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JAMES 1:1-18

Today, we begin a six-week study in the book of **James**. I'm excited about this book...I've taken it in Precept years ago, but I've never taught it.

Before we get to the Scriptures, let's set just a little background for this book.

Who wrote this book?

To whom was it written?

Why was it written?

When was it written?

There were **two disciples** named James...and **one father** of a disciple named James. But, none of these men wrote the book of **James**. The book of **James** was written around 45 or 55 A.D. **by the half-brother of the Lord Jesus**.

James grew up with Jesus being his big brother, but he didn't believe in Jesus as His Savior during the lifetime of Jesus on this earth.

1 Corinthians 15 tells us Jesus appeared to James after His resurrection, and it must have been the resurrection of Jesus that convinced James that Jesus really was who He claimed to be.

James went on to become a pillar of the church. We saw in our study of **Galatians** that he was the head of the Jerusalem church and had authority over the Jerusalem Council.

The Bible doesn't tell us, but tradition does, that James was martyred in A.D. 62. The story is that the Pharisees hated James so much because of his testimony for Christ that they had him beaten to death with clubs.

The story goes on to tell us that as James died, he prayed for his murderers as Jesus had prayed for His... *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."*

James must have been a deeply spiritual man. He must have been a real prayer warrior. In fact, tradition tells us James prayed so much that his knees were as hard as camels' knees!

In **verse 1**, James didn't call himself the brother or half-brother of the Lord Jesus. Now, I don't know about you, but I believe I would have just had to mention that! But James didn't boast about his **physical** relationship with Jesus! **James simply called himself a bondservant of Christ!**

Well, that's who wrote the book! But, to whom was it written?

Verse 1 says he wrote it *"to the twelve tribes who are dispersed (or scattered) abroad."* These were Christian Jews who had been forced to scatter because of their belief in the Lord Jesus.

The first century Jewish believers, and in fact, all first century believers were so persecuted that many of them were forced to leave Israel and they settled in other parts of the world. All this persecution accomplished a higher purpose.

It took the Gospel from the land of Israel into many other parts of the world!!

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Each New Testament letter was written for a purpose...with a theme. And the reason the book of **James** was written was to help these Jewish believers through some problems.

One problem was simply the **persecution** we just mentioned.

There were several other problems...such as **some** members being physically sick because of **disobeying God**. But, the thing that stands out is that **most of these problems seem to stem from immaturity!**

These Christians simply were not growing up. And James wrote this letter to emphasize the need for maturity in the life of all Christians.

According to Warren Wiersbe, the basic theme of this book could be phrased "**The Marks of Maturity in the Life of the Believer.**" James uses the word "perfect" several times. And this word doesn't mean "sinless perfection." This word means "**mature, complete, to come to its appointed purpose.**"

You know, at our age, I hope the longing of all our hearts is that we will all be spiritually mature. I mean, folks, there really isn't a lot of time left for us to get there, is there?

What does it take to be spiritually mature?

Well, of course, the **first thing** is that **we must be saved**...we must be born again! My earnest prayer is that every one of us is a saved person. I pray that at one time in your life you knew you were a sinner and you knew you needed a Savior and you knew you could not save yourself and you called on the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ to save you!

A **second essential** to being spiritual is something we touched on last week. We must **honestly examine our lives in the light of the Word of God**. We must measure our lives, not by other Christians, but by the Word of God and the Son of God.

A **third thing** is that we must **obey what God's Word teaches us**. It's relatively simple to **read** God's Word, but it's another thing to **do** what it says.

A **fourth thing** is that we must **be prepared for trials and testings**. See, the minute you and I get serious about being spiritually mature, the enemy decides to say, "Oh yeh? Let me see how serious you really are!"

Sometimes our trials are just **a part of every day life**...a part of living in a fallen world.

"I've got 'em. You've got 'em. Adam had 'em."

Sometimes our trials **come directly from God's hands**. He sends certain trials to certain people because He is going to use those trials for good in their lives!

Sometimes our trials **come from the enemy**. Satan is never satisfied when a believer doesn't have some turmoil in his life.

