

## “Faith That Matures Through Trials”

Week 1 - James 1:1-18

January 9, 2021

### Introduction to James

Tim. Pastor. **Pray (hurting church fam).** James 1:1-18.

My favorite days to preach are when we kick off new series. I love it. Getting to jump into a new book of the Bible together. We're going to be in the New Testament book of James for the next 11 weeks.

*Reading Plan - Website + Bulletin. Reading Plan. Each weekend - whole book. 15-20 minutes. 12x by end of series.*

My goal for today is to orient us around what we're going for in this series as well as take us through the first 18 verses of James 1.

#### **Recap of Theme for Year**

If you missed last week's sermon I set up this guiding theme of 2022 for us here at Citizens Church, and that is this → **Following Jesus Together with Grit.** Our driving emphasis that's shaping everything we do this year is built around this idea - that we're locking arm-in-arm together chasing after Jesus even when it gets hard. With tenacity and endurance for the long-haul. **We're going to be a gritty family of disciples to Jesus this year.**

#### **Intro to James**

And I don't know if there's a better book of the Bible to kick off our year and this journey together with in light of this theme of grit than the book of James. **James is a gritty book.**

What I mean by that is that out of all 66 books that make up this larger book that we call the Bible, I would argue there is not a single one more direct, in your face, this is what it means to follow Jesus so get after it even when it's difficult, even when you don't want to, book than James.

And the theme of the entire book is found in its most famous verse:

**2:17 - So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.**

That's James' main concern in the whole book - **is your faith alive or is it dead?** Is your trust and hope and confidence you've placed in Jesus stuck in your head - words you say, beliefs you affirm - or has it made its way into your life.

Now it's important here to address that we're not talking about what Christians have come to label as **legalism**. James is not a legalistic book. Yes, there's 59 commands to obey in 108 verses. Yes there's a ton of "do this, do that, don't do this, don't do that."

But here's what you have to understand → **obedience to God is only legalism if you put it first in the gospel equation.**

Here's what I mean:

**Legalism says: I obey, therefore I'm accepted.**

**The Gospel says: I'm accepted, therefore I obey.**

And this gospel fueled obedience is what James is after in this letter → The gospel is true. Jesus is alive. You believe that. Now does it matter for your life? **Is your faith alive with works, or dead?**

And throughout the letter James is going to return to this theme by addressing - if your faith is alive it'll look like this. This is what living faith looks like. He's got a whole bunch that we're going to tackle over the next 11 weeks.

**Today we'll start with the first one - *Living faith matures through trials.***

### **Mature > Making It**

Let's get into it. James 1:1.

#### **1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.**

This letter was written by James, the half-brother of Jesus. They shared a mother, Mary, but James' father was Joseph and Jesus' father was, you know, God.

One of the most convincing pieces of evidence that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior - is that James, his brother, spent a good portion of his life rejecting Him as God, but then after Jesus is killed on the cross and rises again, James believes. He becomes one of the leaders in the early church in Jerusalem and is eventually killed for preaching the gospel. If the resurrection is not true, you don't let yourself be killed preaching that your brother is God and the only way to be saved. You just don't.

And James is writing to what he calls the dispersion - scattered persecuted Christians, on the run away from their home, worried about dying for the gospel, and this is the very first thing he says to them right out of the gate, verse 2:

#### **2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,**

**"Count it"** - Consider it. James instantly puts the weight of response to our trials onto us. We're going to have to shift and reorient our thinking on this. This is active faith. We have to consider it. Consider it what?

**"All joy"** - Now this is important. What James has in mind here is intensity, not exclusivity. He is not suggesting that we *only* respond to our trials with joy - that would be inappropriate, there is a place for grieving in the Christian life, but part of our response to trials is to be *genuine rejoicing*. As we've defined it before - joy is a pervasive sense of well-being infused with hope because of God's goodness. That's what we are to have in the midst of trials - a rooted sense of hope in God.

**"When you meet trials of various kinds"** - When. Not if. When. Trials are a part of life. You will continually have circumstances and situations in your life that hurt, that are difficult, that stretch you and challenge you and press you. Those are trials. They aren't going away. It's a part of living as sinful, broken people in a sinful, broken world.

