

New series on James

James 1:1 - 8 – Joy in character building

BI Testing your faith with joy

Introduction

A practical and pastoral book. Probably James' sermon notes

Title = Count it all joy and wisdom prayer

Joy in character building 1 – 4

Read verse 1

1. What do you know about Jesus' half brother James? (See Matthew 13:35, John 7:2-9, Acts 1:14 and 15:13 – 21).
2. What must have changed for James to be turned from scoffer to believer?
3. Who is the letter addressed to or who are the 12 tribes?

Read Verse 2

1. How do you apply this command?
2. Do we fall into the trap of thanking God FOR trials rather than thanking him for entrusting us with trials?
3. Sisters included in the Greek word *adelphoi* rendered here as 'my brothers'. How do we see ourselves included in being recipients of this letter?

Read Verses 3 – 4

1. What is the reason James gives for not allowing our joy to be robbed?
2. In what ways were the recipients of James' letter being tested? (See 2: 6-7, and then 4:1 – 3, 5:14, 1:9-11, 2:1-7, 5:1 – 6)
3. What trials and testings are you going through – or have been through recently? How have they been seen as character building?
4. Whose character are we being formed into?
5. What does steadfast mean?
6. What is the goal of steadfastness?
7. Does the perfection and completeness here seem a little daunting? How do we use the word perfect in other fields or activities?

5 – 8 Wisdom through steadfast faith

Read verse 5 – 8

1. What is the link word between verses 4 and 5? What might the one thing they lack be?
2. How would you answer the 3 questions James tackles: -
3. What does the Bible mean by wisdom? (See Luke 5:52, Matthew 13:54, Acts 7:22, Moses and Solomon (Matt. 12:2 & 1 Kings 3:18 – 28) Then times of trial Luke 21:15 – 1 Corinthians 1:21.)
4. What does James say about God? What does James say about God in verse 5
5. What does he teach about prayer? In verses 6 – 7? What is his challenge to faith here?

Application

How are you going to stop trials of various kinds rob you of your joy?

Prayer

Lord help us in our trials and difficulties to see your hand at building the character of Jesus in us. Give us wisdom to know the right path to take in such trials.

James 1:1 – 8 St John's 7.07.25

At the start of our journey through James we are introduced to a very practical book and to a warm pastoral content. It seems the book is probably taken from a series of sermons and therefore the structure is more in the style of Proverbs than say addressing a particular problem or church community.

It also throws out challenges which is like a sermon – “do not be deceived (1:16)”. “Do you want to be shown?” (2:20) or “Know this,” (1:19). But there is a warm pastoral tone too – Frequent references to Brothers (and therefore sisters) My beloved brothers – (1:16) (and more references – 1:19, 2:1 & 5, 14, 5:7 and 9)

Joy in character building 1 – 4 (2 parts this morning testing for character building and Wisdom through steadfast faith)

The letter starts like most NT letters with a signature: - Love from James!

1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Most scholars believe the letter is written by Jesus' half-brother and a prominent leader in the Jerusalem church. James is mentioned in Matthew 13:35 as a brother of Jesus.

He was probably one of the brothers mentioned in John 7:2 – 9 who scoffed at Jesus and didn't believe in Him. Plainly a great transformation came over James.

We know he was with the disciples in the upper room after Jesus ascended to heaven (Acts 1:14), and he gave a stirring speech at the great Jerusalem council (Acts 15:13 – 21). The letter was written around AD 49 probably from Jerusalem.

Who is the letter to?

**To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion:
Greetings.**

Although the 12 tribal divisions ceased to function as geopolitical units up until 722 BC, Biblical writers continued to use this designation, as a name for Israel. The prophets used this term to refer to the future restored people of God (e.g. Ezekiel 47:13 – Isaiah 49:6 etc.)

Scottish people to this day keep their ancestral tribes. My Dad was very proud that his mother was a MacPherson!

The 12 tribes – or the Jews - were scattered among the nations. These are Jews living outside of Israel – the persecution of the church in Jerusalem may well have already seen a start of fleeing from persecution.

Here are God's people under the new covenant who were scattered from their true homeland until God's promises come to fruition. (Jas.5:7 – 8)

Testing of Your Faith with joy

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

Does a little demon whisper in your ear – “I wish the Holy Spirit hadn’t included this verse in the Bible?”

I mean can we count it all joy when you are going under the pump? NIV goes even further: **Consider it pure joy,!!** The commentaries go even further than that “consider it nothing but joy – or consider it supreme joy!!

What is James saying here? Is he trotting out the old, misguided mantra - hallelujah anyway? Is he asking us to praise God **FOR** the trials of various kinds?

We might thank God for **entrusting** us with trials, but he does not want us to thank him **FOR** them. James is referring to an extended feeling of well being rather than an immediate feeling of happiness or pleasure.

Pastor Richard Wurmbrand, despite enduring severe persecution and torture during his 14 years in a Romanian Communist prison, maintained a deep sense of joy rooted in his faith in Christ. He saw his suffering as a means to glorify God and an opportunity to share the gospel, even with his persecutors.

His experiences demonstrate that true joy can be found even amidst unimaginable hardship, not as a result of circumstances but as a result of a deep, abiding faith in God.

James also includes the warm inclusion of “my brothers” in his challenge.

² Count it all joy, my brothers - In New Testament usage, depending on the context, the plural Greek word *adelphoi* (translated “brothers”) may refer either to *brothers* or to *brothers and sisters*; as also in verses 16 & 19

And now for the reason for not allowing the pure joy to be robbed from our hearts verses 3 to 4

³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

How were the recipients of this letter being tested? Examples of testing in this letter: are: -

Dragged into court verses 2:6-7

Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honourable name by which you were called?

