

"HANDLING LIFE'S TOUGH TIMES"

James 1:1-4

Your faith will be tested. Count on it. If it can't be tested, it can't be trusted. Think about it. We live in a broken world where bad things happen to good people, even Christ-honoring Christian people. How do we handle life's tough times? I'm talking about those times when . . .

- **our heart is broken**
- **our dreams are crushed**
- **our heart is gripped by despair**
- **our hope is fading**

When life is hard, we must turn to the Word of God. In particular, I'm talking about the book of James. This little epistle is tucked away in the New Testament, and it is designed to help us understand "how to handle life's tough times."

- **It consists of only 108 verses.**
- **It is saturated with 54 commands.**

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CFBC... "James: Real Faith for a Real World"

- It is the most practical book in the N.T.
- It is *"the Proverbs of the N.T."*
- It is *"A Handbook for Hard Times."*

O.S. Hawkins' comments on the book of James are insightful and helpful . . .

Today we are two thousand years removed from James's writing, yet his letter remains as relevant to us as the Internet's morning news. Why? Because in these 108 verses is a sort of code—a James Code—that outlines how we can put our faith into action in the normal traffic patterns of everyday life. If you're like me, your challenge is not knowing what Christ calls us to do, but actually doing it; the challenge is practicing with our lives what we know in our minds and proclaim with our lips James challenged us to put shoe leather to what we believe (James 1:22). *The James Code, pp. 2-3*

Have you received Jesus as your Savior and Lord? If you have, you are a new person in Christ. He's given you the gift of eternal life, and He has given you the

gift of abundant life. Listen, how you live after you are saved is crucial. That’s the point James is driving home in his letter. Are you ready to join me on this journey through this fast-moving, blunt, in-your-face letter? Coach James has his whistle in his mouth and he’s going to be barking out commands that we desperately need to pay attention to. Let’s begin with an important introduction . . .

James 1:1... James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.

James was a popular name. In fact, it was a form of the great Old Testament name, *Jacob*. There were several men who bore this name in the New Testament. Two of them were well-known and influential.

James, the son of Zebedee and the brother of John— James and his brother John were apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ. This James was executed by Herod before this epistle was written.

James, the son of Joseph and Mary and the brother of Jesus— What do we know about him?

Matthew 13:55... "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?" **He was the brother of Jesus.**

John 7:3–5... Therefore His brothers said to Him, "Leave here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing. **4** "For no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be *known* publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world." **5** For not even His brothers were believing in Him. **He was a scoffer to begin with.**

1 Corinthians 15:6–7... After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; **7** then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. **He became a believer after an encounter with the risen Lord.**

Acts 12:17... But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, "Report these things to James and the

brethren." Then he left and went to another place. **He was the leader of the church in Jerusalem.**

James never wavered. He was steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. He was known as "*old camel knees*" because of his fervent prayer life. He wrote this epistle around 45 AD, making it the first of the N.T. books to be written. James was martyred around 62 AD.

James 1:1 ... James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ

James was a godly man and a humble man. He does not describe himself as Joseph and Mary's son or the Lord's brother. He doesn't highlight his position of leadership over the church in Jerusalem. He doesn't mention the fact that the resurrected Christ personally appeared to him.

James referred to himself as a "*bond-servant*." The words here are powerful testimony to the deity of Jesus. The word itself means to be permanently bound to another as a slave. He considered himself

to be the property of the Lord Jesus. Shouldn't we?
Paul wrote . . .

1 Corinthians 6:19–20 ... Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? **20** For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

To get the most out of this study, you must realize that you belong to Jesus. He is your Master! Next, I want you to see who James was writing to.

James 1:1 ... To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.

James wrote his letter to Jewish Christians who had been driven out of Jerusalem because of persecution (Acts 8:1). They were facing tough times because of their faith. They had to leave their home, their jobs, and everything they had spent a lifetime building. They were hated by both Jews and Gentiles because of their bold faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Talk about tough times. They faced it every single day!

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Let's get down to the nitty gritty and answer the question—*how do we handle life's tough times?* There's a powerful truth that emerges out of verses 2-4. Here it is . . .

YOU CAN BE AN OVERCOMER.

Coach James has his whistle in his mouth and he's about to bark out his first command. Are you ready? It's all about . . .

1. THE BELIEVER'S PERSPECTIVE

James 1:2... Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials ...

This text reveals several important aspects we need to pay attention to . . .

A.) The Reality of Trials

Notice that James inserts the word, "when", not "if."

Job 5:7... For man is born for trouble, As sparks fly upward.

John 16:33... These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

B.) The Range of Trials

"Encounter" means to be surrounded by trouble. The same word is used in the parable of the Good Samaritan . . .

Luke 10:30... Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. "

These are not trials that result from our selfishness, our rebellion, or our worldliness. These trials ambush you. They come out of nowhere when you least expect them.

"Various" means multicolored, variegated. What's trial for me may not be a trial for you.

C.) The Response to Trials

In light of the trials we face, that's some kind of command, isn't it?

"Consider" means to carefully develop a logical conclusion so you can avoid an emotional response.

"Joy" is not the jump up and down kind of happiness. This JOY is an inner sense of well-being that nothing in this life can touch. It is a supernatural delight in the person and purpose of God.

Psalm 55:22... Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.

Nehemiah 8:10... the joy of the LORD is your strength."

You can't consider it joy when . . .

- **You are filling your time with entertainment**
- **You are consumed with anger & unforgiveness**
- **You are giving in to an addiction**

What's your perspective in light of the trials you are facing? Listen, you can face your trials as a **VICTIM** if you choose to. As a result, you will blame God and ask the proverbial question—*How can God allow this to happen to me?*

There is a second option. You can face your trials as a **STUDENT**. When you do this, your question will be—*Lord, what are you trying to teach me. How do you want to use this in my life?* Oswald Chambers wrote . . .

Every humiliation, everything that tries and vexes us, is God's way of cutting a deeper channel in us through which the life of Christ can flow.

D.) The Reason for Trials

James 1:3... knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

"Endurance" literally means *to remain under*. It's a picture of triumphant tenacity, steadfastness, and perseverance. It means to keep on keeping on. Too many Christians short-circuit what God wants to do in their lives by cutting and running.

- **We quit our job when we are mistreated.**
- **We divorce because we're not satisfied.**
- **We leave the church when we're offended.**

Hebrews 12:1–2... Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **2** fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

YOU CAN BE AN OVERCOMER.

The first command deals with the believer's perspective. In verses 2-3, we examined the reality of trials, the range of trials, the response to trials, and the reason for trials. That brings us to the second command. . .

2. THE BELIEVER'S PERFECTION

James 1:4... And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

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The Lord is not glorified by hollow endurance that does not result in spiritual maturity. The Lord permits trials in our lives so that He can grow us up spiritually. God uses this process for His glory and our good. Paul picked up on this when he wrote . . .

Romans 5:3–5... And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; **4** and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; **5** and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

This is God's will for your life as a believer. Don't settle for less when the Lord expects more out of you!

CONCLUSION

James calls for real faith in a real world. He presents a Christianity in blue jeans and work boots. He wants you to know that . . .

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Are you a believer in the true sense of the word?

Will you turn from your sin and receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord by faith?

Are you living as a bonds slave of the Lord Jesus Christ? Does He have first place in your life? Commit your life to Him!

Do you have a church home? The idea that you could be a Christian without being a faithful church member was foreign to James and the early Christian leaders.

Do you need prayer for some trial that you are dealing with this morning?