

STUDIES IN THE LIFE OF JAMES

STUDY NUMBER 1 – JAMES 1:1-12

GROW TALLER THROUGH TESTING

We're beginning a series in the book of James. James was written very close to the time of Thessalonians. Probably the earliest, around 50 A.D. The temple was destroyed in 70 AD. Christ and the crucifixion somewhere around 30 AD. So James has a very distinguished position in the lineage of scripture.

As you know the name James is like Smith. You've got to have definition on which one you mean. You've got two of them among the twelve. James and John the sons of Zebedee and then James Alpheus who is probably the brother of Matthew.

Then we've got the James that wrote this book. James has this distinguishing mark in that he is the half-brother of our Lord Jesus Christ. Mary and Joseph had children following the virgin birth and it is believed that James was the oldest of them.

James has left the legacy of being an incredible man of prayer. They nicknamed him "camel knees" because he spent so much time on them. It's a miracle in itself that this man accepted Jesus Christ as His deity and His resurrection and became one of the three pillars of the

early church. His name weaves in and out of the book of Acts along with Peter and John.

James writes a very hard-hitting book. You will never have to question where he's coming from and what he has to say. Following Pentecost the Jewish Christians were scattered everywhere. Many of them were displaced because of the persecution. Many of them had to move. Many of them lost family members. So the passion of James' heart is to address issues that each of us must deal with if we're going to grow and mature in Christ. James is ready to get after that particular project.

I have called this series of studies "The Battle for Our Behavior" or "Pointers for Progress." But the main focus of it is 2 Peter 3:18: "But grow in spiritual strength and become better acquainted with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be all glory and splendored honor both now and forevermore. Amen."

The greatest need that you and I have when we first become a believer is to understand the sovereign purpose of God in creating circumstances to make us more godly. This is the very first issue. We call it growing taller through testing. Our key verses will be verses 2 & 3 out of these first twelve verses.

What James wants them to know, that even though they've lost their homes, they've lost some of their family, some of them lost their jobs, some of them have lost their lives, he wants everyone that surviving to know that God

doesn't make mistakes and that He is intimately engaged in every circumstance that touches our lives. Those circumstances have a secondary function and that is to produce spiritual growth in us as men and women so we in turn can be a witness to others that Jesus Christ really does make a difference.

Now with those remarks, let's just jump right into the text.

The miracle of these verses is that James was an unbeliever during the time that Christ was here. But he had an experience in 1 Corinthians 15:7. "Then James saw Him and later all of the apostles." James saw the resurrected Christ. He saw Him not as an older brother now, he saw Him truly as the Son of God. That's the miracle that comes out as we look at verse 1.

v. 1 James, a bond slave of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes, those in the dispersion, be rejoicing.

He calls himself a "*bond slave*" of Jesus Christ. You know, you have to admire that. He had every right to say "I sure have got a right to speak because I lived in the same family as Jesus for all these years. And in that family I was respected. And I want you to know that I have a right to speak."

The heart of the man is definitely seen in “*James, a bond slave of God.*” It is a person who doesn’t care what happens as long as he serves faithfully. A bond slave has no rights. He’s being a servant. He’s functioning in any way possible.

You see him in the Jerusalem counsel in Acts 15 on the conflict of law and grace. You see him in numerous other places mentioned. One of those miraculous times was when Peter was in prison in Acts 12 and the church is praying united that he would be delivered. As you remember, an angel came to the prison that night. Peter was delivered and he ran to the prayer meeting to tell him about it and when he left he said “Oh be sure and tell James.” It’s like “I know I’m out today because James was on his knees during this time as well as church and I want to be sure that you let him know that everything’s fine here.”

James died a martyr’s death. It is said that from his lips came those words: “Father forgive them for they don’t know what they are doing.” Someone saw that he was still alive after being pushed off the ledge of the temple and hit him with a club and that was the end of James.

Well the word “*bond slave*” according to Barclay means obedience, it means humility, it means loyalty. He is that way. James was convinced that Jesus is the Son of God even though he is a half-brother in the flesh.

“To the twelve tribes, those in the dispersion, be rejoicing.”

Speaking to Israel, Christian believers who've been disbursed because of all of the persecution and the things that have happened.