We need to also understand this. Whether our trials and testings come from the world around us, or from the Lord, or from Satan...**God allows them all! God is sovereign!**

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But, we must remember this...God works all things for good for those who love Him and are the called according to His purpose! And God wants you and me mature. **Not everyone who grows old grows up!**

There's a huge difference between being an **old** believer and being a **mature** believer. And my prayer is that you and I will learn from the half-brother of Jesus just how to be a mature believer!

A mature believer is ready when trials come. We need to be prepared ahead of time. We don't know when trials will come. They don't send us an email and tell us they're on their way. We just know they will come! Most of the time they come suddenly, without warning!

Winston Churchill said: "We must always be ready to meet at our **average** moment anything that any enemy might hurl at us at his **selected** moment."

We might rephrase this a bit: "We must always be ready at our **average** moment to meet any possible trial that Satan or God might bring to our pathway in their **selected** moment."

Verses 2-4...

Well, we've all been tested this week, haven't we? Most weeks I could say that and we could all relate **different tests**, but this past most of us in this room have had the **same test...**

How many of you had no power this week at least for a day or two?

How many are still without power?

Now, in the grand scheme of things, this is a little test...but after a couple of days, it seems like a big one...

James doesn't say "if" we fall into various trials. James says "When..." because I want to tell you...

You're either just coming out of one.

You're in one right now.

You're getting ready to be in one.

Trials are not removed by conversion...nor are they reduced by consecration!

Just because we are God's children doesn't mean we are insulated and isolated from trials. But, because we **are** God's children, we are to respond to those trials differently than if we were **not** God's children. **We are to be patient and persevere and endure.**

Well, since trials are so productive it is essential for us to respond rightly to them. **James helps us greatly in this in this passage by giving us five key ways we can persevere through trials...**

The first thing I want us to consider this morning is

1) **A Joyful Attitude**

We are to consider it all joy. Does this mean the trial is a joy? Of course not. If it were, it wouldn't be a trial, it would be a picnic, wouldn't it? The joy comes to us because we know that trials come

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into our life filtered through the loving fingers of our Heavenly Father...**for a purpose...for good and not evil...to conform us to the image of His dear Son.**

Not only are to have a joyful attitude, but we're also to have

2) An Understanding Mind

What does **verse 3** say? "**knowing** that the testing of your faith produces endurance."

How can we **know** that good will come from our trials? Because we know **the One who allows our trials!**

We know the **power of God**. We know the **promises of Christ**. And we know the **presence of the Holy Spirit**. We know **the whole Trinity!**

I think we lose sight of this many times...

When God tests our faith, He doesn't test it with the intent that our faith falters. He tests it with the intent that our faith will grow!

It's like when Ford Motor Co. tests a car. Do you think they hope the car will fail? After pouring all their efforts into that car, do you think they **want** it to fail?

Of course not! They are pulling for it to succeed! And God is pulling for us as well! Of course, **God knows the end results of our testing, before the tests ever come...but He want us to know!**

Verse 3 tells us that the testing of our faith produces **endurance** or **steadfastness**, **patience**, or **perseverance**.

We all want patience don't we? And we want it now. By the way, this word in the Greek means "**to bear up under pressure.**"

Why is it so imperative that we have **patience** or **endurance** or **perseverance** or **steadfastness**, (depending on your translation)?

Because dear friend, that's the only way we will achieve this maturity we talked about earlier.

Dr. J. Vernon McGee said he once made the remark in a church service that there were more babies sitting in the sanctuary than there were in the nursery. Many Christians have never grown from the moment they were first saved!

Not only do we need an **attitude of joy** and a **mind that understands**, but we need

3) A Surrendered Will

Verse 4 says, "**...and let endurance have its perfect result that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.**"

If we fight against them when trials come our way, then it's going to take a lot longer for the perfect result to be evident in our lives. **God cannot build our character without our cooperation**. He **will** sanctify you and me one way or another, but it will be much easier if we don't resist Him.

I believe the prime example of this in Scripture is Jonah. Jonah fought against God tooth and nail! So, God had to put Jonah in the belly of the whale!

