

**TRIED AND TRUE:**  
***How Pressure Produces a Living Faith for a Dying World***

“A Journey Through James”  
Sermon 2

**Text: James 1:2-12**

<sup>2</sup> Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds. <sup>3</sup> for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. <sup>4</sup> And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

<sup>5</sup> If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. <sup>6</sup> But 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. <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 man, unstable in all his ways.

<sup>9</sup> Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, <sup>10</sup> and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. <sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> 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.

**Introduction:**

Last week we began a journey through the book of James. James is writing at the very beginning of the Christian church – approximately 15 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit inaugurated the Church age.

In the first months after Pentecost, the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ took Jerusalem by storm – within a matter of months, more than 5000 people had embraced the gospel and had become genuine, committed followers of Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah, Savior, and submitted to Him as Lord. As James would say, they became the “Friends of God!” And they wanted others to join them in this friendship.

However, not everyone accepted the claims they were making about Jesus and very soon, these early Christians were forced to pay a heavy price for their faith in Christ. By Acts 8, a strong persecution arose and, in its wake, thousands of Christ's followers were driven out of Jerusalem and had to start new lives in cities throughout the Roman Empire – and they took their faith with them. Through their testimony and the faithful witness of their lives, the gospel also spread throughout these cities and churches were started and filled with followers of Jesus who were to live out their faith in cities where they now lived. But this was no easy task – and there was a high cost attached to accepting this faith and embracing its claims on the lives of those who professed to believe in Christ.

Imagine having to start over – loss of home, family, relational network, resources – all gone because of your decision to become a devoted follower of Jesus Christ. And when you began to share your faith in Christ, it was a horrific offense to all the Jews and scandalous foolishness to all the Gentiles in your new city. Although the gospel would be embraced by some, many would reject both the gospel itself as well as those who brought it. The pressure to compromise would be immense. The crying need of the hour facing the early church was for its members to cultivate and display a living faith for a dying world. And that is precisely what Pastor James writes to encourage and exhort his readers to do – to cultivate and display a whole-hearted (genuine), single-focused, fully-trusting faith! In other words, a living faith for a dying world

What kind of faith will make a difference to people who are living in the deepest spiritual blindness and who are enslaved to the darkest spiritual bondage? What kind of faith would be strong enough to withstand and beautiful enough to attract its strongest opponents?

James knew exactly what that kind of faith would demand because he himself at one time had denied the claims and rejected the message about his older half-brother, Jesus. He had watched him die and yet remained entrenched in unbelief. And then everything changed – the risen Jesus appeared to James and opened his eyes and drew him to faith and James became a committed, devoted follower of Jesus – not as his brother, but as the Messiah and as His Savior and Lord. And he knew this would happen to others as well when they encountered the evidence of the risen Lord in the

lives of people who possessed a living, vibrant, confident, faith that displayed the life-giving, liberating, transforming power of the Gospel!

This is still the need today – people still need to see the power of the gospel to rescue people from the kingdom of darkness, make them members of the kingdom of light, and radically transform their lives and relationships.

Our world needs to see and encounter the kind of Christian Faith James was exhorting his readers to cultivate – a faith that is: 1) Whole-hearted – genuine; 2) Single-focused – committed; and 3) Fully-trusting – dependent. In short, James is calling us to cultivate a working faith that makes a difference not only in our lives but in the lives of others! And to help believers develop and display this kind of difference-making faith, James writes five short chapters (108 verses).

In these chapters, James is going to instruct, confront, exhort, and encourage believers to develop and display a living faith for a dying world. He is going to remind believers of:

- ***Two Wisdoms*** (wisdom from above & wisdom from below)– that lead to
- ***Two Ways of Life*** (walking according to the wisdom of the Law of the Lord or walking according to the counsel of the ungodly, standing in the way of sinners, and sitting in the seat of the scornful) – that reveal
- ***Two Spiritual Alliances*** – friendship with God vs with the World
- James is going to expose ***one Fatal Flaw*** in them that is the enemy of a living and vibrant faith – ***double-mindedness***. James uses this term 2x in the letter and reminds us what this looked like in OT Israel by pointing us to the specific prayer of Elijah on Mount Carmel when he confronted the nation and called them to repent of their double-mindedness between depending on God or looking to Baal to answer their desperate need for rain.

