

James: Confident Stand **Proverbs 2:10, 9:10; Romans 5:1-5; James 1**

We are jumping into a new series this morning where we will study the book of James one chapter at a time. Chapter 1 is so packed full of good stuff. It's a bit of an introduction to the entire letter, so before we get into it too much, let's zoom out and look at the book as a whole.

The Book of James:

The big idea of the book, and this series, is: Real faith is not shallow belief or religious performance. Real faith produces: wholeness, wisdom, endurance, and obedience through a life fully surrendered to Jesus.

James was the brother of Jesus and did not originally believe Jesus was the Messiah. However, after Jesus's resurrection, everything changed. He became one of the primary leaders of the church in Jerusalem. James was eventually martyred for his faith shortly after writing this letter.

This letter is not a theological argument like many of Paul's letters. It is more of a 'how-to guide' for Christian living that was written to scattered Jewish Christians after the persecution and death of Stephen. The letter is deeply influenced by the wisdom literature of Proverbs and the teaching of Jesus...especially the Sermon on the Mount.

The voice of James reflects the voice of Jesus by using short wisdom sayings, memorable one-liners, practical confrontation, and a call to commitment. James is asking: *What does real faith actually look like when life gets hard?*

Confident Stand:

Now let's zoom in on Chapter 1. It tells us that as Christians, we have to take a Confident Stand. We do not place our confidence in comfort, wealth, emotions, or circumstances. Our confidence is in the hope found in God's transforming work. We can stand in confidence because of what God has already given us access to.

A Christian has... Joy in Trials:

Read James 1:2-12. Trials are not meaningless. The Greek word for trial is *Peirasmos* - testing, experimenting, proving. God does not waste pain. Now that does not mean that God *causes* pain. God does not cause harm. It is against His nature. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that it is God's plan for some people to suffer physically, mentally, or emotionally. He is not cruel. However, what the enemy means for evil, God alone can use for good.

Trials reveal: what we trust, who we are, and what God is producing in us. James is not telling us to pretend like suffering is fun. He is saying that you can have joy *because* God is able to make beauty from ashes. Hard times will come...it is a guaranteed part of life...but when we surrender our lives (good and bad) to God, nothing is wasted.

If we live surrendered then trials can be transformed into maturity. James says that trials produce perseverance (Faith + Testing = Perseverance → Maturity). The key word in the scripture is 'Perfect'. (In Hebrew: *Tamim* - whole, complete, integrated. In Greek: *Teleios* - mature, fully developed, brought to completion.) This is not sinless perfection. It is: integrity, wholeness, spiritual maturity, shalom. God is healing the fractured sinful life.

The world produces a fragmented, broken existence. The death that came from the disobedience of Adam and Eve involves divided loyalties, unstable identity, emotional chaos,

inconsistent living, and hopelessness. But Jesus came to make us whole. Trials in the hands of God become tools that He can use to develop us into mature, generative disciples.

Read Romans 5:1-5. Suffering can refine faith like fire refines gold.

A Christian has... Wisdom from God:

Reread James 1:5-8. Wisdom is more than knowledge. Knowledge is information while wisdom is the right application of it. James connects suffering to wisdom. Why? Because wisdom is seeing hardship from God's perspective. It is not just focusing on asking: How can I escape this? but asking: Lord, what are You forming in me?

Read Proverbs 9:10. It is not literal terror or being scared of God. Rather, it is described as a loving reverence, profound respect, and submission to God. When you submit to God's will over yours... Read Proverbs 2:10. This is the solid foundation and starting point for gaining wisdom. It aligns a person's perspective with truth and reality.

It is a lot harder to see things from a higher perspective when you are in the storm. See graphic.



The ocean's waves in a storm are much more obvious and terrifying when on a ship in the midst of them. However, from space, the waves are not even noticeable. Perspective is a powerful thing: not only for thinking of your situation but in forming empathy for other people's situations.

A Christian has... True Riches:

Read James 1:9-11. God has a way of reversing human values. The poor are honored. The rich are humbled. Earthly wealth will fade away and disappear, but spiritual riches endure forever. Humans tend to value and prioritize the physical/tangible, but the value of life is found in the spiritual/intangible.

