

James 1:1-8 Growing Through Trials

5/11/2025

Scripture reading: Heb 5:5-11

Do you feel like life is out of control and there are more problems than answers? Are your problems, sorrows, and grief that are common to all people worse because of your relationship to the Lord of all? If you answered yes to either of these questions, then God has a message for you in His book. The Bible has clear instructions for those suffering. As Christians, we can have a full, satisfying, and blessed life, but we are guaranteed that it isn't always going to be easy. Jesus came to earth, suffered, and died for us. He is the ultimate example of the suffering servant. All of the disciples suffered during their lives and then most were martyred. They were spreading the gospel in opposition to Satan and suffered his wrath. As children of God, we are enemies of Satan and we will endure hardship. Hardship comes because we are living in a corrupt world and hardship comes because we belong to Jesus.

As we study the book of James, we will see that he is addressing people who were also under persecution and were suffering. James starts his letter by addressing the issue head-on. He addresses our attitude, actions, and relationship with the Lord.

Before we dig into the book, here is a little bit of context about James and the book that he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

James is the half-brother of Jesus who was converted after Jesus rose. He was not an apostle. His name is the Greek version of the name Jacob. He appears in the book of Acts as he spoke at the Jerusalem Council where the discussion was had about whether it was proper to evangelize the Gentiles. James was the leader of the church in Jerusalem, and Paul considered him to be one of the pillars of the church (Gal 2:9). James was recognized as a righteous man and as a result, he became known as "The Just." He was martyred in AD 62.

The book of James may be the oldest in the New Testament. It may appear to many that it is a collection of unrelated items, but in actuality, it is written in a Hebrew style and utilizes Hebrew thought patterns not familiar to many contemporary Christians. In it, a series of topics are discussed that have a relationship to each other but are written side by side without explicitly relating them. It is up to the reader to connect the thoughts.

The topics addressed in the book include: temptations, hearing and doing the Word of God, respect of persons, faith and works, dangers of the tongue, true and false wisdom, worldliness, God and business, social injustice, patience and prayer, and restoration of backsliders. Clearly, he presents a broad cross-section of subjects for everyday life.

James 1:1-8 "James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings. My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various

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trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." - NKJV

As with nearly everything in life, we have a choice in how we respond to various events. We will see that a portion of James' message is that during difficult times we should respond positively and ask in faith for Wisdom. Life can be cruel and difficult, but as Children of God, we have the Lord as a guide to get us through and to raise us up to be more like Him.

James 1:1 "James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings."

In comparison to Paul's letters where he expands the greeting to give them a distinctive Christian flavor, James' greeting is much more compact and is more in keeping with the Greek style.

His direct identity in the book is simply "James" with the identification that he is a "bondservant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ." Think for a moment of how people would react today if instead of using the much overused and maligned designation of "Christian," if we identified ourselves as "servants or slaves of Jesus Christ." People would hear the Lord's name, our acknowledgement of His kingship, and the door would probably more often be opened to discussion.

Since James is the half-brother of Jesus, why would he not identify himself that way? It was probably because his authority to write this letter came not from that fact, or the fact he was an apostle like Paul, because he was not, but rather because of his spiritual relationship with the Lord. All who are the Lord's children are His bondservants as we were all bought for a price and have been accepted into His family. James was clearly called by God to write the letter and subsequently followed the Holy Spirit in obedience.

"God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" - this is the only place that Jesus' title appears this way as a full description. The term Lord is equal to the Jewish idea of Messiah denoting the deliverer/King that was expected by the Jews. Christ is the anointed one. In Peter's sermon at Pentecost, he stated: Acts 2:36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

James' letter is literally to the 12 tribes of the diaspora (or scattered people). The 12 tribes are the people descended from the 12 patriarchs who made up historical Israel. During the first

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century, diaspora was a technical term meaning all the nations outside of Palestine where the Jewish people had gone to live.

Greetings - χαίρω chairein - literally joy, "rejoice and be glad" or "thrive and be well."

James 1:2–3 "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience."

At this point, a normal Greek letter would have expressed appreciation for the readers by way of a blessing or well-wish. James dispenses with that and launches directly into his message.

James' letter starts off talking about "various trials," and that preeminence in the letter suggests it is the main theme for which he is writing.

Much like Paul and Peter, James is telling the people that God has a purpose for the tough times that they are experiencing, and it is their duty to respond correctly.

Paul stated in Romans 5:3–4 "And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope."

Peter stated the following in 1 Peter 1:6–7 "... though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,"

My brethren - This is James' favorite address to his readers. Both Christians and pagans used this address to describe fellow members of the same religion. Also, it was broadened to include both men and women, so all are united under that religion. Today, it gets used by many groups that have no relationship to faith.

count it all joy - this could also be rendered "pure joy." This is suggesting intensity, not exclusivity. Said differently, the revelation of the event should be counted as an occasion for rejoicing, but that does not necessarily make it the only reaction we can or will have. We are not commanded in the Bible never to be saddened by difficulties or events.

when you fall into various trials - the word for trial can mean either outward "testing" or inward enticement to sin ("tempting"). It is clear from the context that James is talking about the former, outward testing.

James' letter is congruent with many other scriptures in the Bible. Here is a sample of a few of them:

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Matthew 5:11–12 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Acts 5:41 "So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name."

Romans 5:3 "And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;"

So, what trials were the recipients of the letter experiencing? Poverty was one of them. James' letter has multiple references to poverty. Religious persecution and exploiting Christians were mentioned, but James broadened his scope to include: sickness, loneliness, bereavement, and disappointment.

knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience - the word translated patience is ὑπομένω (hupomeno) - its meaning is broader. It includes the ideas of steadfastness, endurance, and fortitude. Paul and the writer of Hebrews express similar ideas:

2 Thessalonians 1:4 "so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure,"

Hebrews 12:1 "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,"

The etymology of the word for patience suggests a person successfully carrying a heavy load for a long time.

James 1:4 "But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."

This patience, perseverance, and endurance are not the end goal. The goal is to become more like Jesus. James is saying we will be growing toward being perfect, complete, and lacking nothing. Nothing short of complete moral integrity will satisfy God who is Himself holy, righteous, and completely set apart from sin. We are to be growing more like Him. He is refining us in the fire and removing the dross.

The word here for "perfect" for the Hebrew mind, steeped in Hebrew writing, would mean "mature" spiritually. An example is Genesis 6:9 "This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God."

When speaking about completeness and lacking nothing, it is referring to Christians who respond with confidence in God and determination to endure. It includes a whole Christian

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character that lacks nothing in virtues that define God's character. Again, we are growing closer to being like Jesus.

James 1:5 "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him."

There is a Greek conjunction that is not translated in most English Bibles that helps to connect this verse to the previous ones. It is (de) and means "now" or even "but." This verse is a continuation of the previous line of thought.

Wisdom is an important part of our Christian life. With it, the godly can both discern and carry out the will of God. It therefore keeps the person from behavior that is contrary to the will of God.

Wisdom coming from God is a widespread Old Testament teaching that is familiar to Jewish readers. Proverbs, the book whose theme is wisdom, makes the claim directly: Proverbs 2:6 "For the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding."

In a more contemporary context, James was clearly aware of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount where He stated the following: Matthew 7:7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." Jesus was speaking about God providing liberally. There are no bounds to an infinite Lord and God.

Scripture is clear that God will never require anything from us that is above our strength. He is ready to help us and provide what we need when we follow His command and humble ourselves to seek His guidance.

James 1:6 "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind."

This verse is broadly misused. James is speaking directly about wisdom. It is not the universal verse to ask for anything and God will provide it.

James is talking about faith in action. It states we are to ask in faith. Faith counts before God. James is saying pray steadfastly, without doubt. Jesus said a very similar thing in His parable about the cursed fig tree: Matthew 21:21–22 "So Jesus answered and said to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, "Be removed and be cast into the sea," it will be done. And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.'"

Jesus' statement is broader than James'. Our faith in the Lord is effective and active.

James 1:7–8 "For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

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"that man" or that person is derogatory language speaking about the doubter.

should not expect anything, faith is required. The verse: James 4:2b "... Yet you do not have because you do not ask" is not enough. You need to ask with faith:

Matthew 21:22 "And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

Mark 11:24 "Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them."

The Bible has a concept of an undivided heart or whole heart: Psalm 119:2 "Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, Who seek Him with the whole heart!"

James is making a strong point in the Greek. He has effectively created a word that means "double souled." This is translated double-minded and is referring to someone who cannot make up their mind and spiritually is not convinced that the Lord can and will provide. One theologian called it "spiritual schizophrenia."

The message here is clear. Suffering comes for a reason and it is for our benefit. We must realize that God has a plan for us, and part of it is to refine us to be more like Him. We should rejoice that we are His and He cares enough for us to make us more like Him. However, we should also understand that we are not to bear the load ourselves. He will help us through whatever befalls us, if we follow Him, have faith in Him, and humble ourselves to ask Him for wisdom and support.