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I believe each time we encounter a trial, we should ask God, "Lord, what is in this trial for me? What can I learn from this trial that will make me a better child of Yours?"

There's an old book that I read years and years ago entitled **DON'T WASTE YOUR SORROWS**. We must allow these tests to bear the desired results in our lives!

The next thing I want us to think about we see in the next passage...

Verses 5-8...

4) A Believing Heart

James isn't introducing a new subject here. James is continuing to teach us how we should handle the trials God allows to come our way.

Strong, sound faith isn't based on feelings, but on **knowledge of and understanding of the promises of God's truth**. This is spiritual wisdom.

We can have all the education the world has to offer and all knowledge of many subjects, but if we're going through a trial, we need wisdom from God!

What is godly wisdom? Someone has said, "Wisdom is the right use of knowledge.: And I believe that's a pretty good definition, but it's really more than that!"

I believe our prayer should be,

"Father, I believe You are sovereign. I believe with all my heart that You have allowed this testing in my life. I don't want it wasted.

Father, You've promised You would grant me wisdom to go through whatever You send my way. You've promised all things work together for good for me.

I'm waiting, Lord, for this wisdom. I'm going to be quiet and listen as I look into Your Word. I pray Your dear Holy Spirit will teach me wisdom during this trial I'm in!"

God's Word teaches that God's promises are "**Yes, in Christ Jesus.**" They are "**Yea and Amen.**" What He has promised He is able to perform! And we don't have to doubt that what He says is true!

God will give His wisdom to you in the midst of trials and He will do it **liberally, generously**, and He won't scold you for asking!

James calls the person who doubts that God will hear and answer his prayer a double-minded man...an unstable man...like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. May God deliver us from being this kind of believer.

Deuteronomy 6:5 tells us that we are to **love** the Lord our God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all our might. And may I say we must **trust** Him the very same way!

So, in order to be a mature Christian we must have a **joyful attitude**, an **understanding mind**, a **surrendered will**, and a **believing heart**. And the last thing I want to mention to you about how to persevere through trials is

5) An Humble Spirit

Verses 9-11...

These verses simply tell us that times of trials and testings are the great equalizer of all men.

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The Christian who happens to be a poor man should glory that He has the Lord to help him through his trials and testings.

He may be **hungry**, but he has **the bread of life**.

He may be **thirsty**, but he has **the water of life**.

He may be **poor**, but he has **eternal riches**.

He may be **cast aside by men**, but he is **loved by God**.

He may have **no home on this earth**, but he has **one prepared by Jesus in heaven**.

By the same token, the rich man should glory in his trials because they are designed to teach him that all his riches are temporal...

You know...all trials, whether the trials of the rich or of the poor are designed for spiritual maturity in the believer. And they will do one of two things...they will drive a doubting believer away from God, and they will draw a trusting believer to the Father's bosom.

God is no respecter of persons. He is impartial when it comes to trials. And rich and poor alike are to face trials the same way...**with faith and grace and trust in the One who has allowed the trials for His purpose in their lives**. He's not impressed with riches...they will only fade away.

I believe we've seen the trusting believer played out before our very eyes in this class. I believe we've seen in Betty a trust and a faith in the Lord that the rest of us can only hope would be in our own lives if and when we face the same kind of trial. **What a precious person to learn from!**

Verse 12...

We've seen five key ways to persevere under trials, and this verse teaches us that there is **a reward for perseverance under trials**.

There are several crowns mentioned in Scripture. Here we see the "crown of life." And whom does James say this crown of life is for? For those who love Him!

Does that seem odd to you? Wouldn't you think it would be for those who **trust** Him? Or **obey** Him?

I believe this is because love motivates all the things we've just seen.

How can we have a **joyful attitude** and an **understanding mind** and a **surrendered will** and a **believing heart** and a **spirit that's humble**? Only because we love God and know that He loves us and wants what's best for us!

Verses 13-18...

Why does James address temptation here? I mean, what does temptation have to do with trials? Does this seem out of place to you?

Well, I believe James includes this because if we're not very vigilant, the trials that come upon us from the outside, may become temptations that come upon us from the inside.

Many times, when our circumstances are difficult, we don't exhibit the behavior we've just discussed in the first part of this passage...and when that's true, the possibility is very

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great that we will start **complaining** against God...**blaming** God for the trial...**questioning** His love for us and resisting His will.

And Satan loves it so! This is his opportunity to come against us and do a real number on us!

This is exactly what Satan wanted Job to do. Satan thought if he afflicted Job enough then Job would turn on God and curse Him! But, Job didn't do that, did he?

James tells us in these verses to think about **two things**... He tells us to think first about **God's judgment**...and we see that in **verses 13-16**...

Warren Wiersbe puts it so well...

"Do not blame God for temptation. He is too holy to be tempted, and He is too loving to tempt others. God does **test** us, as He did Abraham but He **does not** and **cannot tempt** us. It is **we** who turn occasions of testing into temptations."

This letter is written to believers, so I believe that James is saying, "Don't let your trials bring you temptation to sin and then yield to that temptation! You have the assurance of spiritual life and eternal life...but ongoing sin in the life of a believer **can** result in physical death."

The second thing we must think about in this passage is **God's goodness**...and we see that in **verses 17 and 18**.

The expression "Father of lights" was an ancient Jewish title for God, referring to Him as Creator, as the great Giver of light, in the form of the sun, moon, and stars. These sources of light however, as wonderful and magnificent as they are, can also **vary and eventually fade**. But, God's character, power, wisdom, and love have no variation, or shifting shadow.

In the book of *Malachi* God said, "***I, the Lord, do not change.***"

And I think we can draw from this that God's goodness is as perfect during the times we're being tested as it is in the times when we're not.

I think what we've described today is how a believer can be tested and tried and still have peace! And I want to end our lesson today with a story that illustrates this...

The story is told of a man who went to a young artist and asked him to paint a picture for him depicting peace. The artist called the man many weeks later and told him the picture was ready for him to pick up.

The picture the artist had painted was of a family gathered around the fire. The father had an open Bible in his lap. The mother was knitting. The children sat and listened at their father's feet. There was a cat playing with a ball of yarn and a dog sleeping nearby.

The man paid for the picture and turned to leave. The artist said, "But, you're leaving the picture."

The man said, "I don't believe that picture really speaks peace to me. See, the man has gray hair...and will likely get sick in the next twenty years and die and leave the wife in grief. The children...well, they could meet with some terrible disease or accident and die. Even the fire

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could leap out of the fireplace and consume the home. I don't want the picture, sir, you can keep it or sell it to someone else."

The man went to another artist, one a little older, and made the same request. This artist said he would call him when the picture was ready. When the man went to view the second artist's picture he saw that it was a very serene pastoral scene, a shepherd with his sheep grazing in a lush meadow with mountains in the background. There was a waterfall not far away. It was a beautiful scene.

After he had looked at that picture for a few minutes he paid the artist the agreed fee and turned to leave. The artist said, "But, sir, you've forgotten to take the picture.

The man said, "Oh, I don't want the picture. The clouds over the mountains could turn dark and a torrent of rain could come and the waterfall could become a wall of water and the sheep could drown. That doesn't depict peace as I'm looking for peace to be."

So, the man went to a third artist. This man was much older than the first two. The man explained to him that he wanted to commission him to paint a picture that depicted real peace. The artist said, "Well, sir, I'll pray about it and if I think I can really paint a picture that shows peace, I'll let you know when it's finished."

Well, the man got word that the third artist had completed his picture of peace. And when he went to view it, he paid for it and took it.

This picture showed a black sky with dark clouds and a violent storm lashing a seashore with waves beating on the rocks. But, in one corner of the painting was a little bird, hidden in the cleft of a rock, dry and unaffected by the wind and the water and storm.

See, that's what peace is. When the storm is going on all around you and me...we are hidden in the cleft of the Rock.

Trials and tribulations and testings and the storms of life are inevitable. They're coming in the future or are here in the present or have already come in the past.

"When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply:
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine."