

## **“How Mature is Your Faith?”** **James 1:1-27**

Anybody need more wisdom to make better choices in life? To work out problems in your relationships? To be able to discern between right and wrong? To be able to endure a particular trial? Or the need to be wiser in life so that your life will honor the Lord?

**Overview:** James writes the letter between AD 49/50 in Greek. He is Jesus’ half-brother (Ac. 15:13; 21:18). Mentioned in the Gospels (Matt. 13:55-56; Mk. 6:3). James wasn’t a believer in Jesus (half-brother) as Messiah (Jn. 7:1-5). But Paul mentions Jesus appeared to James at some point after the resurrection and he believed (1 Cor. 15:7). He eventually becomes the leader in the Jerusalem church (Ac. 15) and is referred to as a “pillar” of the faith (Gal. 2:9). Tradition states James was taken from the temple and beaten to death by clubs in AD 62.

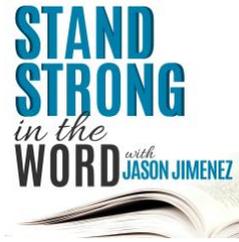
**Purpose:** To explain to the scattered Jewish churches about what genuine faith really looks like. *NKJV Chronological Study Bible Notes*, “The letter of James was written to encourage Christians who were suffering. The opening prologue summarizes the appropriate responses to their trials, responses which the rest of the letter discusses: wisdom (1:5), faith (1:6–8), and endurance (1:9–11). The letter also describes tensions between the rich and the poor: The wealthy are arrogant against the poor (2:1–4), and even repress them (2:6, 7) and withhold their wages (5:4). Yet the poor are advised not to retaliate with violence in deed (4:1, 2) or, perhaps more tempting, in words (4:11; 5:9).”

**Key areas:** Endure trials, bear fruit, tame the tongue, remain humble, overcome temptations, and pray fervently.

**Key verses:** “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness” (1:2-3).

### **I. OPENING (1:1)**

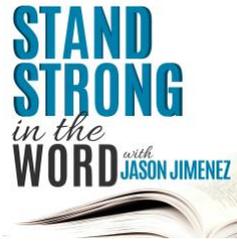
1. **James, a servant** (Gk., *doulos*—bondservant; one who belongs to a master) **of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ**, Like his half-brother, Jesus, James describes his life as a servant of the Lord. **Lord Jesus Christ--**
2. **To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion** (Diaspora; scattered). James is writing to scattered Christian Jews among the various nations. He refers to them as the **twelve tribes** to depict the fullness and completeness of Israel. A phrase that captures the unity of the Jews. **Scattered**—“scattering seed.” James also refers to these scattered Jews as “brethren,” “brothers in the flesh,” and “brothers in the Lord” nineteen times. The scattered Jews could possibly be the ones driven out



of Jerusalem after the martyrdom of Stephen (see Acts 7). Acts 8:1, “And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.”

## II. ENDURING TRIALS (1:2-4)

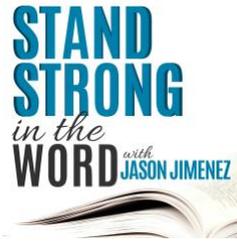
1. <sup>2</sup> **Count** (consider; evaluate) **it all joy** (Gk., *charan*—reason for gladness), **my brothers, when you meet trials** (breaks peace and comfort) **of various kinds**—James isn’t saying Christians are to take pleasure in pain and suffering but to discover a deep sense of peace and assurance that God is in control in the midst of a trial (see 1 Pet. 1:6-8). Jesus said, “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” The word for **trials** (Gk., *peirasmois*—temptation; test; trial) means to learn the character or quality of a person by putting them through extensive testing or examination. **Various kinds**—Trials can come in all shapes and sizes: persecution, conflicts, moral temptation, a loss, or hardship (see Job 1:7-22; 2 Cor. 1:8-10; 2 Cor. 12:7-10).
2. <sup>3</sup> **for you know that the testing** (Gk., *dokimion*—approval; genuineness) **of your faith produces** (creates) **steadfastness** (tenacity; to stand up against difficulty). The term James uses for **testing** is applied to authenticating genuine coins. The purpose of the trial is to refine, mature, and establish a stronger faith in the Christian’s life. Therefore, though trials are extremely difficult, a Christian can rejoice in the midst of them because they are developing godly character in great measure. **Steadfastness**—To have patience/endurance under immense pressure.
3. <sup>4</sup> **And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect** (blameless) **and complete** (wholeness), **lacking in nothing** (fully perfected in every aspect). The Christian who perseveres through hardship (adversity/affliction) will cultivate a trust in God and develop a strength that will supply them with everything they need. Jesus, Peter, and Paul taught about the development of perseverance.
  - A. Matthew 10:22, “And you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”
  - B. Romans 5:3-4, “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup> and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”



- C. 1 Peter 1:6-7, “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup> so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.
- D. *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, “James invites you to envision yourself in the state of spiritual maturity, rid of the jealousy or laziness or impulsiveness or impatience or bitterness or self-pity or selfishness that now mars the wholeness of your fellowship with God and the completeness of your spirituality. Do you hunger and thirst for righteousness? Do you long to be fully the person God desires you to be? If so, then you now have the full reason for considering it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds. The trials can be opportunities for testing to develop in you the perseverance which, when it finishes its work, will leave you mature in Christ! For those who have set their hearts on becoming Christlike, this is wonderful reason for pure joy.”

### III. ASK FOR WISDOM IN FAITH (1:5-8)

1. <sup>5</sup> ***If any of you lacks*** (not to possess something which is necessary) ***wisdom*** (skill; experience; shrewdness), ***let him ask God, who gives generously*** (single-mindedly; single undivided intent) ***to all without reproach*** (rebuke or blame), ***and it will be given him***. Ask God for an understanding of the trial and its purpose and to give you the strength to endure it (see 3:13-18; Matt. 7:7-8). Pro. 3:13-14, “Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold.” ***It will be given him***—God’s holy intent is to give his children exactly what they need to live their life and please the Lord.
  - A. When Solomon was in Gibeon, the Lord appeared to him in a dream by night; and God said, “Ask! What shall I give you?” (1 Kgs. 3:5)
  - B. Jesus said, “Whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.” (Matt. 21:22)
  - C. Jesus said, “Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” (Jn. 16:24)
2. <sup>6</sup> ***But let him ask in faith, with no doubting*** (divided in the mind; to debate; uncertainty), ***for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind***. Prayer must be done in confident faith (trust) in God for direction and answers. Hebrews 11:6, “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” ***For the one who doubts***—You can’t expect God to answer prayers that are not reliant on faith but driven by doubt.

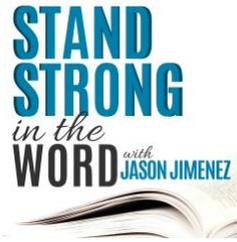


Self-doubt, if left unchecked, can cause major harm in a person's life. It can cripple your reliance on God, call into question your motives and actions, and can trigger a defeatist attitude. **Wave of the sea**—This is the first time James uses nature to illustrate a point.

- A. <sup>7</sup> **For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;** <sup>8</sup> **he is a double-minded** ("double souled"—knows to seek God for wisdom but doesn't do it; conflicted between God and the world) **man, unstable** (unable to be controlled) **in all his ways**. James is underscoring the need to have unwavering faith in the midst of trials. **But let him ask in faith**—That person, according to James, is unstable and reckless. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money" (Matt. 6:24).
- B. Christians will have their issues with God and raise questions about life that will (from time to time) go unanswered. That's life. Your doubt may not cause you to reject God, but it can definitely cause you to have a dejected faith. If you don't gain the wisdom to deal with your doubts, then your doubts will certainly deal with you.

#### IV. PURSUING HUMILITY OVER PRIDEFUL PURSUITS (1:9-11)

1. <sup>9</sup> **Let the lowly** (humble; oppressed; poor) **brother boast in his exaltation,** <sup>10</sup> **and the rich** (Gk., *plousios*) **in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away.** This portion of Scripture may seem out of place but it is not. James applies a measure of writing common in Jewish literature by putting forth a contrast between humility and pride and poverty and wealth. However, at the time of James's letter, Judean Jews were driven out of their lands by the Roman General Pompey and farmers became landless because they were unable to pay the heavy taxes brought on by Herod the Great. Consequently, James uses an example of a poor man and a rich man to point out God is no respecter of persons and that no one is above trials. Despite earthly poverty, the "lowly/poor" Christian can rejoice in knowing that he or she has inherited every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:4). On the flip side, trials ought to remind a wealthy Christian that true riches are found only in Jesus Christ and not in the world. **Rich in his humiliation**—The rich person will be brought low to humble them through trials and teach them to look to God and not wealth. Pro. 16:18, "Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall." **Flower of the grass**—James references nature (v. 6) for the second time to point out the fleetingness of wealth and the brevity of life itself. A clear allusion from Isa. 40:6-8. Jesus said, "Do not lay up for yourselves

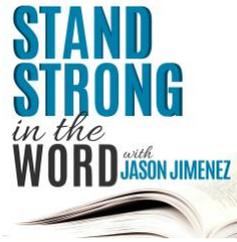


treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:19-21).

2. ***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.*** James echoes Isa 40:7 once more: "The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it; surely the people are grass." James paints a vivid illustration of the transitory nature of wealth by comparing it to the withering vegetation under the hot conditions of the Israeli desert. ***Rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits***—Poverty and wealth are repeated topics throughout James's letter (1:27; 2:1-7, 15-16; 5:1-6).

## V. RESISTING TEMPTATION (1:12-18)

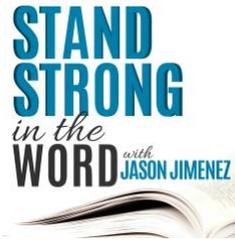
1. ***12 Blessed is the man who "remains steadfast"*** (to endure patiently in the midst of opposition or resistance) ***under trial, for when he has stood*** (approved; tested; genuine) ***the test he will receive the crown (wreath) of life, which God has promised to those who love him.*** After encouraging his readers to ask for wisdom in the midst of trials (vs. 5-11) and emphasizing the humbleness that comes as a result—James quickly transitions into another comparison of the Christian life to a Greek race to reinforce his point in vs. 2-4. ***Blessed is the man***—A familiar phrase taken from the Beatitudes of Jesus (see Matt. 5:2-11). ***When he has stood the test***—Christians who cross the finish line will receive a reward—eternal life with Christ in heaven. ***Crown of life***—A crown being placed on champion's head depicts a Christian receiving his or her reward after faithfully serving God and others. ***God has promised to those who love him--***
2. ***13 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.*** After discussing trials (1:2-12), James now gives a distinction between the nature of temptation and the nature of God. He is not implying that temptation (in and of itself) is sin. Not all temptation leads to sin. ***God cannot be tempted with evil***—God is completely and totally a perfect Being of Goodness, Righteousness, Purity, and Perfection. God doesn't set up his children to sin but tests them. Temptation comes within our own fallen status and it becomes sin when we give into the enticement.
  - A. Hab. 1:13, "Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You cannot look on wickedness with favor."
  - B. 1 Jn. 1:5, "that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."
  - C. 1 Pet. 2:22, "He [Jesus] committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth."



3. ***14 But each person is tempted when he is lured (dragged away) and enticed (making sin look attractive) 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.*** The evil that results from giving into temptation is not from God but comes from the inward workings of our own flesh. ***Gives birth to sin***—James offers a vivid description of how sin develops in a person’s life if they bend to its wishes.
  - A. The difference between trials (1:2-4) and temptations (1:13-14). Trials are tests from God. Temptations are enticements from the flesh, Satan, or from the world. Trials are meant to strengthen your faith; temptations are meant to destroy your faith.
4. ***16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.*** James stresses his point in v. 13 that God does not tempt his children.
5. ***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.*** Instead of leading his children down a destructive path, God, on the other hand, showers blessings on his children. ***Father of lights***—God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. Psalm 136:7-8, “to him who made the great lights, for his steadfast love endures forever; the sun to rule over the day, for his steadfast love endures forever.”
6. ***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.*** Referring to spiritual birth (i.e., salvation) that comes by the “power of God” (Rom. 1:16). *New Bible Commentary*, “The firstfruits were viewed as the best of the harvest, so God is making redeemed human beings the apex of all creation.”

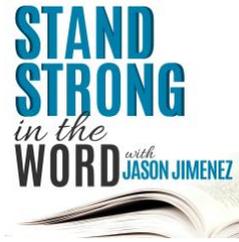
## VI. LIVING OUT THE WORD OF GOD (1:19-27)

1. ***19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger (deep resentment and rejection); 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.*** James lists three exhortations of wise living: (1) ***quick to hear*** (1:21-2:26); (2) ***slow to speak*** (3:1-18); and (3) ***slow to anger*** (4:1-5:18). Anger is a natural emotion God gave humans. However, James is addressing anger as sinful when it leads a person to be impatient, uses bad language, combative, unforgiving, and violent (see Matt. 5:21-26).
  - A. ***21 Therefore put away (lay aside) all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted (engrafted) word, which is able to save your souls.*** Rather than giving into the deception of sin, James encourages Christians to put away sin by holding fast to the Word of God. ***Receive with meekness the implanted word***—James is describing the new covenant that is the truth of salvation that



ought to be received in a teachable spirit. David writes in Psalm 119:11, “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”

2. <sup>22</sup> **But be** (keep becoming) **doers** (makers) **of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving** (deluded by false reasoning) **yourselves**. It is not enough to hear and agree with the truth. You must live it out and share truth with others. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, “Deceiving” is from a verb used in the New Testament only here and in Colossians 2:4. *Paralogizomai* means “to cheat or deceive by false reasoning.” The deception comes from thinking they have done all that is necessary when actually listening to the Word is only the beginning. A fitting illustration of the “sit, soak, and sour” crowd follows.
  - A. <sup>23</sup> **For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.** <sup>24</sup> **For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.** Hearing the Word of God but not doing what it says is painting the Word of God as useless. Jesus marks the difference between a hearer and a doer in Matt. 7:24-27, “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup> And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. <sup>26</sup> And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. <sup>27</sup> And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”
3. <sup>25</sup> **But the one who looks** (to stoop and look intently) **into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres** (to keep going in an activity), **being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing**. Christians are to live a life under God’s royal law and the gospel. The doer is like the righteous person in Ps. 1. They will be blessed, established, and bear much fruit. **Perfect law**—Possibly a reference to Ps. 19:7, “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.”
4. <sup>26</sup> **If anyone thinks he is religious** (performing outward works) **and does not bridle** (control; keep a tight rein) **his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless**. In 3:1-12, James taught the importance of taming the tongue and continues to show the fruitful value of controlling what you say. Jesus said, “The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. <sup>36</sup> I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, <sup>37</sup> for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (12:35-37).
5. <sup>27</sup> **Religion** (Judaism realized in Christ) **that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep**



***oneself unstained from the world.*** In highlighting the true measure of religion, the prophet Micah remarks, “He [God] has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (6:8)? ***Orphans and widows***—The most helpless and defenseless group of people. If the Word of God truly permeates your life, you will actively and compassionately seek opportunities to love and care for those in need. God, the “Father to the fatherless, a defender of widows” (Ps. 68:5) has called godly leaders to care and defend the weak.