
Into Thy Word Bible Study in James

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James 1:1-4 Seeking Jesus to Deal with Problems!

The general idea: James begins his Epistle in a very direct and blunt way. He tells us that the key to dealing with our problems is to keep our eyes upon Christ, allowing Him to be not only Savior but also Lord. James is addressing the new Church that was starting to become complacent when suddenly Steven was martyred (Acts 7:54-60). A wake up call is being pronounced that Christianity is dangerous and requires a level of faith that some may not be willing to give. Hardly anyone in the first century thought that becoming a Christian could bring loss and suffering, they were only seeing the liberation from the Law. James is saying that our faith is not to be cheap and he gives us a warning that trials are coming so we had better be prepared for them!

For us to survive suffering and grow in maturity, we must have a real, authentic faith. Our eyes must be on Him as well as our trust and faith. God must have us in Him, all of us—every aspect (Phil. 3)! Why do we need to allow ourselves to surrender to Him? One of the reasons that James implies is that problems are not an “if,” they are a “when!” We will face problems; they are inevitable, unavoidable, and unpredictable, and no one is immune! How we deal with them is crucial for our contentment and faith. We cannot deal with them effectively without Christ as Lord! He gives us the attitude of joy and the ability to persevere! This attitude of joy is also a key attribute for an athlete in order to excel on the field as well as for a Christian to grow in the Lord. What will you do? Surrender to Him or live unto yourself (Job 14:1; Psalm 34:14; John 3:30; 2 Cor. 4:7-12; Gal. 2:20-21; 1 Peter 4:12)?

James simply tells us we can actually profit from trials. The key is for us to look to Christ, not to our situation, and declare our circumstances as joy. We are to be content and satisfied, to face them, and then learn and grow from them. This does not mean to give up and do nothing; it means to refocus our energies into productivity and faith—not questions and bitterness. It is to have our convictions and fulfillment in Christ, not circumstances. So, when something very difficult comes upon us, we will have the great comfort that God is in control and will not allow us to carry more than we can tolerate.

Vs. 1 a: James starts out his book by massive humbleness in confessing who Jesus is. James is so indebted to his Lord and Savior, that he calls himself a slave to Jesus. He is not speaking of one who is in forced bondage, rather one who has been freed and still desires to serve Jesus with all of his life and strength, to glorify Him. James realized that his life and purpose was all about who God is, and not who he is (Psalm 15; 101; 2 Thess. 1:12; Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1).

- *James* is a form of Jacob (Gen. 49) (see introductory article).
- *Bondservant*, in Greek times, meant the lowest form of a slave, totally at the master's disposal and even expendable. They rowed the boats of war with a whip at their back (Rom. 9:3). This is a profound testimony for James (1 Cor. 15:3-8)! For us, it means total, surrendered devotion to the Lord; our will has been sacrificed to God's will and thus we are totally at the disposal of our Lord (Acts 6:1-6; Rom. 12:7; Gal. 1:15; 2:20; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 2:8-3:13; 4:6)!

Vs. 1b: James desire was to communicate with passion, conviction, clarity, and truth, the key essential issues facing them as Apostles, as Churches, and as followers of Christ. These are the same issues we have today.

- *Twelve tribes*, refers to all those who are Jewish. At this time (and still in ours) ten out of the twelve tribes are scattered and lost. It can also refer to all Christians, since, as Christians, we are spiritually grafted in as Jews (Rom. 11:17-21; 1 Peter 1:1).

Vs. 2: We are to look at whatever situation we face and say *this is good, this will better me, or this will help me. I may not understand it, but I can trust God; He is there and He will carry me through it!* We are called to declare our situation, whatever it may be, as joy! Because, it is not a question of *if* we have problems but *when*, as we all will face them. There is no escape living in our corporeal bodies and in a sinful world (Gal. 3:26; Col. 3:1-4)!!

- *Brethren* means "fellow believers," as a respectful and endearing greeting.
- As Christians, we are all brothers and sisters under God. We are family, and need to treat others in Him with the same reverence and endearment as Christ has given us!
- *Count it joy* refers to declaring our situation as happy and fulfilling. It is to change our mindset and focus. It is realizing the sovereignty of God and that He is in control, even when life seems to be turned upside down and inside out!
- Joy will allow us to enjoy our relationship with Christ, His creation, and others, regardless of our circumstances, with an expression of delight and real, authentic happiness that comes from and with harmony with God and others. (Psalm 32:7-9; Proverbs 15:13; John 15:11; 17:13; 2 Cor. 12:9; 1 Peter 4:13-19; Heb 10:34)
- Joy helps us understand God's perspective and gives us the confidence and patience to endure anything!

- Joy is not happiness, because we may not be content and pleased with it; rather, joy is hope; it is our hope. It is not a meager wish, rather the unshakable confidence in our future in Christ. Our pleasure comes from knowing He is in charge and caring for us (Psalm 34:1-8; 1 Thess. 5:18)!
- *Trials* refer to persecution, but can also refer to any harsh circumstance that is not under our control, such as adversity or some temptations like lust and greed (they creep up, but we can still deal with temptations). It also refers, in this context, to poverty—oppression that the poor experience, not as any fault of their own (James 1:9-11; 2:5-6; 5:1-6)!
- *Testing* refers to the circumstances that God allows so we will learn perseverance, produce our fruit, and prove and develop our faith further. This gives us our maturity, our character, and enables our fruit to benefit others. These are for our direct benefit and growth that He works out for our benefit and for His glory (Romans 5:3; chap. 8).

