



FAITH AND GROWTH

James Lesson 2: James 1:2-27

MEMORIZE THE TRUTH

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

JAMES 1:2-4 - How to Be Steadfast in Trials

1. What attitude did James urge believers to have when they face life's various trials?
2. What benefits result from this attitude?
3. What do you think steadfastness looks like in practice? Give a specific example, if you can.

JAMES 1:5-11 - Pursuing Wisdom

4. What did James say to ask for during life's trials?
5. How did James describe the person who doubts that God will be generous in giving wisdom?
6. What perspective did James encourage poor and wealthy Christians to have about their financial status?

LEARN THE TRUTH

Nothing tests our faith like trials. We may say we believe God is good and loving, but when we experience suffering and difficult times, how do we respond? What do we do? That's where wisdom comes in. Wisdom helps us see from God's perspective. It helps us make sense of what happens to us and others. What are you struggling to understand today? Follow James's instructions: Ask God for wisdom. Plan to tell your small group what He showed you and how you responded.

JAMES 1:12-18 - Understanding Temptation

7. What did James want his readers to know about God's character (1:13, 17)?
8. From your observations, what excuses do people use for giving in to temptation?

9. What did James identify as the true source of temptation?

JAMES 1:19-25 - Faith's Conduct

10. What attitudes and actions does this passage encourage?

11. What attitudes and actions does this passage discourage?

12. What is dangerous about only hearing the Word of God and not doing what it says?

13. We often think of laws restricting our freedom, but James referred to “the perfect law, the law of liberty.” How do you think freedom can come from this law?

JAMES 1:26-27 - True Religion

14. What examples of genuine religion in action do you see in these verses?

15. Why do you think “orphans and widows” need special attention?

16. James wanted his readers to keep themselves free from the corruption of the world. What are some ways the world can corrupt a person who is trying to follow Christ?

APPLY THE TRUTH

Can you think of a time when you applied God's Word to your life and it set you free and blessed you (see James 1:25)? Share that story this week with someone who is struggling with applying God's Word to some area of life. Your experience can encourage that person to persevere and be blessed. Plan to share with your small group about how this person responded to your story.



LEARN MORE

FAITH AND GROWTH

James 1:2-27

How to Stand a Trial

James knew his readers were hurting. When persecution drove them from their homeland, many of them had to start over as tenant farmers or unskilled laborers. In addition, they faced common trials such as illness, loss, loneliness, disappointment, and temptation.

James offered an unexpected perspective about these trials. He wrote, "Count it all joy." The word he used for "count" is an accounting term. When a bookkeeper puts items in either the loss column or the profit column, that person is deciding what value to place on each item. Many of us would want to count your trials as a loss. James, however, claimed trials should go in the profit column. They were a reason for joy.

Think about the inevitability of trials for God's people. Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation" (John 16:33). Jesus also said, however, that He has overcome the world and sent His Spirit to help us overcome it too. God is with us in our difficult times. He promises that we will one day be "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." We mature because of trials, not in spite of them.

One reason we rejoice in trials is that they produce steadfastness and endurance. Being steadfast allows us to stay calm and consistent in the most difficult situations. James encouraged believers that as they continued in the work of enduring, they would become "perfect and complete."

Until we become perfect and complete, however, we may feel as if we live in a stormy sea. We can stay calm and steady among the waves and wind, or we can be tossed about. The difference lies in how we respond to the invitation: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God." When we ask and trust in His ability and willingness to give, we receive wisdom.

Think about God as a giver. When James wrote, "Ask God, who gives generously," he literally wrote, "ask from the giving God." Do you view God as the giving God or as the withholding God? What we believe about God's character has enormous impact on how we pray. For the next week, try beginning your prayers with "Dear giving God ..." It can change how you pray from being tossed-about and unstable to one who asks in faith and receives abundantly.

Riches and Poverty

Next, James turned to a specific trial: poverty. He encouraged the poor to recognize their standing in God's sight and boast about it. Even the poorest believers will receive an eternal inheritance.

The rich face trials as well. Wealth and ease can cause God's people to forget Him and to place their confidence in their own abilities to take care of themselves (see Deuteronomy 8:13-14; Psalm 62:10). The pursuit of riches can strangle the desire to know God (see Mark 4:19) which makes us vulnerable to temptation (see 1 Timothy 6:9). No wonder James urged the rich to be humble.

Trials and Temptations

James continued his discussion about remaining steadfast, even when temptations test our faith. Temptation comes to us in different ways. The enemy may directly assault us. But more often temptation comes through the everyday tests and trials we face. Each test and trial creates an opportunity to prove our faith. God never tempts us to sin. The enemy, on the other hand, does tempt us with the purpose of destroying our faith. But when we persevere with God, the outcome will be good.

Every trial brings temptation. For example, when we are mistreated, it is much easier to be angry and seek revenge than it is to love our enemies. Or poverty could tempt us to seek dishonest ways to increase our income. Temptation does not have to result in sin, however. Temptation occurs when we want to follow our own desires instead of what we know is God's will. We are tempted when we think our lives need to go the way we think they should. James compared the steps in temptation to the steps of giving birth. When desire gives in to (rather than rejects) a temptation, it gives birth to sinful actions. Sinful actions then give birth to death (see Romans 6:23).

Some Christians grow discouraged because they continue to experience temptation. They fear it means something is lacking in their relationship with God. Yet temptation will be the experience of every believer. It was even Christ's experience (see Hebrews 2:18). The measure of spiritual maturity is not how rarely we are tempted, but how rarely we give in to temptation.

James then returned to the subject of the nature of God. Far from being the author of temptation, God is perfect, pure, and full of light. He is entirely dependable. There is no inconsistency between His actions and His character. That means that God can only give good, beneficial gifts to His children.

Faith's Conduct

Joy in the face of trials is one way to express faith. Another way to express faith is by doing what God says. For example, believers are to be "quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." As we give thought to our words, we will be less likely to erupt in anger (or stir up anger in others), in part because we are taking time to listen to the other person.

Verse 21 begins with the word "therefore" that seems to refer back to "the word of truth" in verse 18. If we are to stay steadfast in trials, resist temptation, and become careful speakers and listeners, we need to receive God's Word like the soil receives a seed. That soil needs regular weeding out of "filthiness and rampant wickedness" so the seed of the Word can grow. As we weed the soil, we need to enrich it with "meekness." This is an attitude of accepting God's teaching rather than resisting it.

Receiving God's Word has another aspect: We are to do what it says and not just hear what it says. When we hear the message without applying it, we lie to ourselves. When we receive the Word and do what it says, the result is a visibly different life. Our conduct is compassionate toward those who are afflicted. Our speech is careful and controlled. Our character is not corrupted by the evil influence of the world.

PERSONALIZE THE TRUTH

Let's obey James's opening challenge to "count it all joy" and be accountants for a moment. Write a phrase that describes a current or recent difficult time in your life—perhaps "long illness," "job loss," or "troubled relationship." Now make two columns: Profit and Loss. What are the negatives you've experienced in this trial? Put those in the loss column. In the profit column, list any reasons for joy you discovered in your trial—perhaps your faith was strengthened, a relationship grew deeper, or your testimony of God's faithfulness helped another person. Give God thanks for the joy He has added to your life even in difficult times.