

James

Practical Principles for Life

Zoom Bible Study | Lesson One

November 7, 2023

Chapter 1:1-18 (ESV)

The Author:

Most Bible scholars agree that this letter was written by James, the half-brother of Jesus. What do we know about James?

John 7:1 – 5: After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him. ² Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand. ³ So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. ⁴ For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." ⁵ For not even his brothers believed in him.

Not one of Jesus' brothers is mentioned as a disciple during his earthly ministry. But after his resurrection and ascension, there they are in the upper room worshipping him as God.

Acts 1:14: All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

We know James had four brothers and some sisters:

Mark 6:3: Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

Mark 3:20-21: Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."

It must have been difficult to have Jesus for a brother.

Luke 2:46 – 50: After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." ⁴⁹ And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰ And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them.

He was astounding temple rabbis by age 12! Do you think Mary and Joseph treated Jesus differently?

Matthew 13:57: And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household."

It's likely James came to trust in Jesus as the Son of God either late in Jesus' ministry or after the resurrection. Paul writes that after Christ was raised from the dead, he appeared to James:

1 Corinthians 15:6 - 7: Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

James 1:1:

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

James's letter is written to all the scattered Jewish Christians, referred to as "the Dispersion." He wrote to offer practical, pastoral advice to those Jewish believers.

James 1:2-8

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.

⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶But 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. ⁷For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

When you face trials of many kinds, *not if* you face them. Some trials come simply because we are human - sickness, accidents, disappointments. Other trials come because we are Christian.

1 Peter 4:12: Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

What does James mean: Count it all joy?

"Count" is a financial term and it means to evaluate. Evaluate your trials in the light of what God is doing for you.

Hebrews 12:2: ...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.

If we live only for the present and forget the future, then trials will make us bitter, not better.

Job 23:10: But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.

James says: You know that the testing of your faith develops steadfastness. Do you know it? Do you believe it? When you are tested, is that the first thing you think?

Romans 5:3-4: Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope...

Hebrews 10:36: For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.

What are the consequences of not accepting trials as good things?

During any testing, if you "lacks wisdom," you may have it by asking. This assumes that when you're facing a trial, you do lack wisdom.

So, what is the first thing we should do when we are facing a trial?

We need wisdom so we will not waste the opportunities God is giving us to mature. Wisdom helps us understand how to use these circumstances for our good and God's glory.

What will keep you from getting God's wisdom? The answer is found in v. 6 - Believe and not doubt. Peter was doubled minded when he tried to walk on the water to Jesus.

Matthew 14:28 – 33

And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³² And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Jesus asked him "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" Why did Peter doubt?

What is the difference in a double-minded person and one who has small faith?

Mark 9:24: Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

The anguished was not oscillating between belief and unbelief. In spite of his weak faith, he had set his heart to believe. And Christ responded to his faith and healed his son.

Admit to God when your faith is small and ask him to give you more faith. But don't waiver; just confess your "little" faith.

Jonah is an illustration of an immature Christian who did not obey God from his heart. He is impatient; he did not persevere.

Ephesians 4:14: ...so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

Instability and immaturity go together.

James 1:9-12

Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, ¹⁰ and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. ¹¹ For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits. ¹² Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

James is saying that believers are to rejoice in all circumstances regardless of what their station in life may be.

Philippians 2:8: And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Being in *humble circumstances* trains us to humble ourselves before God, as Jesus humbled himself. Can we come to the place where we consider it a high position to be in a place where we have the opportunity to learn humility?

No matter the circumstance, the believer is to see beyond it, and take it captive as an opportunity to mature in faith.

Asking God for wisdom is asking for his perspective of whatever situation you are in. Keep focused on what matters for eternity.

Proverbs 23: 4 – 5: Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist. When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven.

James 1:13 – 18

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

God will not spare us the experience of temptation. However, God does not tempt us because he is holy.

Where does temptation come from?

How do you know if the devil is tempting you to do something wrong, or if it is only your own desires?

1 Peter 5:8: Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Matthew 4:3: And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

The Bible declares that the devil is the source of all temptation and is called the "tempter." But he is able to succeed because we let him.

Verse 15 warns us that temptation always progresses:

- First temptation
- Then desire
- Then sin
- Then death

How often do you pray that God will show you where you are deceived?

Temptation carries with it some bait that appeals to our natural desires. The bait not only attracts us but is also hides the consequences of that temptation.

Did David see the tragic consequences of his adultery when he looked upon Bathsheba? No, he saw the bait.

Temptation leads to death, not life. It may take years for the sin to mature, but when it does, the result will be death.

See how these stages are perfectly depicted in the first sin recorded in the Bible in Genesis 3:

- The serpent used desire to interest Eve.
- Desire became an act of her will - she took the fruit and shared it with her husband.
- They both experienced immediate spiritual death - separation from God, and ultimate physical death.

How many of us would have to confess that we have fallen for the bait somewhere along in our lives? This is why we pray for wisdom—for discernment!

The first barrier against temptation is a negative one: the judgment of God.
The second barrier is a positive one: the goodness of God.

God's gifts are always better than Satan's bargains. Satan never gives any gifts because you end up paying for them dearly.

Proverbs 10:22: The blessing of the Lord makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it.

The third barrier against temptation is found in verse 18:

Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.