#### **3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.**

James says - you know this. You know in life, that when something is tested, pushed, put under stress and strain and trial - that that produces something with them. You don't get growth without trial and pain.

- Running + Working out.
- Vocational development
- Relationships - the best relationships are often the ones that walk through trial together.

The same is true of our faith. The testing of our faith, the trials of our faith produce steadfastness. Endurance. Patience.

**Trial produces grit.**

**4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.**

**Count it all joy when you face trials, because trials lead to steadfastness, and steadfastness leads to maturity.**

**There's a shaping that God wants to do in us to make us more like Christ that He intends to use the trials of our lives to accomplish.**

There is an aspect of our discipleship to Jesus, to growing and maturing and being formed and shaped into the image of Christ that **James says doesn't come *despite* our trials, but *through* our trials.**

But if your life, as we talked about last week, is set up for the sole pursuit of ease, or if you don't expect trials as a part of living as broken people in a broken world, or you don't believe in a good God who can work all things for His glory and our good -

then trials are not something God might use to grow and sanctify and mature you, but rather are something to simply survive.

So if that's your mindset, when you're in a trial, the **only** questions you ask are: How do I endure this, get out of this, when will this end? Which are not bad questions!

But James says living faith does more. Living faith learns to ask → How do I consider this joy? How do I let God do the work He's trying to do in me through this trial? God is more committed to my holiness than my happiness, so that means He's up to something in this trial.

These trials are going to come. The question is - are you going to let them serve you or not?

**Because living faith doesn't just *make* it through trials, it *matures* through trials.**

**Youth Football.** Let me give you a silly example from my life that might help show you what I mean. This is a moment of vulnerability. Ok, I need you to receive me with gentleness.

When I was 10 years old I played one season of youth tackle football.. I was a big kid growing up. Much bigger than your average 10 year old. (that's me...) So when you're the size I was at that age you get told you should play football. Which is fine for most kids, but I've never been like the "let's punch each other and wrestle kid", just not my vibe. But I wanted to try it so in 6th grade I signed up to play for the Aiken Tigers Youth Football Team. Sure enough, was told to play Center. Snaps the ball. That guy.

All good. 8 game season. First 4 games are awesome. Our offensive line is stacked. There's three of us on the offensive line that are head and shoulders above every kid we play. They called us the OGG (Olson, Gore, and Glover). So it's easy. I snap the ball, push over a kid half my size over and over again for an hour. Everything is fine. Don't love football, but don't hate it either.

Until game 5. We play this team, the Southside Bulldogs. Our rivals. And it's the first time there was a kid on the defensive line, not just my size, but bigger than me. They had several of these dudes on their Dline. First real test for the OGG. They played a 3-4 defense. Which means this kid lined up basically face to face with me. We go out, first snap of the game. I snap the ball, blink, and I'm on back with the wind knocked out of me.

Had to come out of the game. I'm over on the sidelines, actually crying. Coach is like - you want to go back in? No way. To play these kids? Not happening. I remember my dad comes down from the stands to talk to me over the fence. My dad

has never really done empathy, his words not mine. I don't really remember what he says but it was something to the effect of - this is a learning opportunity, so stop being a quitter and go play.

Went back out there, and spent the next 60 minutes getting knocked on my butt over and over and over again. I made it through. And then I quit at the end of the season and never played football again.

Gore and Glover had a different response that day. It was hard for them too, don't get me wrong, they weren't ready for it just as much as I wasn't ready for it. But in the face of adversity they rose to the occasion. They took it as a learning opportunity. They said - this is hard, and painful - but we can grow and mature as football players in the midst of it. Stuck it out. Kept playing football.

I just made it through. They say it as an opportunity to mature.

8 years later, I'm a freshman in college. First college football game as a student. Get into the student section. I look down on the field and guess who is warming up as a part of the University of South Carolina Gamecock football team? Gore and Glover.

There is something unique that happens in trials that God uses to shape us and mold us into mature, gritty followers of Jesus. Here's the question: **Are you going to let it?** James puts it on you → **Consider it all joy. Let steadfastness have its full effect.**

**Living faith doesn't just make it through trials, it matures through trials.**

### **How to Remain Steadfast with Joy in Trial**

Question then becomes → **How?** How do we let God do the work He wants to do in us in the midst of our trials?

**How do we mature through trials? James gives us 4 ways.** They're right in the text, we'll hit them fairly quickly with the remainder of our time together this evening.

#### **1. We ask God for Wisdom (v 5-8):**

**5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.**

James goes immediately from telling us the purpose of trials to grow us and shape us into mature, gritty followers of Jesus into a message about asking God for wisdom. This is not by coincidence. The wisdom he has in mind here is directly related to having eyes to see what God is doing in the midst of our trials.

What happens in the midst of our trials, suffering, pain is that we can start to fear.

- We are driven by despair, or anger towards God, others, and our circumstances.
- Our hearts and minds can start shifting inwards to "look out for number one".
- We begin to believe the lies of the enemy - God is not good. He is not with us. He does not care. He is not working.

**We need Godly wisdom.** We need to learn in our trials to pause and ask ourselves and each other → **What is God doing here? We ask it directly to God → Lord, what are you doing in this?**

We grieve, yes. We carry each other's burdens, yes. And part of how we do that as faithful, gritty disciples is to help lift our eyes and each other's eyes up from the immediacy of the situation and onto God remembering - our ultimate hope is not in this being fixed, but in the God who knows all things, holds all things together, and is doing something in and through us in the midst of this.

And so we ask God for wisdom, and we cling to the promise of verse 5 - that to all who ask in faith, God gives wisdom generously without reproach.

- **Meaning, first - He's not angry with our questions in trials.** There's no reproach there for those who ask. He's not frustrated. He's not rolling his eyes going - just trust me and deal with it. God is not frustrated by your seeking of wisdom. He's not frustrated by your questions.
- **Second - he gives wisdom generously.** God's not interested in a hide-and-seek game with His work in our lives. He's not trying to be confusing. He's not trying to withhold. God delights in revealing His will to His people.

**Now, that doesn't mean you're going to get the specific "why" of your suffering right away.** Not the wisdom James is talking about here. "God why am I experiencing this pain?" "Well, I'm trying to make you more patient." That's not a guarantee.

**The wisdom James does say we should expect from God is:**

- (1) clarity on how to live in light of the trial - joyful and hopeful. Grieving yet rejoicing.
- (2) eyes to see that God is doing a bigger sanctifying and maturing work.

In other words - we need wisdom from God to see the "what", not the "why".... and the "what" is that God has not abandoned us, He is still good, He is still working, and He's doing something bigger.

**Jared Wilson - "What if [God's] plan for you is not success but drawing you so near to Him in your dependence, your disappointment, and your devastation that you become more like Christ? The truth is that the Lord may not be committed to our success. But here's the promise in this: He is committed to His. And because of that, He is committed to us becoming more like His Son."**

God - give me wisdom to see that. Give me wisdom on how to live in light of that in this trial.

But then James gives a warning...

**6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.**

Don't ask God for wisdom in trial, and then live in a way that doubts He'll give it. James says if you ask and then doubt you're a double-minded man. What he means by that is you're trying to live with one foot in both worlds - one following God, one doing your own thing.

Being double minded in our trials means → **We ask God for wisdom for our trial in the morning, then run to other idols during the day to fix it.**

That's what it means to be double minded.

- In this financial trial I'm finding my security in God (and secretly in my bank account as well.)
- In this relational trial I'm finding my comfort in the Lord (and in mindless scrolling on social media to feel less alone too.)

James says if you lack wisdom, we ask in faith. We ask, believe, and then ground yourself and wait on the Lord - His wisdom and His kindness to us.

### **We ask God for Wisdom (v 5-8).**

#### **2. We view ourselves rightly (v 9-11):**

**9 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, 10 and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. 11 For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.**

In order to remain steadfast with joy in our trials we must view ourselves rightly. James says that the lowly should boast in their exaltation and the rich in their humiliation.

What James is saying here is that we need a gospel view of ourselves in trials.

The gospel of Jesus both elevates and humiliates. Track with me here.

- **The gospel humiliates.** What I mean by that is that necessary to receiving the gospel is humbling ourselves before God and owning as true some things that in our flesh we'd rather not acknowledge - we are sinful. We are dead in our sin. We are separated from God. We are enemies of God. We cannot save ourselves. Apart from God we are undeserving of any of his blessings, any of His kindness, any of His grace to us. That's James' warning to the rich, to those who have much - be wary of puffing up your chest. Of your pride in what you have, what you've done, who you are. Boast in your humiliation - that the gospel takes you low, in complete dependence on God for everything.
- **The gospel also elevates.** James says to the poor - boast in your exaltation. Why? Because in the gospel Christ comes and raises us up. He seats us with Himself in the heavenly places. He makes those who were God's enemies into His sons and daughters. The gospel elevates us into our new identity in Christ - beloved sons and daughters of God.

So much of my personal heartache when I'm in trial is falling off one of these two sides. I either think of myself more **lowly** than I should and I doubt God's care for me. God doesn't see me. I'm not valuable. He is not with me. I'm not loved. OR I think of myself more **highly** than I ought to and I begin to believe that I am above suffering, I'm above the fall, I'm above the brokenness of the world, my sin and the sin of others.

**But maturity comes from seeing ourselves rightly in the midst of our trial - which comes from going back to the gospel.** In the gospel, we are both worse than we think we are. And more known, accepted, and loved than we could ever dream.

Which grounds us in our trials.

Because in our **gospel humility**, we stop asking - "Why would God let this bad happen?" But rather - "Why does God allow anything good to happen in my life? Anything good is a grace gift from Him that I am undeserving of. Beginning with my salvation and everything thereafter. It's all undeserved." I deserve none of God's grace and gifts to me. It's all a gift from Him.

But **then I boast in my gospel exaltation**, which is the work of Christ, we remember - God cherishes me. He cares for me. He adores me. So in the midst of this trial He has not forgotten me, abandoned me, left me, deserted me. He is with me and He cares for me and offers me rest and peace in the midst of it.

**We ask God for Wisdom (v 5-8).**

**We view ourselves rightly (v 9-11).**

### **3. We live for God's Reward (v 12)**

**12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.**

James circles back to his original point of verses 2-4 - admonishing us to remain steadfast under trial. And he says if we do so that we are blessed, because there is promised to us a crown of life. It's the same crown the apostle Paul references in 1 Corinthians 9 where he talks about running the race of the Christian life to receive an imperishable wreath.

The crown of life, the reward at the end of the battle that is life → **It's life forever in perfect joy and holiness with God**  
→ It is a gift of honor given by the king of the universe to those who keep faith in the midst of suffering and trial and testing. Enjoyment of God forever. Him speaking over us - "Well done good and faithful servant."

That's what a living, maturing faith keeps its eyes fixed on in the midst of trial → A day is coming when we'll be with Jesus and it will all be worth it.

**Korean Pentecost.** I just finished a book this week called *The Korean Pentecost*. It's a biography of missionaries in Korea in the early 1900s. (\*Side note - if you ever need your faith stirred by the Spirit, read a biography of a missionary.). The book is in two parts. The first part is about how a missionary named William Blair helped lead an incredible revival in Korea in the early 1900s and how the gospel went from a couple hundred to 2 million people in the course of 30 years.

The second part of the book is about his son Bruce, who also became a missionary in Korea. However for Bruce, it was not a ministry of revival but of suffering. In 1910 Japan took over Korea and one of the laws they implemented was that before the church could start their worship service worshipping Jesus, they had to offer sacrifices on a shrine to the Japanese gods. About half the church in Korea obliged, and half didn't. For the half that didn't it began about 40 years of intense suffering and persecution at the hands of the Japanese government.

The author then goes into detail about the imprisonments and torture and death facing these Koreans. They used to take bamboo rods and shove them between their fingers and fingernails. They would put them in cages for weeks that were too small to stand up or lay down. Give them the bare survival minimum of food and water. And day after day lay before them a shrine with the simple offer - make a sacrifice to our gods and we will let you go.

And in response to these trials, this suffering, the Korean church developed a battle cry. It was based out of Matthew 24:13 and in Korean it was the phrase **"Gut Kajee!" - "To the end."**

And as they would be led to that day's torture, or even near the end of the conflict their executions, they would shout to each other → Gut Kajee. Gut Kajee. To the end. To the end.

On the one hand it was a call to courage - be faithful to the end. Stay true to Jesus through the trial to the end.

But in another sense, it was a reminder of a promise - That Jesus would be faithful Gut Kajee. Jesus is faithful to the end.

Trial forces our heads down to what's right here, right now, right in front of us. James says → Look forward in your trials. Look ahead to what is to come.

You see, the deep desire we have in the midst of our trials to experience reprieve from the pain, it is a good desire. We just have to look past the immediate fix and look to the future. A future James says is coming for those who endure - the crown of life forever with Jesus.

**There is hope at the end of our trial - a promised crown. The ultimate goal for those who trust in Jesus is not freedom from pain and suffering here in this life....It's the crown of life with Jesus forever.**

The promise of God is that one day not only will **your** trial cease, but **all** trials will cease when Christ returns and makes all things new.

**For all who love God and trust in Him - suffering is not the end of the story!**

Jesus is faithful to the end and a crown of life is coming.

And that's James's last call.

#### **4. We trust in God's Character (v 13-18)**

**13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.**

**16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. 18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.**

Let me break this down for us. Look at v18. James says:

- God, **out of his own will** - no one coerced Him. Forced Him. Convinced Him. God chose to...
- **Bring us forth** - in the original Greek it's the same term for giving birth. God, on His own, decided to bring us new birth, new life.
- How? **By the word of truth**. That is the gospel. That is the word of truth in the book of James - the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Why? **That we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures** - meaning that we would be the first of his whole creation to experience redemption. That one day God is going to redeem and restore all things but He's starting with us, the firstfruits, the first of the harvest. He is saving and redeeming us.

**So walk these verses backwards, see how powerful this is:**

- Because God has saved us and redeemed us by the power of the gospel...(v 18)
- And He does not shift or change. There is no variation to Him. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (v 17)
- And in that sameness He is a good father who gives good gifts to his children (v 17)
- Then do not be deceived in the midst of your pain to think he is not good or has no purposes for the trial (v 13-16)

In other words → **Since God has saved us from our sin, he will see us through our sorrow.**

That's how we remain steadfast in trial → we trust the character of God! We trust His hand. We know God can bring redemption out of our trial right now.



## **GOSPEL**

**Why? Because God used the greatest trial and suffering on earth to bring about the greatest redemption in history.**

The death of Jesus - his trial of pain, suffering, and death. Jesus goes to the cross, He takes our sin, the Father turns His face away from the Son - complete physical, spiritual, emotionally, mental agony. The greatest tragedy in history. The greatest trial there ever was or will be - the Son of God dies. And yet God uses the greatest of trials to bring the greatest redemption - forgiveness of sins, salvation to the world, redemption of souls.

And He doesn't change. He only gives good gifts. That same God is the one working out His purposes in our trials. With us as we endure. Holding us fast to the end. Maturing us through the trial.

So maturing faith says - alright God, you're in control, I'm not. You're good. You're faithful. I know that because of the cross. I know that because Jesus suffered for my sin, in my place. I know that because your love for me paid the ultimate price so I could be forgiven, and know you, and be in a relationship with you.

You were good in that, you'll be good in this. And so I trust you.

**In Christ, I am accepted and embraced and loved by you → Therefore I obey you. And obedience here says I count it all joy in trial because I know you're maturing me.**

So this trial is not something I'm just going to make it through.

Might be hard. Might take longer than I want. Might be more painful than I want. Might not get resolved like I want, when I want, but you're still good.

**You've saved me, and you'll see me through my sorrow.**

### **In our trials...**

- **We look up** - we ask God for wisdom. God what are you doing? Help me to see you in the midst of this.
- **We look in** - Who am I in light of the gospel? Desperately needy and infinitely loved. How does that change how I live in my trial?
- **We look forward** - There is a crown of life promised for those who remain steadfast. For those who love Christ a new day is coming.
- **We look backward** - God was faithful in my salvation. He's been faithful in my life. He has not failed me yet, He will not fail me now.

**Living faith matures through trials.**

**Pray. Communion.**