

## Count It All Joy

## James 1:1-18

### James 1:1-18 Introduction

- Each of us experiences trials and temptations.
- They are a normal part of life.
- Still, it is vital that we understand how to deal with them properly.
- As we begin his letter, James will help us with that today.

### James 1:1-18 Outline

- I. Greetings from James. 1:1
- II. Rejoice in your trials. 1:2-4
- III. Ask God for wisdom. 1:5-8
- IV. Know your position. 1:9-11
- V. Don't blame God. 1:12-18

**Face your trials with confident trust in God, who will use them to bring you to full maturity in your faith.**

### Greetings from James. 1:1

- James is the brother (really "half-brother") of the Lord. His parents were Mary and Joseph.
- He is writing to Jewish Christians in the "diaspora," that is, scattered outside the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem or Palestine.
- Greetings is literally something like "rejoice," but it serves as an actual greeting. James uses the word as a starting point to his next section.

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### Rejoice in your trials. 1:2-4

- 1:2 count it or "consider"
- All joy = "pure, complete or total" joy.
- James is not telling us how we should feel; he is telling us how we should think.
- Feelings are largely unintentional.
- Thoughts involve a great degree of choice.
- Learn to think correctly about your troubles.
  
- 1:2 Fall into We don't have to go out looking for problems. We fall into them soon enough.
- Trials can be outward forms of testing or inner temptations to sin. Here they are outward.
- James uses the word both ways in this section.
- 1:3-4 God uses trials to test our faith and bring us, slowly but surely, to greater maturity if we respond properly, by trusting God as we submit to them.
  
- Our faith does not shelter us from adversity.
- It may even be the cause of it.
- Our trials will be "various," meaning that come in multiple colors – we might add multiple shapes and sizes as well.
- (Expect all kinds of trouble.)

- The key issue is how we respond.
- Problems are not inherently joyful. James is not looking for a false display of pleasure or happiness in the midst of trouble.
- We should, however, view trials as an essential part of God's plan for us.
- They play an important role in our growth when we face them with determination.
- Therefore, we should choose to view them positively and with appropriate gratitude.
- 1:2-4 Compare James to these verses from Christ's teachings in the Gospels.
  - Regarding James 1:2
    - Matthew 5:11-12
    - Luke 6:22-23
  - Regarding James 1:4
    - Matthew 5:48

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**Ask God for wisdom. 1:5-8**

- 1:5 Wisdom is the ability to act biblically, revealing that we really understand what life is about from God's perspective.
- God is generous in His giving of wisdom.
- He will not condemn you for not having it.
- He will happily answer your prayer and give you more of it.
- He liberally gives us whatever we need to please Him. Wisdom is one of those things.
- 1:6 Ask in faith When we pray we need to believe that God really answers prayer.
- Listen to the firmness of Jesus in Matthew 7:7.
- With no doubting James pictures the doubter as a person as unstable as the surface of the sea, constantly moving with each new gust of wind.
- See Matthew 21:21.
- 1:7 That kind of faith receives nothing, but here we need to distinguish between two types of doubt.
- One type of doubt is merely a weakness of faith.
- The other type of doubt actually questions the character of God or whether it makes any sense to pray in the first place.
- One illustration of a weakness of faith is found in Mark 9, where the father of a boy afflicted by a demon asks Jesus for help.
- He also gives us one of the most precise, realistic expressions of faith in all of the Bible, in Mark 9:24.
- The result was that Jesus cast out the demon just as the father desired.
- The other type of doubt – the questioning of God's character – is seen in the faith of the Israelites in the OT, who worshiped both God and their favorite idols at the same time.
- We see it today in, say, politicians who believe in God at election time or during a crisis.
- Or in the multitudes of people who pray at church, but never at home or with any depth.

- 1:8 double-minded “double-souled” literally, “di-psychos” is a word James coined.
- He uses it again in 4:8.
- The meaning is obvious. This person clearly does not love God with all of their heart, mind, soul or strength.
- They keep one leg on each side of the fence.
- Their faith is consistently inconsistent, which is otherwise known as “unfaithfulness.”

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**Know your position. 1:9-11**

- 1:9 The lowly brother is the one of humble circumstances. He is contrasted with the rich of 1:10.
- Boasting is often seen as negative in the Scriptures, but there is also the OT concept of “boasting in the Lord.”
- That is the kind of thing James implies here.
- The humble brother can look forward to his future state and rightly give glory to God.
- 1:10-11 The rich also have something to glory or “boast” in, but it is not their riches, as some might be tempted to believe.
- They are to glory in their “humiliation.”
- If a rich person recognizes their utter dependence upon Christ, then this is a real reason to glory or boast.
- He or she has found the secret of true riches.
- Compare what James says with the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 23:11-12.
- The final judgment will bring some reversals.
- The rich, powerful and famous of this world may not amount to much in God’s sight.
- God’s most faithful servants, likewise, may be the poor, humble and unseen people of today.
- The contrast between wealth and poverty is a major theme in this letter from James.
- You may remember the bumper sticker slogan:
  - “He who dies with the most toys wins.”
- James might word that differently:
  - “He who dies with the most toys still dies, so he better get ready now while he still can.”

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**Don’t blame God. 1:12-18**

- 1:12 This section starts with a beatitude, that form so prominent in Christ’s own teaching, but also found in the Psalms, Proverbs and elsewhere.
- The blessing is not just for the one who comes under fire, but for the one who faithfully endures the test.
- This victorious Christian is rewarded with the crown of life.

- 1:12 James equates “the man who endures temptation” with “those who love Him.”
- This brings up a serious issue:
- If we really love God, it will so impact our lives that we will faithfully endure in various struggles out of total devotion to Him.
  