Now, let's jump to verse 2.

v. 2 Deem it pure joy, my brethren, whenever you fall into various kinds of trials; trials of many kinds,

That word to “fall” is the same word that Jesus uses in Luke 10 when He's telling the story of the Good Samaritan. The guy that came down the road, fell into the hands of thieves and was laid there wounded until the Good Samaritan came by.

Robert Johnstone says: “nothing but love sends the troubles that come, however numerous and diversified and severe and long continued troubles may be, our Almighty Father can give strength to count them all joy.”

“Deem it pure joy.” This is so foreign. It's foreign for you to have me standing up here talking like this because you assume that your life is comfortable when you're in a position of God's blessing and it's uncomfortable when you're disobedient and He's trying to show you what you did wrong so you can get right so you can get out and suffer. And to a lot of people that's the limit of God orchestrating circumstances in their lives. “Blessing, I'm really cool, I'm on track and God's pouring out His

blessing. Or man, everything's falling apart. There's sin in my life." That's exactly what the friends told Job in the Old Testament. The Lord made it clear at the end of that scenario that they were not right.

"Deem it pure joy." You and I have known folks who have read this verse, "count it all joy" and they'd say "Well, then, that means that I just found out that I've got cancer so I've got to have a huge grin on my face and say "Thank you for cancer." "Deem it pure." This is pure, humble, ???

You understand that God is faithful, number one. God is sovereign, number two. And He's not been blind-sided by what He allowed to come into your life so you truly can be joyful in anticipation of what's going to happen as a result. That is "pure joy." When you are so in love with Jesus Christ and the passion of your heart is to glorify Him, it doesn't make any difference what God puts into your life. He has some good purpose for it and He is not obligated to tell us why. But every time you ask why just forget it.

He wants to hear from you "What do I need to learn because this has been permitted and allowed in my life?" How can I grow? How can I mature? How can I bear more fruit because this thing happened? Now you can "deem it pure joy." You can know that God loves you so much that he entrusted you with this and this, whatever it is, thorn in the flesh or whatever, God will get greater glory out of that because of what He's allowed. It's our

responsibility to be so hooked up and so in tune with the Lord that we truly can “deem it pure joy” knowing with expectancy that something good is going to happen.

Whenever you fall into various kinds of trials. Peter agrees with this. 1 Peter 4:12: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trials which is to try you. As though some strange thing happened unto to you. But rejoice, inasmuch that you are partakers of Christ’s sufferings that when his glory shall be revealed you can be glad also with exceeding joy!”

For most of us as believers we’ve got to have a Biblical mindset to be able to do this. And you’ve got to understand it. It’s not preached. It’s not taught. And yet James starts right out with it: “Deem it pure joy, my brethren [brothers and sisters in Christ], whenever you fall into various kinds of trials.”

Don’t get unhappy. Don’t get anxious. Don’t criticize God. Call upon Him with Romans 8:28. He’s the God who’s working all things together for good to them that love God and to those who are the called according to His purpose.”

If you’ve come defeated this morning, if you’ve come down, if you become resentful, if you’ve come to the service just really angry at God, how about trying the other tack. Why don’t you just lift your prayer today: “God I love You so much and I’m just so thankful for the gift of life today and God I have been really ticked off at

You. I've been angry. I've been mad. I'm a lousy witness. I'm yelling at my husband and my kids." And on and on you go. Just try that. "God, I made a mistake. I'm sorry. I really want You to be glorified."

Andrew Murray has written some great books. But when he gets to this particular passion he is dealing with the issue. I want you to listen to what he says. This is so good. "First, He brought me here, it is by His Will I am in this difficult place. In that fact I will rest. Next, He will keep me here, in His love, and give me grace to behave as his child. Then He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He intends me to learn and working in me the grace He means to bestow. Last, in His good time He can bring me out again." So, he summarizes it one sentence: "I am here, first by God's appointment; second, in His keeping; third, under His training; and fourth, for His time."

I wrote under it Isaiah 43:10: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; through the rivers, they shall not overflow. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned; neither shall the flames kindle upon you."