Quarrels and fights and wrong motives (4:1 – 3) Sickness (5:14), poverty (1:9-11, 2:1 – 7; 5:1-6.)

All these tests challenge faith – from simple anguish – how does God allow this to happen to me to oppression – how does God allow persecution of Christians in oppressive regimes.

As we hang on to joy in these trials – **the joy of the Lord being our strength (Nehemiah 8:10)** This is an opportunity to remind ourselves that strength comes from Him and this strength builds character – steadfastness – perseverance – endurance.

The challenge is to use the suffering to mould the character of Jesus in us. Here is the long game - **And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.**

What a goal – perfection- a word for both the ultimate and the near future. How daunting! The Lord Jesus used the same word when he said we are to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48).

This is a word used in the arts and crafts word – it might be said I am trying too perfect my water-colour skills. The same might apply to brick laying skills or to those of a Master joiner.

Sporting achievements are some times described as the perfect run – jump – shot or race.

Now we know that this is ever our present target, we also know that it can only be our experience when we see Jesus and shall be like Him (1 John 3:2). The pathway there James tells us is trials and testings.

Perfection here means complete – possessing every part that which goes to making up the complete whole. He repeats this in a negative way – lacking in nothing.

Verses 5 – 8 Wisdom through steadfast faith

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

At first sight, James seems to have jumped to a whole new subject leaving the testing part hanging in the air! And it could be that if these are just his sermon notes some of the link thoughts are lost.

BUT there is a link and it comes in the word lack – lacking nothing in verse 4 and if any of you lacks...verse 5

So the preacher says, “Look forward to the day when you stand complete, lacking in nothing. But at the present time I am sure there is one thing that you know you lack.”

Perhaps this testing does not connect with your life at the moment which consists of such a tangle of circumstances – it just seems a purposeless mess. A sudden catastrophe at work – a sudden diagnosis – a squabble that is turning into a major row – a bereavement.....

The last thing it looks like is a stepping stone to maturity. In a word, you need wisdom – the type of wisdom that sees all life serving the purposes of the Lord.

Maybe you are at a cross-roads that it does not seem either easy or plain which way to turn. Yes you accept that the Lord is preparing you to persevere, you do not know which way to choose discerning the Lord's way forward for you.

Wisdom from God is needed. 3 Questions James answers: -

1. What does the Bible mean by wisdom?
2. What does James say here about God?
3. What does he teach about prayer?

The Lord Jesus grew in wisdom (Luke 2:52) and during his ministry people marvelled at his wisdom , wondering where he got it from. (Matt.13:54).

Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians (Acts7:22).

These examples of wisdom are general in scope. Moses was an educated man. Jesus impressed people with his learning. BUT from other references in the Bible the word *Sophia* wisdom is deeper than this.

The wisdom of Solomon (Matt. 12:42 – 1 Kings 3:16 – 28) was a practical, forensic wisdom. It was his ability to apply what he knew to the problems of life

The Lord Jesus promised his disciples that in times of trial they would be given words and wisdom that none of their adversaries would be able to resist or contradict. (Luke 21:15). As an aside this scripture is sometimes grossly misinterpreted as preachers having no need to prepare for their teaching!

Stephen had this gift .

A different side to wisdom is given in 1 Corinthians 1:21 where it is contrasted with worldly wisdom.

This is the wisdom James is linking verse 5 back to verses 2 – 4. The wise person will be able to see life as James has pictured it in verses 2-4. Able to make personal decisions in life's pathway that lead to progress towards maturity. This is the gift of wisdom from God.

The acquisition of this gift is very simple - **⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.** Yes it is as simple as asking for it and God will give it.

James links his simple direct faith to his doctrine of God. He teaches us that God's nature is to give – the literal translation in verse 5 is “let him ask from the giving God.”

This is an aspect of God's nature that is always true. Similar aspects are that he is gracious – always – consistently so too is this aspect – he is always giving infinitely.

So in our prayers – God never says “Come back tomorrow – perhaps then I will be the giving God!” Now giving is not the whole truth about God but it is ceaselessly true. He is more than giving, but he is always giving.

James widens the application - **who gives generously to all without reproach** Such is the bounty and generosity of God. He has no earthly limitations – he gives to all. Such is his character – he gives selflessly.

To complete this section James turns from the character of God to the desires character of the intercessor – the nature of our prayer: verse 6 – 8

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

Once again we can be thankful of James’ direct writing style – it is simple and replete with examples of what he means. Later in the letter he will write “You do not have, because you do not ask.” (4:2)

Alec Motyer in his commentary on James at this point writes: -

“Do we want to go forward with God? Are we wholeheartedly committed to his way of seeing things and his ambitions for the future? ... OR

Are we keeping a door open for the world? Are we trying to have a foot in in each camp? God’s mind is clear but are we double-minded?

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.

The faith challenge James is throwing out is confidence that God will give what we ask for. If not we are as restless as a wave of the sea – adrift – driven every which way – tossed by the wind.

Skua II

One of the supreme acts of generosity my dad showed me was to gift me in a half share in a 12 foot clinker built gaff rigged sailing dinghy called Skua II.

Sailing adventure story

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

It is a fearful thing to be driven and tossed at sea!

Application

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

We might thank God for **entrusting** us with trials, but he does not want us to thank him **FOR** them. James is referring to an extended feeling of well being rather than an immediate feeling of happiness or pleasure.

Don't allow the storms of life take away your joy - for **the joy of the Lord is your strength Nehemiah 12:8**

Allow the Lord to use the hardships of life to form the character of Jesus in us. - **And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing**

In seeking guidance as to how to handle the hardships ⁵ **If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him**