- 1:12 And if we don’t – in other words, if our faith just utterly flounders – then can we really be called Christians at all?
- In the final analysis that’s an issue between each person and God, but the answer is “Maybe not.”
- Eternal life is given to those who withstand the test – or at least that’s how we can know eternal life when we see it.
  
- 1:13 When it comes to temptation, that form of testing that rises up from within, please always remember that God is not the problem. We are.
- God and temptation have nothing in common.
- Temptation, in the sense of enticement toward evil, is something which arises from within us.
  
- 1:13 Temptation, in this sense, is a result of the fall and is evidence that we, by nature, are no longer in harmony with God.
- In such times we should turn trustingly to God and ask for His help.
- God’s help is available to us so that we can resist temptation, but since He and evil are at odds with one another, we dare not blame God when temptation comes our way.
  
- 1:14-15 Here is the process by which temptation turns into sin, which then leads to death.
- This is purely a human problem, not something that originates with God at all.
- It is a form of rebellion against Him.
- James envisions three generations: Desire is the father of sin, which is the father of death.
  
- 1:14-15 Blaming God or others for our own sin, however, is as old as the Garden of Eden.
- Adam told the Lord his sin was caused by “the woman You gave me.”
- And while the world, the flesh and the devil indeed work together in a very complex relationship, the core of the blame for our sin rests solely with ourselves.
- God remains separate, holy and blameless.
  
- 1:16 James now issues a stern but loving warning to all of us.
- We need to be careful because we can easily be deceived.
- This might also be translated, “Do not deceive yourselves ...”
- This tendency toward deception does in fact come from within.
- See Jeremiah 17:9
  
- 1:17 Deception would involve believing something other than this about God.
- God gives us every good and perfect gift.
- This is all He gives us and, because He is unchanging, He never gives us anything else.
- Self-deception, temptation and sin are a result of our own tendency toward wickedness.
- God, by contrast, deserves the credit for everything that is perfectly good.

- 1:18 God “gave us birth” of His own will by means of His word.
- When we receive Christ through believing the gospel message, we are born again to a new, eternal life in Christ.
- This is the exact opposite of what happens in the cycle of sin.
- 1:18 Sin brings forth death. God’s word brings forth life.
  - See 1 Peter 1:22-23.
- Face your trials with confident trust in God, who will use them to bring you to full maturity in your faith.

### **Trials and Temptations.**

- James makes a distinction between trials and temptations (which are the same word in the original Greek).
- The first type we are to “count all joy,” because we know God has a plan in them.
- The second type is a tempting toward evil that arises from within ourselves.
- For example, we may find ourselves in the midst of a financial struggle.
- This is a trial that God intends to use to mature us and strengthen our character.
- Yet, in the midst of this God-ordained trial, we are tempted to behave unethically to obtain money in a dishonest way.
- This is a temptation that arises from within ourselves. God did not cause it.
- If we rely upon God’s help to resist temptation, and take the “way of escape” promised in 1 Corinthians 10:13, then this God-ordained trial will help us to grow.
- We become persevering, steadfast believers.
- Alternatively, if we give in to the desire to do something unethical, we will sin and have only ourselves to blame.

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### **James 1:1-18 Conclusions**

- Trials and troubles have enormous positive potential within them.
- If we let them, they can be used by God to bring us to greater maturity in our faith.
- This means we have to submit to them and not doubt God’s character in allowing trials and troubles to come our way.
- We need not put on a fake “happy face,” but we do need to “count it all joy.”
- We must confidently ask God for wisdom in all those many times that we really need it.
- How do we live uprightly in the midst of a corrupt and immoral world?
- By wisely staying unshakably loyal to the God who is unfailingly committed to us.
- While he sometimes intentionally lets us learn through trial and error, we know that he will give us insight to discern His will at all those times that we genuinely need it.
- Moving on to money: The Lord certainly encourages us to work hard and expects us to do our best to earn an honest living, but He is also realistic in that.

- Despite our best efforts we may have trouble making ends meet.
- And though we may do our best to fight it, economic injustice will always be a part of this world's makeup. "You have the poor with you always." (Matt. 26:11)
  
- Part of a mature Christian mindset includes a biblical view of money.
- Categories of rich and poor are non-essentials in God's sight and as believers both need humility.
- "You can't take it with you." may be a tired old cliché, but it happens to also be true.
- Put God first and use your resources wisely.
  
- Always remember that God is responsible for what is good, not for what is evil.
- He will never tempt you to sin.
- Sin and death come as a result of the desires that reside in our own rebellious hearts.
- These were not part of God's initial creation, but entered it when God's free creatures began to rebel.
  
- Consequently, any time we blame God for our own temptations or sin, we are accusing Him falsely.
- Remember that He wants to help you resist evil and will provide the "way of escape" when you encounter temptation.
  - *"Christians are a special people, but not a protected species. Indeed, there is a sense in which they ought to expect even more than their share of the buffetings of life. This is because patient endurance of all sorts of tribulations is, in fact, God's appointed way forward for his people to the maturity (1:4) and crown (1:12) he wills for them."*
    - J. A. Motyer, *The Message of James: The Tests of Faith*.
  
  - *"When believers respond to ... trials with joy, faith, and endurance, their Christian experience is no longer just intellectual or theoretical. They develop proven faith (v. 3), full and complete character (v. 4), and the kind of practical obedience James called for throughout his epistle. The corollary to this is that a faith that is not tested by adversity will always remain shallow and incomplete."*
    - Roy Zuck, *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*

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