God is there in His presence to go with you through that circumstance and He's going to get glory and honor and fruit is going to be born through your life because of the way you respond. You stand against culture, never losing your confidence in God or questioning His processes in making you into the person that You should become.

v. 3 knowing that the testing of your faith is producing endurance (patience).

Perseverance. Those beautiful qualities that people love to see in people, who because of the adversity tend to fall apart, get distant from God. You've gotten closer and you're still glorifying God, you've still got a song in your heart. There's still joy inside as you anticipate how God is going to use even this.

The apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:17 says: "These troubles and sufferings of ours are after all quite small and won't last very long. But this short time of distress will result in God's richest blessing upon us forever and ever so we do not look at what we see down here, the troubles all around us, but we look forward to the joys in heaven which we have not yet seen. The troubles will soon go away but the joys will come to last forever."

Take that to the bank! That is exciting.

These are the things that we know. Now, we act in those in our daily lives and prove God's faithfulness by seeing Him walk us through it.

How do you deal with these kind of circumstances with "pure joy"? This is the way the writer put it:

Dealing with Irritations Constructively: The Oyster

There once was an oyster story I tell,
Who found that sand had got under his shell;
Just one little grain, but it gave him much pain,
For oysters have feelings although they're so plain.
Now, did he berate the working of fate
Which had led him to such a deplorable state?
Did he curse out the Government, call for an election?
No; as he lay on the shelf, he said to himself,
"If I cannot remove it, I'll try to improve it."
So the years rolled by as the years always do,
And he came to his ultimate destiny- stew.
And this small grain of sand which had bothered him so,
Was a beautiful pearl, all richly aglow.
Now this tale has a moral—for isn't it grand
What an oyster can do with a morsel of sand;
What couldn't we do if we'd only begin
With all the things that get under our skin.

(From Parson's Technology)

What we couldn't do if we could not bear testimony and witness of all the stuff that bothers us and hassles us and God's saying: "Learn it. Once you learn it we can get over this." By the way, if your trials have something in common it's probably that you're a slow learner and He's going back because He's wanting to impress you that this is a big enough issue that He's got to deal with it. When He finally sees the silver reflection of His face in the trial as you're sitting in the heat then you're going to move on to other things.

v. 4 But let patience be having its complete work, in order that you may be fully developed and complete, lacking in nothing.

All he's saying is when the going gets tough, the tough get going and you cooperate with what God's doing. And that makes you into a person who is able to bear more fruit for the glory of God because you're responding to the One who's making you more like Christ. So don't today think that we're making promises here in the church that you come to know Christ and He's going to solve all your problems. You're going to come to know Christ and you haven't seen any problems like you're going to see after you become a Christian.

He's going to make you like Jesus and you're going to be so glad with the process of being made like Him because of the joy and the fellowship and the excitement and the expectancy, of all that He's going to do. This is James' desire.

Harry Ironside is an old commentator that has said some great things. When he comes to this passage this is what he says: "This is the time we should look up into the Father's face with confidence knowing that He is working out some purpose in us which could not be rot out in any other way. We who learn to be submissive to whatever God permits, glorifies Him who orders all things according to the counsel of His own will."

What James is asking us to do here is not to get discouraged by the testing and trials because this would be submitting to the plan of Satan but that we would be patiently enduring the testimony, seeking God's purpose. The reason James is concerned that we stick with it through it to the end that we might be fully developed and complete, lacking in nothing. He wants to see us more and more like Christ as he does these believers and not to formulate premature opinions because of losing their homes and having so many things difficult for them at this time.

Annie Johnson Flint has written a great little poetic piece and here are a couple of verses from her poem: "Disappointment His appointment, change one letter that I see that the thwarting of my purpose is God's better choice for me. His appointment must be blessing though it may come in disguise, for the end from the beginning open to His wisdom lies. Disappointment, His appointment, whose the Lord's who loves me best, understands and knows me fully who by faith and love would test for like loving earthly parents He rejoices when He knows that His child accepts unquestioned all that from His wisdom flows."

Here the writer's telling us "be patient. It's going to take some time. Stay where you are and focus on thanksgiving and gratitude for what you have, not what you have lost." Basically stay focused on the Lord.

Now, naturally you're saying how do I do that? Well, the writer knew you were going to say that. Look at verse 5.

v. 5 And if any of you is deficient in wisdom, let him keep on asking from God, [present tense] who is giving to all generously (without reserve) and who does not reproach, and it shall be given him.

I thought of Solomon as he takes the reigns of government from his father David, asking God for wisdom and it delighted the heart of God that he didn't ask for money and wealth and long life but for wisdom to be able to relate to what was happening right then. And God's heart was thrilled. You think His heart is any less thrilled than when you come and you have to be already submissive and broken to do this, but you come and say "You know, God, this thing is so foreign to me. I don't understand. God could You help with the Word? Could You help me with wisdom from You to know how I should handle this so that You'll get glory?"

You see, when you open yourself up to that and you're still before God then He says "I will give wisdom to relate to it." Wisdom will benefit you. Wisdom will benefit others because now you are glorifying God in the midst of this thing that you'd rather not experience. And if you need wisdom, all you have to do is ask, James says, and He's ready to do it. He provides.

So many times in our lives that wonderful gift of wisdom comes to the floor and God is glorified right in the midst of it.

v. 6 But [there's a warning] let him be asking in faith without any doubting, for the one who is doubting is like the surf of the sea moved and tossed by the wind.

The other thing that you've got to have when you come to ask for wisdom is faith. You got to believe that when He gives it it's going to answer the situation and that He's going to get glory, because you don't know what's going to happen to it yet. You can't doubt, you can't waffle. But in faith...

Hebrews 11:6: "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

You can't be going back and forth, thinking one day that all's going great and the next you're doubting whether God's going to do it or not. That hurts Him. And He doesn't provide wisdom for people who waffle like that. Who go from one extreme to the other and blow hot and cold.

Remember Peter? He's the only one that wanted to go water skiing and the Lord kept walking across the water to him in Matthew 14. He got out of the boat and started walking toward the Lord. Then what happened? As long

as he kept his eyes on the Lord he was doing great. But the minute he took his eyes off the Lord and got them on the waves he got scared, started doubting, and “boom!” down he went. Prayed the shortest prayer a guy could ever pray to save his life. “Lord, save me.” And up out of water he comes and goes back in the boat.

You see, you don't live this kind of life blowing hot and cold, getting your eyes on other things and then getting back on the Lord and then trying to figure out what He's trying to do. Come with an honest, genuine heart that's submissive and broken before God. You wouldn't have chosen this trial but you're going to trust a faithful God to deliver you in the midst of it or use it for His glory and in some way to touch people more than anything else could have ever done in the whole wide world.

Don't question God. Trust Him. Understand that He does indeed do things that seem so off the wall to us at times when it hits. But it's always right. He's never been wrong. He's never made a mistake. And He's never been blindsided by something that happened to you where He said “Uh, I didn't mean for that to happen!” He's in complete control.

v. 7 For let not that man be supposing that he shall receive anything from the Lord,

If that's the way you're going to approach Him, it probably won't be an answer.

v. 8 a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

I don't know how a man can serve two masters. You can't go one way and the other. The other thing that happens to you is when you go through a trial the first thing we think of is withdrawal and the bottom line.

Now, the next thing you have a tendency to do is when things get hard and difficult, what are you supposed to do? "Deem it pure joy," knowing that God's in control of it. If you need wisdom to relate to it, what are you supposed to do? You ask for wisdom. You've got to ask for wisdom with faith, believing that God is going to work out and use all this for His glory.

There are a lot of people in the New Testament that will tell you that it's because James was on his knees that God did some marvelous, marvelous things.

v. 9 But let the lowly brother be glorying in his high position;

v.10 but the one who is wealthy, in his humiliation, because as the flower of the grass he shall come to an end.

It's understanding that material things are totally secondary. It's the call of God on your life, it's what He wants to do through you that's the priority and the most

important thing. Don't be settling just for big bottom lines and for success from the world's point of view because that's like a flower that's going to fade and it's going to blow away and you want to live for eternal things.

v.11 For the sun arises with its scorching heat, and the grass dries up, and its flower falls off, and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so also the wealthy person will fade away together with his pursuits (projects, undertakings, investments, holdings).

