

I Believe...So Now What?!
(Week 1)
James 1:1-11
“Find Joy in WHAT?!”

Introduction

What do you want out of life? Think about it for a moment before you answer. If you asked that question of 100 people, you'd most likely get 100 different answers. Some would say, they would like to be financially well off. Others might say, they want to live a long healthy life. Still others might wish for romance, a great career, or even a new bass boat! But for the Christian, the answer should always be the same. What every true believer “should” want out of life is to glorify God. Is that the first thing that you thought of when I asked the question? If the answer to this question is no, then my friend you are still quite a ways from spiritual maturity.

The book of *James* is a study in practical Christianity. Some have called it a commentary upon “The Sermon on The Mount” (**Matthew 5-7**). I think this is a very good description. Remember, that James is the younger brother of Christ Himself. Since Jesus preached this message over and over again, I'm pretty sure that James heard it several times. Probably even in his own home as Jesus was growing up. The Sermon on The Mount gives us instruction as to how a born again child of God will think and act completely different from the world. The righteous life of the Believer must bring glory and honor to God. This is the very meaning of life.

God has promised that those who put their faith in Jesus will be forgiven for their sins. We all know this. It is called “The Gospel”, and we preach it every single Sunday. But what many Christians do not fully understand is that once a person has been born again, The Holy Spirit of God moves into that person's life and begins to do a work in them. Old things are passed away and all things become new (**2 Corinthians 5:17**). God begins changing us from the inside out, so that we no longer think, act, or even speak like the rest of this world. This process is called sanctification, and its end result is that every child of God will one day become a perfected reflection of Jesus Christ Himself.

“For those He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” **Romans 8:29**

I find it fascinating that this verse actually follows the often quoted verse:

“We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to His purpose.” **Romans 8:28**

We love that verse don't we? I mean, we hear it quoted all the time. Unfortunately, most of the time it is misused. It doesn't mean that if you love God, you will get everything that you want. So let's put it in context shall we? When you put the two verses together, what it says is that God has chosen you to be conformed into the image of His Son, and He will see to it that this will happen. God is guaranteeing that everyone who truly believes in Jesus will end up being perfected into the very image of Christ Jesus! That's what He means by “all things working together for good”. The “good” means Christlikeness. So, just what “things” will God use to bring us into the image of Christ? Ok, take a deep breath and hold onto your seat for just a moment. I'm going to give you some truth that the televangelist will never tell you. God uses **suffering** to conform us to the image of Christ!

A child that always gets their way is destined to become a spoiled brat, but God has predestined us for greater things. And, in order for us to become what God intends, we must be subjected to hardships in order to test and strengthen our faith. I realize that this is not a popular concept in our culture of convenience. We long for a life filled with luxury and comfort. Why, we are a generation who has a meltdown while waiting at a two minute red light! We stand in front of our microwave ovens and scream “hurry up”! Is it any wonder that we are so unacquainted with the work of The Holy Spirit, Who

longs to sanctify us and teach us patience? The book of *James* is a reality check upon the “modern day Christian”. He doesn’t sugar coat his message. He plainly, and often painfully, reminds us that we are to be nothing like this world around us. We have been set apart to be different. Different in How we **Handle Our Trials**, How we **Handle our Thoughts** , and How we **Handle Our Treasure**.

How We Handle Our Trials (vs. 2-4)

“Consider it great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.”
James 1:2-4

Upon first glance at this passage a person might be inclined to believe that it is a typo. But rest assured, it says exactly what The Holy Spirit wanted it to say. The word “consider” in the Greek actually means *to take in to account, or to carefully examine*. James admonishes us to consider our trials and tribulations and then, make the conscious decision to not just have joy in them, but to have abundant joy! Though he is most definitely not saying that we should enjoy the pain. He is, however, saying that we should seek to find joy in the midst of our trials. The next question that any normal person would ask after understanding this statement is... Why? Why should we take time to stop and consider our painful experiences and then, decide to be joyous because of them?

Well, the answer is actually quite simple. Remember back in *Hebrews*, when we discussed that God has not only saved you, but He has committed Himself to see you through to perfection (completion)? In ***Hebrews Chapter 12***, we are taught that God will discipline His children in order to help them reach maturity. And, just what does that maturity look like? We will know that we have reached maturity, when we are completely like Jesus. Now, I don’t know about you, but I’m not there yet! So, how will God discipline me, so that I will get there? Through “various” trials James tell us (the word means “*multifaceted*”). God will use many different and painful circumstances in our lives to bring us into the image of Christ. So, why should we joy in our trials? Because we trust that God is using them to make us more like Jesus, so we will eventually bring Him glory!

Every truly-born-again-believer will find joy in knowing that we can glorify God. Even if that means we must go through some discomfort to do so. It doesn’t mean that we enjoy the pain, that would just be weird, but it means that we will take joy in knowing that God is using it to do a work in us. We know by faith that God will do whatever it takes to bring us to a completed work of sanctification.

“I and sure of this, the He Who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”
Philippians 1:6

You see, when we are more like Jesus, knowing what is at the finish line will allow us to have joy, even when the race is difficult. Just think of how He accepted the cross. He had joy in knowing what the final result would be, even though the pain was horrific. He knew that the end more than justified the means, so He accepted His cross with JOY!

“Keeping our eyes on Jesus, the Source and Perfecter of our faith. For the JOY that lay before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”
Hebrews 12:2

Of course, he didn’t enjoy the pain! But Christ endured it with joy, because He knew that because of His sacrifice, He would glorify God and save us from our sins. He counted it great joy to suffer for the sake of perfection. Now listen to what James says will happen when we endure our trials with joy.

“because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.”

Just knowing that God is working in us, through our trials, to remake us into the image of His son will bring us JOY! What a thrill this should be to the believer, when they realize that God is truly keeping His promise to see us through to completion! So... when you face trials, remember the reason that God allow us to be tested and consider it **GREAT JOY**. For it means that God is still working on you!

How We Handle Our Thoughts (vs. 5-8)

“Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God — Who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly — and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, without doubting. For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from The LORD, being double-minded and unstable in all his ways.” **James 1:5-8**

When we read this section, it would seem that James is changing the subject, but he really isn't. What he is saying is that we must learn to seek the wisdom of God when we face various trials, rather than react to them as the world does. Remember, for the Child of God, every trial and temptation is for the purpose of developing our character and strengthening our faith. Therefore, when we are in the midst of discouraging and painful circumstances, we must go to God in prayer and ask Him to show us what we are to learn from these trials. We must ask... in faith, believing that all things are working together for our good just as God has promised (**Romans 8:28**).

We do not think as the world does, but instead, we seek the wisdom of God in our every circumstance. Imagine what our lives would be like, if we took this approach in every difficult situation? Instead of complaining and asking “Why me Lord?”, we would fall to our knees and say, “What are you trying to teach me Lord?” You see, knowing Christ is supposed to transform our way of thinking.

“Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.” **Romans 12:2**

Now **that**, is revolutionary Christianity! The world knows, all too well, how to complain when times get tough, but the believer is supposed to handle his thoughts differently. Those who have faith are to trust God completely in the storms of life. They don't get blown in every direction by the winds of doubt, but rather, they hold on to the faith that God is at work to insure that everything is for our own good. Genuine faith doesn't walk away from God in the storm. It clings to Him all the more.

Have you ever thought about why God got so upset with the children of Israel in the wilderness? Because they complained all the time, that's why. By their constant whining, they proved that they had no faith, and God got more than a little fed up with it. As a result, He let them wander around in the wilderness until He could raise up a generation of faith. Real believers aren't complainers. They aren't quitters. They just hold onto God, no matter what. That is true WISDOM.

Think about Christ, when He suffered for our sins upon the cross. Listen to what The Scriptures say about how he handled it.

“He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth. Like a lamb led to the slaughter and like a sheep silent before her shearers, He did not open His mouth.” **Isaiah 53:7**

Do you know what it means, when it says that through all of His sufferings, Jesus did not open his mouth? It means that He never once complained! He went through the most agonizing trial that anyone has ever known, and rather than complain about it, He sought the wisdom of God to be able to endure His suffering. Think about it. Why did Jesus go and pray in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before He went to the cross? He was preparing Himself for the trials that He would soon be facing. He wanted to glorify His Father by enduring those trials well. He sought God's wisdom, and He was able to meet the challenge perfectly. He is our example. The next time you are going through a trial and times are really hard, seek the wisdom of God, and ask Him to guide you through your time of grief. Believe that all things will work together for your good and cling to God in faith, trusting in Him for the outcome. Then God will give you the wisdom that you need to endure.

How We Handle Our Treasure (9-11)

“Let the brother of humble circumstances boast in his exaltation, but let the rich boast in his humiliation, because he will pass away like a flower of the field. For the sun rises and, together with the scorching wind, dries up the grass; its flower falls off, and its beautiful appearance perishes. In the same way, the rich person will wither away while pursuing his activities.” James 1:9-11

What James is saying here is quite simple. If you have nothing else but Jesus, then you are rich. But if you have everything, and miss out on having Christ, then you have nothing. Riches are fleeting, but Jesus is forever. We should be content with knowing Christ, no matter our present financial condition. The believer is required to be content with what he has (***Hebrews 13:5***).

It becomes evident from reading this letter from James, that he wasn't overly impressed by wealth. Remember that James lived in a time when Jewish believers were having their property confiscated, because they had decided to follow Christ. Other Jewish believers were selling their possessions in order to support their destitute brethren (***Acts 2:45; 4:32-35***). So, to have great wealth in James' congregation, meant that you weren't being supportive of those who were doing without. There is nothing wrong with having wealth, but there is something very wrong with hoarding wealth. The true follower of Christ must realize that all he owns belongs not to himself, but to The LORD. This is what it means to have Jesus **as** Lord. He is in charge of everything, including our finances. If we see those around us in need, but are unwilling to share from what we have, it proves that we do not possess the love of Christ.

The Church in Jerusalem was going through some pretty intense hardship when James wrote this letter, but he wanted them to know that God would use these trials for His glory. James also expected other believers to share with those who were suffering. You can tell a lot about someone's faith by looking at their checkbook. Love goes far beyond sympathy and prayer. Genuine agape love causes us to give, and give generously. How we handle wealth speaks volumes of how we love our Lord.

The Book of *James* outlines simple and practical Christianity. If we truly believe in Christ, then we will live like it. It is the book that answers the question, "I believe, so now what?". He begins by telling us that when we have truly been born again, not only will we have trials and temptations, but we should embrace them, for they are given so we may be conformed to the image of Christ. And following Him should change the way we handle our trials, our thoughts, and our treasure. We must bring all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and in so doing, we bring Him glory. So let us live out what we say we believe.

And ALL of God's people said... **Truth!!!**