

Sermon Study Guide

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Sermon Series: **INSIDE / OUT: The Book of James (1:1-12)**

IN *Opportunities to connect and pray as a group*

1. What are some usual ways that people respond to trials in their lives?
2. Share a trial that you have experienced (optional). Do you wish you had dealt with it differently? If so, how?

UP *Time that is devoted to the Word of God*

1. Review the circumstances around the phrase 'scattered tribes.' (Acts 7:54-8:3) What significance is there that James introduced his letter with instructions about trials? What kind of trials would these people have been experiencing? Compare their situations with what is being experienced by believers today.
2. Paraphrase the words of James 1:2. (Check out other versions.) What are helpful synonyms for the words "consider" and "joy"? What are some reasons why James began with such a startling statement?
3. Pastor Henry gave an outline for reasons to rejoice in trials: our faith is tested; it is examined; leads us to maturity; helps us see our need for God. Name biblical characters who exemplify these characteristics. Who in your life has encouraged you in your faith-walk?
4. What words/phrases does James use in this passage to describe the character of the person who 'will receive the crown of life'? (1:12) Contrast these words to the description of a double-minded man, unstable in all he does." (1:8)

OUT *Seek to be the Community of God's people in your community*

1. What was God saying to you through this sermon study?
2. How will following the steps of --**a.** Naming the trial; **b.** Writing out the purpose for your life; **c.** Answering how this trial will advance the mission Jesus has called you to — give you hope in your faith-walk?

Joni Tada Eareckson: God permits what He hates — to accomplish what He loves.

UP – IN – OUT reflect a balanced life including a focus on our personal relationship with the Father (UP), staying connected to the Body (IN), and reaching our world (OUT).

THE WORD (NIV):

James 1:1-12

1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings. **2** Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,^[a] whenever you face trials of many kinds, **3** because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. **4** Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. **5** If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. **6** But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. **7** That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. **8** Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do. **9** Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. **10** But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. **11** For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business. **12** Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

Lamentations 3:33

For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone.

Psalms 27:13

I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

2 Corinthians 12:7

7 ... Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. **8** Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. **9** But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. **10** That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Sermon Study Summary

James, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote to the Christian church (the twelve tribes) who had been scattered from Jerusalem due to persecution (Acts 8) of various kinds. James was writing a pastoral letter to those who were once a part of his church. He knew and cared about them and was keenly aware of their sufferings in their trials. Hence this was the first theme that he touched on in the letter.

We all face trials. James 1:2 says not 'if' but 'when' you face trials. Jesus said that we would have trouble in the world (John 16:33). Should trials come to us due to poor decisions or sin on our part, or because of the hurtful, sinful behavior of others we can understand the reason behind these trials. However, when they come at us from out of nowhere, we struggle for understanding. What trial are you facing now? Can you identify it? What is sucking the life out of you? Is it a health issue, your job or colleague, or not having a job? Is it a trial with a special needs child or your marriage? James says we face trials of many kinds. The question we wrestle with is 'why?'

James speaks into these trials (1:2) by saying to 'consider it pure joy'. He is not saying to delight in the trial. They can be hurtful and it is okay to want them to go away. Instead, James is saying that because we have met the living Christ and come to trust in Him that we are going to see those trials differently than those who don't know Christ. We will see trials more from God's perspective. Response to hardship can be quite varied: complaining and feeling sorry for oneself, blaming it on others and God (even if they don't believe in Him!), or escaping through bailing from the trial or through other means such as alcohol or television etc. However, when you have put your trust in Jesus and see trials from His perspective — one that realizes that He truly has your best interests at heart — you can respond with joy rather than anger or bitterness. It is not the trial that is the basis of our joy. Rather it is the expectation of the outcome of what God wants to accomplish in us that leads to joy in the face of adversity. Note here that the 'joy' is not meant to be seen as happiness, which is fleeting and circumstance based. Joy comes to those who have put their faith totally in God and know him to be trustworthy and will use whatever trials to accomplish His very best for our lives for His glory. Joni Eareckson Tada once said, "God permits what He hates to accomplish what He loves." Know, however, that James also challenges us to pray about our trials. Prayer for healing — or for a trial to be taken away — is a good thing. Both Jesus and Paul did this. How may we rejoice when trials come our way?

1. Trials test our faith (vs 1:2-4). Trial means to stress-test something to determine how genuine and strong your faith in Christ is. It determines whether you are in fact a true follower of Christ.
2. Trials force you to examine your faith. See Job, Matthew 8:25 as examples, modified by Lamentations 3:33. Trials are often God's way of getting our attention and forcing us to nail down what really are our beliefs and convictions about God. Is my trust truly in God alone? Do I believe He is good and has my best interests at heart? Can I trust without understanding? Is God for me and does He want to form Christ's character in me? Psalm 27:12-13.
3. Trials lead us to maturity. Most everything we have had to learn came through the exercise of discipline. If this is true in the physical and intellectual realm, why not too in the spiritual? God will use trials to bring fruit to maturity in us by way of our persevering through those trials. If you believe that God is punishing you through a trial and putting you in the penalty box then you will not know or experience the joy of the Lord, nor will you grow through it. However, if you believe God is good and accomplishing something good through the trial we will seek to find a way through it rather than out of it and in it find joy. If we bail then we will short-circuit what God wants to accomplish in our lives. God did not redeem us to make us happy and healthy and free of trouble. No, He redeemed us to be in relationship with us and to make us more like Jesus. He wants us to be so close and so surrendered and trusting in Him that our lives are a reflection of Him.
4. Trials help us see our need for God (vs 1:9). James is speaking of pride, be it through our conceit (it is all about me and because I am strong and rich I will succeed) or our insecurity (it is all about me and because I am weak and poor I will fail). Both are pride as they function without God. God would see us in the place where it is not about us at all but that He is strong! In 2 Cor 12:7-10 we see that God used trials in Paul not only to work IN him (to keep him from arrogance) but also THROUGH Paul. It is not about our capacity but about our trust in His capacity to do more than we could ask or think. And this is why we can rejoice through our trials.

How do we respond to trials?

1. See the trial from God's perspective. James uses the word 'consider'. It means think it through. If our dream is the good life, then every trial is a roadblock and makes us miserable. Yet if we believe that life is found in living for that which matters and pursue God, then every trial is allowed by God to give us what we need in order for us to endure and fulfill the purpose for which God created us. Don't fixate on the trial but on what God is accomplishing through the trial. How do we do this? A) Name the trial. Write it down. B) Write down what Jesus has called you to give your life to as His follower and what will matter in the end. C) Write down how you believe the trial will advance the mission to which Jesus has called you.
2. Ask for wisdom (vs 1:5). If you are trying to make sense of the trial and how you should respond — then ask Him. Come to Him with an open heart that is without preconditions of what we will or will not do. Humble yourself and say 'God, teach me whatever you want to teach me.' Preconditions are like going to Him with two minds asking what God wants, yet not wanting what God wants. Such people will not receive from the Lord. Trials may be hard but they cannot separate us from God (Rom 8:38) nor can they truly defeat us (2 Cor 4:8-9) if our trust in God doesn't waver. The ultimate decision all of us must make is whether or not we will put our whole trust in God.