So, how does God drive out double-mindedness from the heart and life of a believer? Asked differently, what does God use to expose a double-mindedness in his people and how does He grow a strong and vibrant faith in them? The answer is both surprising and difficult – God uses ***trials*** to expose what is in our heart and to build a strong and vibrant faith in us if we are willing to embrace wisdom from above and reject wisdom that comes from below.

As we look at the twelve verses that make up this first section, James is going to help us confront the true condition of our faith and then he is going to comfort us by helping us see the value and blessing trials bring when they come. If we are willing to listen and accept the wisdom James is giving us, we will discover that nothing builds faith better and stronger than the multi-faceted work that God does in us through the tool of a difficult, ongoing trial. And that is the real question – are we prepared to listen to James and are we willing to embrace his wisdom?

***James divides these twelve verses into three segments followed by an important reminder.***

- In verses 2-4 he directs our attention to the reality, nature, and value of the trials that God uses to strengthen our faith and prove its authenticity.
- In verses 5-8 he stresses the importance of wisdom in this process and reveals both the source and condition for receiving the wisdom that is essential to building a strong and vibrant faith.
- In verses 9-11 he introduces a test which reveals whether or not we have embraced the wisdom from above fully and unreservedly – our response to wealth and poverty.
- Verse 12 announces a blessing on those who pass the test.

So, with this in mind, perhaps the best way to follow James' thinking is to let him make ***six important points which, if we are willing to embrace, are designed to produce a full-hearted, vibrant, living faith*** for a dying world!

## **I. A Spiritual Objective – Wholehearted, Vibrant, Working Faith**

*James 1:2–4: Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, <sup>3</sup> for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. <sup>4</sup> And let steadfastness have its full effect, **that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.***

James has an urgent pastoral objective for his beloved readers – he wants to guard them from something that will damage the vitality of their faith and destroy the credibility of their faith when it is put on display to others around them.

If we trace this concern throughout the 108 verses that comprise the letter, we can spot the danger James is concerned about almost immediately through various symptoms showing up in their lives:

- Lack of spiritual endurance under pressure (1:12)
- Self-deception about sin and temptation (1:16)
- Hearing but not doing the Word of God (1:22-25)
- An empty and worthless religion (1:26-27)
- Ungodly Partiality toward others (2:1-13)
- Faith that is not working (2:14-26)
- The wrong use of the Tongue (3:1-4:3)
- Embracing and following wisdom from below instead of wisdom from above (3:13-18)
- Presumptuous behavior in life and business (4:13-17)
- Persecution of others (5:1-6)
- At the core of all of these symptoms is a deadly spiritual condition – Spiritual Adultery and Double-Mindedness (4:4-8)

Which left them with a religion that was empty, worthless, and powerless (1:26-27) because their faith was not living, vibrant, and mature – that is the real issue that James is after – double-mindedness not only damages the credibility of our faith, it reveals a serious defect in the actual condition of our faith – it is not complete. It lacks full strength and maturity. *James reveals this in vs 4 when he states his readers need to be complete and whole, so they lack nothing.*

James is not talking about the content of our faith – what we believe. He is talking here about the character and condition of our faith – how it works and what it produces in us.

James tells us that God’s objective is to produce in us a full-orbed faith that lacks nothing and is fully functional and capable of displaying the beauty of the Gospel and the true identity of Christ throughout the darkest, most dangerous places in the kingdom of darkness.

The term “*complete*” in this text does not imply that James’ readers have failed to believe something essential to the Christian faith – their faith was not missing any

doctrinal component. Rather, this term has reference to fullness, strength, maturity – the idea behind this term has reference to something or someone that is whole, healthy, and sound.

James is pointing to the need his readers have of a faith that is robust, healthy, sound, full of strength and capacity – it is a mature faith that is strong and vibrant – ***resolute in its convictions*** (what it believes) and ***resilient in its manifestation*** (how it behaves under pressure).

***So, how does God grow this kind of resolute and resilient faith in us?***

## **II. A Surprising Means – Trials that Test Our Faith**

*James 1:2–3: Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,<sup>3</sup> for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.*

Now that James has made his objective clear to his readers – ***their need for a full and vibrant faith that not only believes the right content but allows those beliefs to actually shape behavior*** – James now turns to the surprising means God employs to develop and display that faith in His children – trials. And he wants us to see four important aspects of trials God uses to transform our faith:

### **A. The Reality of Trials**

*when you meet trials of various kinds*

- James tells us that as we live the Christian life we can expect to encounter ***various kinds*** of trials that come upon us at ***different times in life*** that are ***often painful and prolonged*** but are ***always profitable***.

### **B. The Reason for Trials**

*for you know that the testing of your faith*

- The term James uses for “***trial***” means “***test***” or “***testing***” and it implies that something or someone is put under pressure for two particular purposes: 1) to reveal or expose something; or, 2) to strengthen or build something about the thing or person being tested by pressure.

- **Illustration:** Sea trials/tests of a brand new vessel shortly after it is built but before it is put into actual naval service.
- The thing being tested in a trial is our faith – what we have confessed to believe about Jesus Christ when we embraced the gospel.
- And the two things a trial reveals about our faith are its **genuine authenticity** (do we really believe what we say we believe under pressure) and **its strength** (will we remain faithful and loyal to its ethical and moral implications) when we come under extreme and prolonged seasons of pressure.

### C. **The Result of Trials**

*for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. <sup>4</sup>And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

- James is asking the very personal question – “How well does your faith hold up when it is tested by the pressure of a trial? Does your faith stand up under pressure or does it cave in?”
- And the word James uses to help us grasp this concept is “endurance” or “perseverance”. Does your faith hold up under pressure – does it endure and persevere?
- Perseverance is the proof of genuineness – real faith endures!
- And endurance has an amazing effect on our faith – it strengthens and rounds it out so that it is complete (not missing anything) and robust (strong and vibrant).
- Which is why James tells us to respond a certain way to the reality and the experience of trials when they come.

### D. **The Response to Trials**

- Evaluate trials properly as a reason for joy  
*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds for you know*
- Embrace trials personally so they will have their full effect  
*<sup>4</sup>And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing*

### III. Spiritual Models – (Noah, Abraham, Jesus)

A. **Noah** – manifested unwavering belief and trust in God’s instruction over a prolonged trial that lasted 120 years.

*Hebrews 11:7* By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

B. **Abraham** – manifested unwavering belief and trust in God’s promise during an intense trial that demanded a precious relationship in his life.

*Hebrews 11:17–19* By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son,<sup>18</sup> of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”<sup>19</sup> He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

C. **Jesus** – manifested unwavering belief in God’s character during a physically painful and emotionally devastating life-ending trial.

*1 Peter 2:23* When he [Jesus] was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

In every case, their enduring loyalty and continued faithfulness to God confirmed the presence of a resolute and resilient faith in them!

And this is precisely what God desires to produce in us if we will allow him to use trials to strengthen, complete, and mature our faith in Him, His Word, and His promises.

### IV. A Spiritual Requirement – Wisdom from Above

*James 1:5–8:* If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.<sup>6</sup> But 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.<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 man, unstable in all his ways.

So, how were they able to navigate these immense pressures so successfully? And more importantly, how can we? James answers this question by pointing to a particular kind of wisdom.

Wisdom for James is much more than having the right information about life – it is knowing how to use that information and relying on that information to navigate life successfully in God’s sight.

He points out that this wisdom is not innate in us – we lack it. Further, this wisdom is particular – it comes from God which is why we must look to Him for it as opposed to other sources of wisdom around us. This is why James later describes this kind of wisdom as “*wisdom from above*” that actually produces qualities that shape and direct our life (*purity, peaceableness, reasonableness, gracious gentleness, mercy, moral goodness, impartiality, and sincerity*).

Most importantly, God has given this wisdom to His people by giving them a gracious “wisdom gift” – the Torah better known to us as the “*Law of the Lord*” in Psalm 1:2.

God will give abundant insight and help from this wisdom to anyone who will come to Him and ask – as long as they come with an undivided heart that has already determined to love Him with their whole heart, mind, and strength and to obey whatever He has said in His Word (Dt. 6:4-6).

In other words, James is pointing out an important truth – the pressure of a trial reveals whether you have an undivided heart that is fully committed to loving and obeying God or whether your heart has become divided, and you are looking to both the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world to see which is the better option.

***Illustration*** – Israel had been given a wisdom in which God promised to give them rain if they obeyed His word and remained undivided in their loyalty to Him (Lev 26:3-4; Dt. 11:11-15) and He told them how to obtain rain from Him (Zech. 10:1 – “ask rain from the Lord”).

By Elijah’s time, they had been under the extreme pressure of drought for 3 ½ years – it had devastated them personally, impoverished them economically, and brought death and devastation. The burning question of the hour – “how are we going to get rain? If God isn’t going to send it to us, should we listen to

Jezebel and her prophets and turn to Baal? After all, he is known as the rain god and he seems to have sent rain to the other nations!”

And the pressure from the test of a prolonged and painful doubt would reveal the truth about their faith and loyalty to God – would they look to the wisdom He had given to them and repent of their sins, OR would they turn to the wisdom of the nations and serve Baal?

James’ readers were not facing the test of worshiping Baal – but they were facing a very similar test that would reveal who, or what they were trusting in to meet the very real needs they had for daily bread!

## **V. A Sure Evaluation – Poverty and Wealth**

*James 1:9–11 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, <sup>10</sup> and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. <sup>11</sup> 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.*

Nothing will test the true nature of our faith than our response to poverty and wealth when we lack the resources necessary for daily life.

The way James puts this test before his readers is to ask them what they “boast” in – riches or poverty? The term “boast” is a word that both Paul and James use to express the idea of “rejoicing” or “confidence.” Here, James is asking, “As a believer who professes to have faith, what brings you joy and where are placing your security?”

If you lack material wealth, have you believed what Christ told you in His Word about the true status of those who are “poor in Spirit” (Matt 5:3)? Do you really believe that you are highly exalted with Christ in the heavenlies (Eph 2:6-7)? Or are you envious of the material wealth God has entrusted to some in your midst – do you long for it? Have you been distracted by it? Are you willing to bend God’s words or to depart from God’s will for your life to get it? In short, are you looking to what the world has to say about wealth to help you navigate the difficulties and pressures of your life?

If you have wealth, are you rejoicing in your wealth or are you rejoicing that God has humbled your heart so that you are no longer depending on your wealth for

life and strength but are devoted to using your wealth for the advancement of God's kingdom and not your own? Have you seen the fleeting nature of the wealth that God has given you in this life and are you using it to build a better life or are you using it to bring eternal life to others?

## **VI. A Satisfying Reward – True and Lasting Blessing**

*James 1:12 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.*

What is the source of our joy and where is the source of our confidence – wisdom from God or wealth from this world? For James, this was an important test! Those with a divided heart would give preferential treatment to the wealthy over the poor in their midst (2:1-7) and they would presume on the providence of God in their pursuit of wealth (4:12-17). However, those with an undivided heart would rejoice in their true position in Christ!

Those whose hearts are divided and who are double-minded find temporary joy and eternal sorrow as they watch their riches vanish in the unfolding of their earthly lives.

However, those whose heart is wholeheartedly and unreservedly God's receive blessing in this life and the crown of life in the life to come.

### **Conclusion:**

So what makes the difference between a professing Christian who has a divided heart (double-minded) and one who is wholeheartedly devoted to God? James has a very pointed answer – one loves God and the other loves the world.

James states that the person who passes the wealth test will receive a crown as a reward that God gives to those who love him (1:12). Later James reminds us that God has promised rich faith and an eternal kingdom to those who love him (2:5).

And then he cuts to the heart of the matter for a believer – you cannot love God and be a friend to the world. If your heart is divided in this way, you are guilty of adultery against God. And you can expect God to respond the same way you would

respond if someone you love were being tempted away into adultery – you would fight for that person and do everything in your power to keep them from the danger of falling and rescue them from the devastating effects of that kind of broken affection.

And that is precisely what James says will happen when our hearts are divided – and if we really want to know if they are – God will reveal that to us through a trial! This is why trials are such an important and valuable part of our lives as believers!

They expose the condition of our faith, they reveal the truth about our heart, and they can build a strong and vibrant faith if we will come to God and trust His Wisdom fully and completely.

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**The book of James reveals:**

- **Two** \_\_\_\_\_ – that lead to
- **Two** \_\_\_\_\_ **of** \_\_\_\_\_ – that reveal
- **Two** \_\_\_\_\_ – that expose
- **A** \_\_\_\_\_ **Spiritual Condition**

**I. A Spiritual** \_\_\_\_\_

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**II. A Surprising** \_\_\_\_\_

*James 1:2–3: Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, <sup>3</sup> for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.*

- A. The \_\_\_\_\_ of Trials
- B. The \_\_\_\_\_ of Trials
- C. The \_\_\_\_\_ of Trials
- D. The \_\_\_\_\_ of Trials

### III. Spiritual \_\_\_\_\_ :

A. \_\_\_\_\_

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C. \_\_\_\_\_

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### V. A Sure \_\_\_\_\_ : Poverty and Wealth

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