



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Your Trials Are Not Random (James 1:1-4)

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Welcome back to Annapolis for this year's session! As I have been walking the halls and visiting with legislators and staffers, I have heard two common themes – the next few weeks are going to be incredibly hectic and there will be huge issues acted upon that will impact the lives of all Marylanders in a major way. If there ever was a time for those in our government to possess wisdom beyond their own, it is now.

It is for that reason that I believe discussing the book of James is most appropriate during this session. What a wealth of knowledge and wisdom we have in this short letter! It covers everything from what we can learn from suffering to the importance of our words; from the significance of good works to the difference between worldly and godly wisdom; from humility to the power of prayer. There's so much here and I am looking forward to exploring it with you.

Always remember that I am available whenever it is convenient to talk about whatever is on your mind. My contact information is at the top of these notes. It would be an honor to visit with you.

THE AUTHOR AND RECIPIENTS

James 1:1 - James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.

The James that wrote this letter was actually the half-brother of Jesus. He was an influential leader in the first-century church as we see in Acts 15 when he presided over the Council of Jerusalem.

He is writing here to “the twelve tribes in the Dispersion” as opposed to a certain local body of believers in one location. Jews had been moved from Palestine for many years, but the persecution that followed the execution of Stephen in Acts 7 caused a dispersion of those who followed Christ (Acts 8:1). It is to these believers that James writes this epistle.

Because of the suffering his readers were experiencing, James jumps right in with this exhortation:

James 1:2-4 - ²Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its

full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

I. INEVITABLE TRIALS (1:2B)

As we unpack these opening verses, let's start at the end of verse two, which admits that trials will happen. For these readers, much was at stake and their trials looked very different from ours, yet James could still say “when” trials occur, not “if”.

It's curious that some people who begin to follow Jesus eventually fall away because of difficulty. They begin with excitement and enthusiasm, yet when life gets hard, they blame God and walk away. It's curious because we were left with a clear understanding that a life with Christ is not problem-free.

2 Timothy 3:12 - Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

John 17:14 - I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

Trials and suffering may not always be persecution. Sometimes life is just hard because of the fallen world we live in. Illness, financial problems, sour relationships, flat tires – trials are a part of being human, and being a Christian doesn't change that.

II. INVERTED THINKING (1:2A)

Isn't it amazing that the wisdom from the Bible is often the opposite of what we naturally want to do? To be great, serve. When you're wronged, forgive. And here, James says when you go through trials, consider it a joy. Our feelings during suffering will shout to do anything but be joyful, but this verse is not addressing our emotions. “Count it all joy” is a decision of the mind. “Count” means deem, consider or evaluate. To think right about something is the first step to responding right.

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS: TUESDAYS AT 7:50AM, ROOM 153 (HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING)

Maryland

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THINK, THEN FEEL, THEN DO. THIS PATTERN HELPS US TO BASE OUR ACTIONS ON FACTS RATHER THAN LETTING OUR EMOTIONS DICTATE HOW WE REACT TO DIFFICULTY. BUT WE HAVE TO START WITH *RIGHT* THINKING.

If we are to understand James properly, we must dismiss modern notions of joy and happiness, linked as they are to immediate gratification and full satiety. It is a joy that is found fundamentally beyond the self. It is found in a sensitivity to and humility before God, and in service to others.¹

This is backwards from our normal reflex to act on our feelings, but even in the early days of the Church, there is encouraging evidence that they already understood how to count it all joy when persecution came.

Acts 5:40, 41 - ...and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.

Trials are not only to be expected, but embraced. They should force our minds to decide to be joyful, then let our emotions follow.

III. INTENTIONAL TESTING (1:3)

He called his readers “brothers” in verse two and then here says that the testing believers face is a test on our faith. Those who reject Christ will still have to go through difficult times, but the cause will not be due to faith. In fact, the one who does not desire God is promised misery precisely because their faith is not in Him.

Psalms 52:7 - See the man who would not make God his refuge, but trusted in the abundance of his riches and sought refuge in his own destruction!

What an encouragement, then, that James would address these persecuted Christians to tell them that their struggles are not only

caused by their faith, but will result in strength. The trials produce endurance. When we receive ridicule for our faith, the reality is that we aren’t the ones being rejected. Christ is and he promises that his strength will uphold us in those times of testing. It is intentional and part of his plan.

1 Corinthians 10:13 - No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

IV. INFLUENCED TOTALLY (1:4)

Fullness, perfection and completeness are the ultimate goals that God has for his children. Does it feel as if something is missing in this world? When we deal with a world full of sin and its effects, yes! But we are moving toward a full redemption from this world and the process takes us directly through trials.

James says that endurance or steadfastness must have its full effect. The word for effect is “ergon”, a word we associate with work. So, James is telling us that God is working, even during times of pain and struggle, with a purpose and a progression.

BELIEVERS IN CHRIST MUST LOOK PAST CURRENT DIFFICULTIES, KNOWING THAT GOD HAS REASONS BEYOND OUR LIMITED UNDERSTANDING TO MOVE US TOWARD PERFECTION.

Philippians 1:6 - And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Thank God that we are not a part of a random, absurd, chaotic, directionless existence! Our troubles have a purpose and the Scriptures show us exactly what those reasons are.

¹ David Nystrom, The NIV Application Commentary: James (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1997), 64.