Have you ever noticed that the times in history where Christian faith and devotion grows the most rapidly is when it is under persecution? When James wrote this letter, new believers (both Gentile and Jew) were under extreme persecution in Jerusalem. Jesus had been executed. Stephen was stoned. The disciples and followers of 'the Way' were scattered throughout the region in order to escape persecution as well as to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth. Their faith was strong because it was often all that they had.

I don't want to get too far down this rabbit hole but I think it's important to understand. In 313 AD, Roman Emperor Constantine declared Christianity legal under the Edict of Milan. While this seems like a good thing, think about what became of Christianity after it was no longer a grassroots movement spread through devotion of generative disciples. Legalizing Christianity changed it from a Spirit-led movement to a human-made religion. It was no longer a path to a devoted and persecuted life, but now was a path to political advancement. It was Government endorsed and attracted false converts interested in political gain and social status.

Christianity was then built in the image of the Roman government instead of the image of God. There was government interference and influence on theological practices and doctrine. The legalism that Jesus had done away with was re-introduced. The *quantity* of followers was increased, but the *quality* of their faith was decreased.

In places where Christianity is persecuted, faith is often described as being stripped of institutional comforts and more focused on spiritual disciplines and communal trust. Without public buildings or social acceptance, Christianity becomes an ‘underground’ movement that is focused on **relationship** rather than **religion**.

“Those who suffer the same thing from the same people for the same Person can scarcely not love each other.” -C.S. Lewis

Christianity is currently **growing** the fastest in: Iran & Afghanistan, China, Nigeria & DR Congo, and Nepal & India. Christianity is currently **decreasing** the fastest in: The Global North (Europe & North America) with annual decreases of 2.77 million Christians across both regions.

I’m not trying to depress you with these numbers, but to help you to understand that when James says: *Consider it joy when you face trials of many kinds* he is talking to people currently practicing their faith under severe persecution. However, in this persecution, they can find joy because God is working through their devotion and love.

The spread of the Gospel is stunted when we - as believers prioritize: Comfort over Conviction, Pleasure over Pain, Fear over Faith, Gain over Grace, and Prosperity over Poverty. Lack has a way of driving us toward trust. Abundance often drives us toward self-sufficiency

James reminds us that what matters most is not what is in your bank account but what is in your heart.

A Christian has... Responsibility in Temptation:

Read James 1:13-15. Trials and Temptations are different. God *tests* faith. He does not *tempt* people to sin. Temptation grows from disordered desires within us (flesh). Desire → Sin → Death

Sin always promises life but produces death.

Real faith takes responsibility and seeks transformation from flesh to spirit. We need to stop blaming: Culture, family, circumstances, or even God. Instead, we need to say “Lord, transform my heart.”

A Christian has... New Birth Through Jesus:

Read James 1:16-18. God is faithful and is always good. Circumstances change but God never does. He wants to re-create us in His image so we can be like Him (steady, faithful, generous).

Salvation is not a one time rescue from sin but a total inward transformation of our hearts and minds.

A Christian has... God’s Word Planted In Them:

Read James 1:19-25. It’s not enough to just hear the Word. We have to consume it, make it part of who we are, AND put it into action. James moves us from simply believing to obeying. Listening without transformation is meaningless (*hevel*). Hearing sermons, reading scripture, and knowing theology means nothing without obediences which can create deception.

Truly walking in God’s freedom is not about doing whatever we want, but about being able to live the life God designed for us to live.

Recap:

What do we have as Christians?

- Joy in trials
- Wisdom from God
- Endurance through suffering
- True riches in Christ
- Responsibility for holiness
- New birth through Jesus
- God's Word planted in our hearts
- Freedom through surrendered obedience to God

What James is doing in this first part of his letter is confronting shallow Christianity. Real faith:

- Survives (thrives in) pressure,
- Seeks wisdom,
- Trusts God
- Obeys Scripture
- Becomes whole

The world produces fractured people that Jesus can heal into whole beings. The question is not just: "Do I believe in Jesus?" The deeper question is: "Is my faith becoming visible in how I live?"

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." -James 1:22

Reflection Questions:

- What are some ways painful circumstances and unanswered questions can strengthen faith?
- How does Scripture influence the way you think and live? What are some ways you could grow in this area?
- What are some areas in your life where you say you're willing to obey, but are not actively doing so?