

The Book of James

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Thank you also to my family at New Life Wesleyan Church for giving me the freedom to grow as a leader and as a follower of Christ.

Most importantly, I want to thank and praise God!

About This Book

People sometimes ask why I would take the time to write a book. The answer is twofold. First, it's an opportunity to speak with my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren about this wonderful gospel that I have had the honor of working for all of my life. I want them to see the joy and power of living a life guided and protected by God's Word, God's Spirit, and God's commands. In doing so, I hope to establish many generations of my family in the wonderful grace of our Lord. So I write as a father.

I also write as a pastor. New Life Wesleyan Church has become a rather large body of believers meeting in multiple services and multiple locations across multiple states. While this is a huge reason to praise God and more of a blessing than any of us who work here could ever have hoped for, it creates its own set of challenges. It has become impossible for me to sit down individually with folks in the church like I once did and have deeper conversations about the power of God's Word and how it can be applied in their lives. And so, this is the reason for a series of books called *Coffee with the Pastor*.

While I am neither a theologian nor a scholar, as a pastor, it is my job to help people read and better understand the Word of God. His Word is powerful and life changing. If you read and understand it, you can see the God of heaven through the blood of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit—and that will change your life. Therefore, the goal of this series of books is not theological, but a practical application of life-changing, biblical truth. That is the purpose of my ministry and the ultimate goal of my life.

So, grab a cup of coffee, open up your Bible, and let us think about what God can do in your life.

Introduction

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

—James 1:1

The opening line tells us the name of the author of this epistle (letter). However, several men in the New Testament are named James. So which one wrote this letter? One commentator explains it this way. “There were two apostles with the name of James. One was the brother of John, son of Zebedee. The other was the son of Alphaeus (see Matt. 10:2–3). However, neither of them is thought to have been the author of this Epistle. The oldest half-brother of Jesus was also named James (see Matt. 13:55). . . . Most scholars believe that he wrote this general letter.”¹ So James, the brother of Jesus, is generally thought to be the writer of this epistle.

One second-century writer described James in this way:



James, the brother of the Lord, who, as there were many of this name, was surnamed the Just by all, from the days of our lord until now, received the government of the Church with the apostles. This man was holy from his mother’s womb. He drank neither wine nor strong drink, and abstained from animal food. A

razor never came upon his head, he never anointed himself with oil, and never used a bath. He alone was allowed to enter the sanctuary. He never wore woolen, but linen garments. He was in the habit of entering the temple alone, and was often found upon his bended knees, and asking for the forgiveness of the people; so that his knees became as hard as camels', in consequence of his habitual supplication and kneeling before God.²

And so, we have an epistle written by someone who by his family, upbringing, training, and personal example is worthy of our attention. In fact, among the early church leaders that we know much more about, this lesser-known character carried a huge reputation. Clement of Alexandria, the ancient historian, recorded this concerning St. James' appointment to the charge of the church of Jerusalem: "Peter and James and John, after the ascension of our Saviour, did not contend for the honour, but chose James the Just as Bishop of Jerusalem."³

In the last part of verse 1, James wrote to Jewish people ("the twelve tribes") who no longer lived in Israel or Jerusalem ("scattered among the nations"). This knowledge can help us understand the cultural assumptions behind James' words. He spoke into Jewish culture and was most comfortable with Jewish culture. In Acts 15:12–21, James helped bring resolution to an early conflict about the requirements for non-Jewish people who entered the Christian faith. While James had a deep understanding and appreciation for the traditional Jewish customs and laws, he also understood the unique needs of non-Jewish believers.



JAMES 1



*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,
whenever you face trials of many kinds.*

—James 1:2

On the surface, this requirement seems very odd. Why would we consider it joy to face trials? The word *joy* really does mean what it seems to mean. The original Greek word *chara* refers to the actual emotion of joy or gladness or an occasion that brings joy or gladness.¹ Here, the apostle is requiring us to have the actual emotion of joy or gladness as a result of facing trials. This request seems unreasonable until we read in verse 3 that “the testing of your faith produces perseverance.”

Every trial has a purpose, just like every heartache has a benefit and scar a lesson. When we face “trials of many kinds,” we encounter life lessons. Each trial teaches us something or strengthens us in some way. Whatever we may think of the statement, it is still true: “What doesn’t kill you, makes you stronger.” This type of understanding gives meaning to our trials and purpose to our suffering. We are not just in anguish; we are learning. Learning to be stronger, smarter, calmer, and wiser. None of this knowledge eases the pain and heartache of trials; however, that pain and heartache is somewhat easier to endure when we know there is purpose behind it.



Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

—James 1:4

Just as individual trials make us stronger, the repetitive occurrence of trials builds our perseverance and character. Over time, strength builds on top of strength until we become truly resilient, wise, powerful, strong, “mature and complete.” With enough time (and it will take a lot of time) and through the grace of God, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the maturity that comes from enduring trials, we can come to a place of “not lacking anything.” This maturing process takes time, and tough lessons must be learned along the way. At times, we might be tempted to lose our perspective and quit. The apostle speaks to that as well, when he said anyone lacking wisdom should ask our God, who does not find fault and gives generously (v. 5).

When the going is tough and the pain and difficulty are mounting, we can easily lose our perspective on the work God is doing in us. We can focus on the pain and forget about the progress. In these moments, we must cry out to God and ask him for wisdom. We must ask for the wisdom to understand that he is working in our lives and to remember that every trial has a beginning and an ending. Trials come, and trials go.

God sustains us through each one. When we ask God to give us wisdom to retain our perspective, he “gives generously to all without finding fault.”

It is difficult to explain how comforting those words are to me. That God would give me the wisdom that I lack and do it without finding fault in me is a marvelous thought. I can be so weak and lose perspective so easily. But without yelling at me, calling me stupid, looking down on me, or judging me in any way, God gives generously. What an amazing grace! What an amazing God!



But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

—James 1:6–8

Faith ultimately requires faith. That might seem redundant, but sometimes we all need a reminder of that simple truth. We want a steady, regular, predictable relationship with the Creator God of the universe. We want him to do exactly what we expect, when we expect it, and how we expect it to be done. We want God to work like a business contract or a vending machine—if I do these things, I will get these results. But God doesn’t work that way.

This chapter presents a clear theme: trials . . . perseverance . . . maturity . . . completeness . . . wisdom . . . and for all of that . . . faith!

This is not a prescription for getting a new car, a new house, or a big raise. It is a prescription for *becoming*, not getting. God wants us to become more, better, wiser, stronger, deeper, and more like him! That process is not predictable or steady. Life has ups and downs. There are good days and bad days, trials and blessings. We need to ask for wisdom—when it is all going right and when it is all going wrong. When we ask for wisdom, we must ask with belief. Our faith in God is what ultimately provides the wisdom we need and gives us the courage and stability to carry on when a given moment doesn't make sense.

When we falter in our faith, we become unstable. We're blown about like the waves of the sea on a stormy day, furious and flustered, while God is in the deep parts of our lives, untouched by the fury that seems to be tearing us apart. Our faith reminds us that the wind and storm will eventually stop. Then the surface will be just as calm as the depths. What is really deep inside will come through on top.

Maturity, peace, strength, and faith will prevail. Confusion, doubt, indecisiveness, disillusionment, and depression will fade away with the passing wind and leave us further convinced that our faith is placed, not vainly in a God that does not respond, but wisely in *the* God who cares and delivers.