We need to realize that we have no control over what happens to us at times, whether it be trials, suffering, setbacks, injury, sickness, or death of a loved one. We only have control of our attitude and response. We are called to choose to declare our situation joy! We cannot change our circumstances; however, we can accept them by learning and growing from them (Isa. 26:3). It does no good to complain, to fret, or to be angry or bitter, as these things do neither others nor us any good. All that complaining just escalates the situation and blinds us to our ability to be better and not bitter! Real, authentic, Christian maturity will grow as a result of our problems. They will strengthen us and make us better, stronger, and able to get over things faster and get on with our lives. Then, we will be able to be of better use to God and to others.

Vs. 3-4: Our Lord comforts us with the assurance that when we go through tough stuff, even testing and trials, we will be better for it! Our setbacks and sufferings will produce greater character and maturity in us; we will gain patience and our faith will grow and be strengthened. When we see Christ, we have confidence that we will be complete.

- *Patience* is “staying power.” It is like perseverance and the endurance to not give up; it is about actively overcoming our situation—not just sitting, accepting, and doing nothing (Hos. 2:19-23; Psalm 33:20; Matt. 27:14; Rom. 5:3; 12:12; Gal. 5:1; 6:9; Col. 1:11; James 1:3-4,12; 5:10-11)!
- Stoic philosophy, popular then, states that we can control our responses but not our fate. Thus, we have no choice but to be content.
- Our faith and learning leads to our growth and development that further leads to helping others in their situations (Romans 5:3-5; 8:28; James 1:14-15; 1 Peter 1:5-7).

Patience will help allow us to receive and participate in God's love because it builds loyalty and faithfulness, as in the life of Hosea. It will take us beyond our comfort zone, into an area we do not want to go. Yet, when we do, we are better and more able to be used by God and to be available for others. Patience is not an excuse to do nothing, as it requires an action and a response; so, wait for the right time and in the meanwhile learn and grow! Patience is looking to hope and a time when there will be no more tears (Rev. 7:17; 21:4), and when we will fully realize the wondrous purpose for which God created us. Patience is not a finished product; it is a "beta site." That means it is in process and waiting for updated design, refit, and then placement! Patience also needs persistence, to which this passage testifies (1 John 3:1-3)!

Applying His Precepts to our life!

There are two ways most people deal with trials; the first is to ignore them, and the second is to panic. The first group can think all they want that, *well, that will never happen to me*, but it will. The others can panic all they want, but panic never solved anything. We have to literally change our mindset and consider the trials as Joy. We are to take our lead from biblical considerations and the leading of the Spirit—not the leading of ignorance or panic. This means we will see trials from God's perspective and not ours or the worlds. Trials do not mean despair; they mean opportunity and growth. They have a purpose. They are not God's original plan, but are, however, the one we have now because of sin. Do not despair; we have the assurance of God's providential care. We have the assurance of God's love, and that He is indeed in control!

Why do we struggle? To produce and enhance our faith, character and excellence! If not, we produce despair from our callousness, carelessness, and laziness. Just like in building muscles, it takes work. A bodybuilder or an Olympian needs to work out several hours a day several days a week to compete and succeed. A Christian needs to do the same in His Word; so, we can choose to grow deeper in Him or not. Just be aware. If we do not, we will just sit on the sidelines as the game of life passes us by and the carnal life takes us over (Rom. 8:1-11)! Our working out in our faith through struggle and trials means our triumph and growth (Rom. 8:31-39). No, we do not like trials; we never need seek them because they will always seek us. However, for our benefit and others' encouragement and mentoring, we may as well let them teach and train us for our Lord's Glory. Otherwise our impulsiveness and self-interests will distract us from our Lord and His plan. We may just keep repeating the problem until we learn what we need to learn! If not, we gain nothing but despair, and how sad that would be! We do not need material things and our ways fulfilled to make us complete. Jesus makes us complete. He is perfect and His perfection covers us and makes us whole!

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me? How am I encouraged and strengthened?
4. Is there a sin in my life that needs to be confessed and repented?
5. How can I be changed so I can learn and grow?
6. What is in the way from these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
7. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
8. What can I model and teach? What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. What do you do when a problem develops? What should you do?
2. What is patience to you? What would your life and relationships look like with more patience?
3. What is God trying to impress upon you from this passage?
4. What does trusting in God mean to you? What should it mean?
5. Do you depend on yourself or others to solve your problems, or God?
6. What is the balance between the effort you are to put in and your reliance on Christ to see you through a trial?
7. Read and contrast Psalm 142:1-7 and Romans 8:28.
8. How can problems work for your good?
9. What has happened when you have just looked at your situation and not Christ?
10. How can declaring your situation as joy be of benefit to you?

11. Read 1 John 3:1-3. How does hope play a significant factor in your trust in Christ and faith development? How can hope and joy help you more?

12. What is a problem you are going through now? What can you learn? How can you handle it better? How can you grow from it?

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Psalm 46:1

The Serenity Prayer

GOD, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Living ONE DAY AT A TIME; Enjoying one moment at a time; Accepting hardship as the pathway to peace. Taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it. Trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will; That I may be reasonably happy in this life, and supremely happy with Him forever in the next. Amen (Reinhold Niebuhr-1926)