved" for its intended purpose. God tests the genuineness of our faith by allowing us to pass through the fire. **Not because He needs to know, but because we need to know, either where we're at, or where we're not at.** Trials have a tendency to level us off & ground us in humility, show us our dependency upon the Lord.

⁵ The New King James Version, 1982 (Ge 50:20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

They produce patience. Btw I should note that the word “produces” is in the present tense, meaning that it’s not an instantaneous result; but rather it’s an ongoing process of growth & development, the maturing process that’s being emphasized here.

I also want you to understand a little bit about this word “patience”. It’s not a passive waiting; it’s an active endurance. It’s not the quality that allows you to sit quietly in a classroom or the doctor’s office that’s being stressed here, but rather the quality that helps you finish a marathon. It’s the picture of someone under a heavy load & resolutely staying there as opposed to seeking an opportunity to escape.

This is that quality that adds to your ability to endure hardship, difficulty &/or distress & not crack or cave in under the pressure. It’s what Paul was exercising when he said, *“We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed-”*⁶ Patient persistence. Listen, impatience & immaturity go hand in hand, a mature person of faith will be both patient & persistent. Notice

Vs 4

BTW I should point out that faith is *tested* by trials, it’s not *produced* by trials. Faith is *produced* through the intake of the word of God. Faith comes by hearing & hearing by the word of God (Rom 10:17), it’s as we hear, understand & trust in God’s word that faith comes to fruition in our lives. So trials don’t produce faith, but when trials are *received* w/faith it produces patience. If trials aren’t received w/faith, but rather they’re met w/grumbling & unbelief they can produce bitterness & discouragement

“But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect & complete, lacking nothing”. That is, brought to full maturity, not lacking in anyway. Maturity goes way beyond theological insight, it’s manifested (made known) through daily, faithful endurance, it’s not what we know, it’s who we are...

We’re to realize that trials don’t work *against* us, they’re working *for* us the ability to keep going when the going gets tough (2 Cor 4:17). You don’t learn that ability by reading a book, or listening to a sermon, or even praying a prayer. It’s as we pass through the trials & difficulties of this life, trusting the Lord & remaining obedient to Him that God builds this quality *into* our lives.

His goal for us is to be like Christ, to be men & women of maturity & this is process through which He causes us to grow. We’re refined in the furnace of affliction.

I camp out on this because it's so important. Listen, God will always work *in* us, before He works *through* us. He will build character before He calls to service. I don't know that there's a single exception to that rule. Abraham, (worked in him before working through him), Joseph (worked in him before working through him), Moses, David, Peter, Paul. God works *in* us before He works *through* us, develops *character* before the *calling* to service. Before *honor* is *humility*...

You show me a man who is a shallow, superficial, impatient & immature believer after walking w/the Lord 10+ yrs & I'll show you a man who has wasted his suffering, who has refused to "bear up" under the pressure but has always pulled the ripcord & looked for the escape hatch... God wants us to grow up, be perfect (not sinless), the word is mature, lacking nothing, notice.

Vs 5-8

Did you catch the wordplay there between Vs 4-5? Vs 4, "...lacking nothing" Vs 5 "if you lack wisdom."

Here's the deal, when a trial comes into your life, or my life, we need wisdom. Wisdom is necessary in order to have the proper perspective & follow the right path in while we're in the pressure cooker. We need wisdom so that we *won't* waste our suffering. So the universal offer goes out, "If any of you lacks wisdom, ask of God...& it will be given." What is wisdom? Well, if knowledge is information, wisdom is application. It's the ability to know what to do in a given situation. Someone has said that knowledge is the ability to take things apart, but wisdom is the ability to put things together.

I should also point out that the word "ask" is another present tense word, keep asking. Some people feel as though they insult God by asking more than once. They don't understand God's heart, they project the fallen human heart upon God. They think that since we would get annoyed God gets annoyed. Not so.

We serve the God of the open hand, not the God of the clenched fist. Notice God gives "liberally & w/out reproach". That means God gives generously & w/out rebuke. In other words God isn't all, "You again! How many times are you gonna ask?" God knows our frame, that we're mere dust, He knows we need His help, His wisdom, His strength, constantly, we depend upon Him perpetually, so He says, "Come to Me, again & again & again, as often as you like, I'm here for you." He's not going to fault you for being who you are, there's no reproach in seeking His help, His wisdom, His insight & understanding.

Only 1 prerequisite for the provision of wisdom, ask in faith... *"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."*⁷ The enemy of answered prayer is unbelief.

God says that He wants to give us wisdom, it's ours to believe Him for that. How would you like it if every time you made yourself available to someone they didn't really believe you would honor your word or come through for them? Yet we do this to God all the time...

We doubt Him, James calls us out, says we're "double-minded". Faith says "Yes" unbelief enters in & says "No", it's doubt. It's "Yes" one minute, "No" the next. Faith believed Jesus and stepped out on the water, doubt entered in & Peter started to sink. Faith held him firm, but due to doubt, being double-minded he almost drowned.

That's a lot of believers today, like a cork on the ocean, up & down, in & out, tossed to & fro by waves of doubt. Instability & immaturity go together... We're to ask in faith. Now, faith isn't psyching ourselves up to convince ourselves of God really doing it, or some kind of positive thinking trip. It's simply taking God at His promise, trusting Him for His word.

Vs 9-11

Here's the idea, we don't trust in the riches or uncertain resources of this world. It doesn't matter how rich you are, riches won't save your life. The rich & the poor die alike & this life is like a vapor. Be you in poverty or in prosperity our trust is in the Lord.

Social prominence passes away, wealth withers like a wild flower in the hot sun, fame will fade. True faith refuses to trust in riches, but trusts wholly in the Lord.

Don't waste your suffering, whatever trial may be upon you, lay hold of the proper perspective, God has a purpose & you can rejoice to the extent knowing that in the end if you trust in Him, you will *grow* & He will be glorified...

Prayer Points:

Father that's our prayer, that You would be glorified in our lives, Lord we trust You so we can say to You, Have Your way. Help us not to look for the escape hatch, or leap from the altar when the heat is on. *But give us steadfast endurance, move us on to maturity, we want to be like Jesus.* God we need Your wisdom in our lives, help us handle hard times in an appropriate manner. We don't want to have to hit "reset" & try again, we want to give You total reign in our lives, grow us, glorify Yourself.

⁷ The New King James Version, 1982 (Heb 11:6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

God wants to be glorified in your life, but if He doesn't have your life than that's where it begins. Tough times visit us all. The believer has hope, God has a purpose & a plan, those who aren't in Christ are w/out hope being w/out God in the world. **Don't go through life w/out hope, give your life to Christ, who died for you, became sin for you upon the cross that you might be made the righteousness of God in Him.** Don't over complicate it, it's real simple, believe on the Lord J.C. & you will be saved. If God is calling out to you, knocking on the door of your heart, don't resist Him, open the door & receive Him...