Then James starts with and he ends with it.

v.12 [Blessed] **Happy** [by the way, that's the same word that you've got in Psalm 1, blessed. It's the same word Jesus used as he opened His ministry on the Sermon on the Mount when he gave us the beatitudes. "Blessed"] **is the man who being tested [that's what we've been talking about] is holding his ground; [he's staying by the stuff, steadfast. Why?] because, having been approved, he shall receive the crown of life, which He promised to those who love Him.**

Now don't put your sheets away. Because the most important part is in that last phrase that you read very fast. Do you understand it? "*To those who love Him.*" James is saying, "You've passed the test when your love is unchanging toward the Lord by what you've gone through."

To qualify with the crown of life at the judgment seat of Christ, you've still got to be passionately in love with Jesus. Friends, that's the bottom line. It's going through all that and loving Jesus more, sweeter as the days go by. You are deeper or more committed to Him today than you were before the thing hit. And you don't understand it all because we see through a glass darkly but then face to face we know in part but then we're going to know even as we're known so it's alright if I don't know. I'm trusting You fully and completely to do Your good work in my life.

It's Job saying "Though he slay me yet will I trust in Him." It's God at work and those who love Him are those who've weathered the storm. They don't feel that God has forsaken them.

In the book of Habakkuk this is the last prayer that he prays and this is the prayer I would like to hear come from your lips today in your heart of hearts. "Even though the fig tree is all destroyed and there is neither blossom left nor fruit, and though the olive crops all fail and the fields lie barren. Even if the flocks die in the fields and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be happy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength and He will give me the speed of the deer and bring me safely over the mountains."
(Habakkuk 3:17-19)

Trust Him. Rejoicing that no matter what He is going to glorify.

LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: When trials come, our attitude should be joyful expectancy.

LESSON #2: The Lord promises wisdom to relate in a right manner.

LESSON #3: Hang on to your confidence in God no matter what.

LESSON #4: His love is unconditional and unchanging.

A Practical Study of JAMES: The Battle of Our Behavior

“Addressing the Tough Issues and Learning to Live It”

Key Verse 1:4 — *“But let patience be having its complete work, in order that you may be fully developed and complete, lacking in nothing.”*

STUDY NUMBER ONE - GROW TALLER THROUGH TESTING — **JAMES 1:1-12**

KEY VERSES 1:2, 3

v. 1 James, a bond slave of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes, those in the dispersion, be rejoicing.

v. 2 Deem it pure joy, my brethren, whenever you fall into various kinds of trials;

v. 3 knowing that the testing of your faith is producing endurance (patience).

v. 4 But let patience be having its complete work, in order that you may be fully developed and complete, lacking in nothing.

v. 5 And if any of you is deficient in wisdom, let him keep on asking from God, who is giving to all generously (without reserve) and who does not reproach, and it shall be given him.

v. 6 But let him be asking in faith without any doubting, for the one who is doubting is like the surf of the sea moved and tossed by the wind.

v. 7 For let not that man be supposing that he shall receive anything from the Lord,

v. 8 a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

v. 9 But let the lowly brother be glorying in his high position;

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v.11 For the sun arises with its scorching heat, and the grass dries up, and its flower falls off, and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so also the wealthy person will fade away together with his pursuits (projects, undertakings, investments, holdings).

v.12 Happy is the man who being tested is holding his ground; because, having been approved, he shall receive the crown of life, which He promised to those who love Him.

NOTES

QUESTIONS:

1. Read James 1:1-12 and in your own words pull out the main thought of this passage.

2. What does James ask us to do in verse 2?

3. What is the result of the “testing” of our faith in verse 3?

4. What are we invited to do in verse 5, while we are going through difficulty?

5. How are we supposed to ask, according to verse 6?

6. Describe the “double-minded man” in verse 8.

7. How is the rich man described in verses 10 & 11?

8. What is the reward for enduring tests in verse 12?

9. Which verse in the study has meant the most to you?

10. What lesson have you learned from this study?

LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: When trials come, our attitude should be joyful expectancy.

LESSON #2: The Lord promises wisdom to relate in a right manner.

LESSON #3: Hang on to your confidence in God no matter what.

LESSON #4: His love is unconditional and unchanging.

ADDITIONAL NOTES: