## **James: Faith & Works**

**Week 1** - Testing & Persevering

**Big Idea**: The testing of our faith through trials, adversity, suffering, etc… produces in us a steadfast spirit and perseverance. And perseverance is an invaluable characteristic of those who follow Christ.

**Prayer**: *“Lord Jesus please give us the strength to endure, to persist, and to thrive throughout the various trials and sufferings of this life. And thank you that at the end of it all, we’ll receive the greatest promise of hope… An eternity with you.”*

**Scripture**: James 1:2-12, 2 Timothy 3:12

(All scripture quoted comes from the ESV unless otherwise noted)

### Introduction

Today, we begin an amazing 5 week series through the New Testament book of James. As many of you have probably read before, the book of James is well known for its emphasis and teaching on both *faith* and *works.* Which by no great coincidence is the title of our series.

The book of James is believed to be the earliest of all books written in the New Testament. It’s author, James, was the half-brother of Jesus and the pastor/leader/elder of the church in Jerusalem. Also, significant to our series is the intense persecution and adversity this early church faced. James is not writing as a disconnected observer but rather as an active participant in the lessons of faith and perseverance that he encourages through his letter.

“James the just,” as he was affectionately referred to, is a good pastor with an important message for the early church. Importantly, his message continues to be relevant as the years go by, the persecution of the church carries on, and the experience of personal adversity is felt by every last living being.

Each week we will look at two big ideas from the book of James. Today we’re going to dive into James chapter 1 and it’s teaching on *testing & persevering.* The testing of our faith through trials, adversity, suffering, etc… produce in us a steadfast spirit and perseverance.

Please open your Bible with me to James 1.

### Main Teaching

**Read James 1:2-12**

Our passage begins with an intentionally shocking statement; *“Count it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you meet trials of various kinds.”* It’s hard to hear this and imagine there can be joy in the midst of trials. I can think of numerous things I find joy in and none of them include pain, suffering, destruction, or adversity. And yet James calls the early church to joy in the midst of persecution.

Also worth noting here is that James doesn’t say, “if” you experience trials, but rather, “when” you do. Adversity was a foregone conclusion. 2 Timothy 3:12 says, *“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”* Not, “might be” persecuted, but, “will be” persecuted.

And just because you and I aren’t experiencing persecution like the early church did or like some of our brothers and sisters around the world currently are, that we’ve somehow lucked out and been spared the trouble. Not at all… In fact, what James goes on to articulate in our passage is that we count our trials as joy, not because we’re masochists and we love being in pain, but because we trust that the testing of our faith is producing in us something of immeasurable value. Something so valuable that every believer needs to experience it in one form or another.

**The Testing of Our Faith**

James says we will meet trials of *various kinds.* This is an extremely important point to remember as the original meaning for *various kinds* was literally *many colored.* Let’s pause here for a moment and try to remember opening the Crayola crayon box as a child.

(Pastor - If you could have a big box of crayola crayons with you as a visual I think that would make the point even more powerful.)

Try to remember the feeling that came over you when you looked at all the various colors available to you as a young artist. On some level, this is the concept being shared by James. There are a huge variety of trials, a “many colored” palette of adversity and pain that believers around the world will experience in their lifetimes. It differs from person to person, church to church, and culture to culture. We’re talking things like;

* Relational pain
* Mental health and well being
* Physical disease and suffering
* Financial loss
* External persecution

The list could go on and on and on. In fact, there are people sitting here today who are experiencing a deep testing of their faith. There are those in our midst asking questions like;

* Is God even real?
* If God is so good, why does He allow evil?
* Why won’t He intervene in my life?
* Why won’t He heal my child/spouse/friend?

These are questions we all ask at some point in our faith. But the BIG question isn’t, “*will* I experience trials”, but rather, “*when* will I experience trials?” And the good news is that although there are various trials, more numerous than the colors found in a box of crayons, there is also a God in heaven who is weaving every trial, every color, into a magnificent and meaningful tapestry.

The trick is learning to trust Him through the process. And that’s called perseverance.

**Perseverance**

Webster's dictionary defines perseverance as; *persistence in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success.* And for those who follow Jesus, what do you think *achieving success* means? Or said a different way, “what would it look like to live a successful life as a follower of Christ?”

James gives us some insight into the answer when he says, *“you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness (perseverance). And let steadfastness (perseverance) have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”*

Success in Christ means trusting Christ through the varied trials of life as He brings us to perfection and completion. Success, for the believer, is wholeness in Christ. And wholeness is found on the other side of suffering. There is something unique about suffering, pain, and adversity that produces divine character in us. Listen to what the Apostle Paul says in Romans Chapter 5;

Romans 5:3-5 says,

*“Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance (perseverance), and endurance (perseverance) produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”*

Adversity calls us to go higher, to be greater, and to trust deeper. Suffering expands our faith. Pain drives us into the arms of the Father. And as we learn over and over and over again to trust our heavenly Father through any and every situation, or capacity to hope increases.

Our capacity to be faithful increases. We learn to persevere because of the promise we have in Jesus.

**The Promise**

As we grow in faith and learn to follow Christ, we must also learn to keep our eyes on Him no matter how difficult or seemingly impossible the circumstances get. The apostle Paul talks about this throughout His letters but there is one place in Philippians that I find especially poignant. Here’s what He says;

*“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

Paul’s motivation is Christ. Through various trials, suffering, and persecution, Paul presses on. You get the feeling he’s learned to *count it all joy* just like James says.

18th century abolitionist William Wilberforcesays, “Our motto must continue to be perseverance. And ultimately I trust the Almighty will crown our efforts with success.” And success for the believer is to finish the race and receive the promise of eternal salvation made available through Jesus Christ. With that in mind…

*“...let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance (perseverance) the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” -* Hebrews 12:1-2

So throw off any weight or burden holding you back from pursuing Christ. Throw off the sin clinging to your life. Run the race set before you. And when you need help, think about these three specific encouragements that come from our James passage;

**#1. If you need wisdom through the trial, just ask.**

*“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

**#2. Don’t let doubt creep into the process.** Doubt and faith cannot coexist together.

*“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. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”* - James 1:6-8

**#3. Stay humble.** Be careful not to think too little or too much of yourself, God’s love, grace, compassion, and mercy is impartial.

*“Let the lowly brother boast in his exultation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; it’s flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.”* - James 1:9-11

### Conclusion

I said earlier, and it’s worth repeating; Adversity calls us to go higher, to be greater, and to trust deeper.

Suffering expands our faith. Pain drives us into the arms of the Father. And, as we learn over and over to trust our heavenly Father through any and every situation, or capacity to hope increases.

So count all the various trials of your life as joy for they are producing something immeasurably valuable in you.

Our passage from James ends by saying; *“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life.”* - James 1:12

This coming week, I want you to think about the various trials you are facing or have faced. What have you learned from them? What would you have done differently? How would you help someone else get through a similar season?

And if you’re in the midst of great suffering today, please know we are with you. God is for you, and He’s heard every single one of your prayers.

Remember to ask for wisdom, to exercise faith, and to stay humble through the process.

God bless you all this week. We’ll continue our study through James next week.

Let’s pray together.