

# James 1

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Preacher: Malcolm Jarrett

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning. It is an introduction to James, which actually ties in quite well with what Ray's been speaking about as well.

! As you see on the screen, it's often called the Proverbs of the New Testament. So I'm going to do, first of all, a quick summary before looking at the verses more closely.

And there's a lot to pack in this morning. I know Ray had five minutes to do, what was it, 35 verses. Easier for me, I've only got 27 verses, and I've got a bit longer, hopefully.

So, James is one of those books that doesn't warm up slowly. It starts off with trying to move your furniture. The book of James is one of the most practical and direct books in the writings of the New Testament.

It doesn't spend much time on theology. It gets straight to everyday Christian living. If the Gospels tell us what Jesus taught, James shows us what it looks like when those teachings are actually lived out.

[ 1 : 17 ] So the true greatness is serving Christ. Faith must be lived out practically and not talked about. The author introduces himself simply as James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Most scholars identify him as James the Just. He was also a key leader in the early Jerusalem church. What's striking is his humility.

He doesn't lean on his family connections to Jesus, but instead calls himself a servant. James is writing to the 12 tribes scattered among the nations, which refer to Jewish Christians who have been scattered due to persecution.

The Greek word for scattered is diaspora. I don't know if I pronounce it right. It means dispersed or special abroad. These believers were facing real challenges, like many of us are today.

Poverty, oppression and pressure from the surrounding culture. And that's true of today. James writes so that he can encourage them, but also to challenge them.

[ 2 : 35 ] One of the key themes of the book is that genuine faith produces real action. And perhaps the most well-known quote from James is that faith without works is death.

It's not enough to simply say we believe our lives should reflect what we believe. Our words, our decisions and how we treat other people should always demonstrate the reality of our faith.

James also focuses heavily on wisdom, which we've heard about this morning. He tells believers that if they lack wisdom, they should ask God.

And God gives generously. But this isn't just knowledge. It's the ability to live the right way, especially in difficult circumstances. For James, wisdom is seen in humility, purity and peace.

Another major theme is perseverance in trials. Right at the beginning, James says something surprising. He says, consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds.

[ 3 : 44 ] Not because trials are pleasant, but because they produce endurance and maturity. He's reminding believers that God uses hardship to shape and strengthen their faith.

The book also addresses very practical areas of life, like controlling the tongue, avoiding favoritism, caring for the poor, resisting temptation and living with integrity.

James has a way of speaking plainly and sometimes bluntly. He wants his reasons to examine themselves honestly. And that is what I want for us today, is to examine ourselves.

But always seeking God in our lives. Overall, the message of James is simple, but challenging. Real faith works.

It's visible. It transforms how we live every day. And it's not just about hearing God's word, but doing it. Real faith is revealed in how we respond to trials, temptations, truth and others.

[ 4 : 52 ] So as we read through James, we're invited to ask ourselves important questions. Does my life reflect what I say I believe? And what does genuine faith actually look like when life gets difficult?

Today we're going to start with James 1, which has 27 verses. However, I think this chapter splits into two parts quite nicely.

Verses 1 through 18, we have trials and temptations. And verses 19 through 27, listening and doing.

So I'm going to read the first part. So if you've got your Bibles, open at James chapter 1. And we'll read verses 1 to 18.

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the 12 tribes scattered amongst the nations. Greetings. Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds.

[ 5 : 54 ] Because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work. That you may be mature and complete. Not lacking anything.

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault. And it will be given to you. 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.

Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. But the rich should take pride in their humiliation. Since they will pass away like a wild flower.

For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant. Its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the riches will fade away even while they go about the business.

[ 6 : 58 ] Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial. Because having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

When tempted, no one should say, God is tempting me. For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone. But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.

Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death. Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above. Coming down from the Father, the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.

So, let's do a practical walkthrough of James 1, 1-18. And I want to try and draw out the main insights and how they connect.

[ 8 : 09 ] So in verse 1 we have identity and audience. James could have introduced himself as the brother of Jesus, but chose the better to induce himself as a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is widely understood to be James the just. So, right from the start, identity matters. James models humility. He defines himself by his relationship to God and not his status.

For us as believers, our identity shapes us, how we live. Verses 2-4 we have joy in trials. James says, Consider it pure joy.

Whenever you face trials. I don't know about you, but I've never prayed for a trial. And I can't remember being particularly joyful when I went through one.

Some of us might read these words and think, well, James clearly wasn't stuck in traffic on the M27. James isn't saying, trials feel joyful.

[ 9 : 19 ] He's saying, count it joy. It's a decision that we make. Trials are not pointless. They are part of God's process of spiritual growth.

John Piper has said, Christian joy is not pretending pain doesn't hurt. It is knowing pain does not have the final word. And Spurgeon said, And Spurgeon said, Christians can sing in prison because the walls cannot shut out God.

Another illustration would be, a muscle grows only under resistance. Without pressure, there is no strength. The truth is, God is more interested in your character than your comfort.

The application here is, are we learning from our trials? And what is God trying to grow us just right now? What we shouldn't, we shouldn't do, is say, I don't naturally count it all joy.

I counted all complaints. And then go on and repent. An illustration would be like going to the gym. You don't enjoy it while it's happening, but later say, well, that was good for me.

[10:32] Well, you might eventually come to that conclusion. Verses 5 to 8, here we come to asking for wisdom. James says, if any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God.

Which is encouraging, because some of us have clearly been weaning it for years. And that is why I often have to ask God for wisdom, because I know I lack it.

Solomon was a good example when he asked for wisdom, rather than riches or anything else. Because wisdom is not just knowledge, it's knowing how to live rightly in difficult situations.

James warns against double-mindedness, a divided trust between God and the world. A double-minded person is like someone trying to follow God and Google at the same time.

Lord, I trust you, but let me first just check a few other opinions. Spurgeon has said, a foot in two boats will eventually leave you swimming.

[11:39] Faith here means steady reliance, not wavering in decision. Not doubting, but trusting his character. Trials tend to bring confusion.

Why is this happening? What should I do? James gives a simple answer. Ask God. Ask God for wisdom, and God will give generously without reproach.

But, there's always buts, aren't there? But there is a condition, and that is, we need to ask in faith without doubting. A double-minded person equals one who trusts God one moment, but doubts the next.

Are you, am I, trusting God fully, or are we hedging our bets? Verses 9 to 11. Here's what I call a reversal of values.

The lowly should take pride in their high position, and the rich in their humiliation. James here flips worldly values upside down. Earthly wealth is temporary like a fading flower, which is a reminder.

[12:43] Your bank balance can never save your soul. True worth is found in our standing before God, not in material status.

Riches are temporary, and we need to have our priorities right. We, as my wife and I, we had to learn that lesson twice, because we didn't learn it the first time.

It's like refining gold. The heat removes impurities. A better way is to ask ourselves, what is God trying to produce in me through this situation?

We go on to James 1 verse 12. Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial, because having stood the test, the person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those that love him.

This verse is one of the key encouragements in the whole book of James. It connects trials, endurance, love for God, and eternal reward.

[13:44] So I split this verse 12 into five sections. Number one. Blessed is the man, or blessed is the one. The word blessed means more than simply happy.

It describes a person who is spiritually fortunate and approved by God, and living under his favour. James is saying the person who remains faithful during a hardship is truly blessed, even if life is very difficult at the moment.

This is very different from the world's idea of blessing. The world says, blessed are the comfortable. Blessed are the successful. Blessed are the problem free.

James says, blessed are those who keep trusting God when life gets hard. Number two.

Persevering under trial. I don't know if that's on.

Trials are precious. Difficulties, suffering, disappointments, temptations, opposition, illness, or even seasons of testing. The key word is perseveres.

[14:49] Not quitting. Not giving up on God. Not becoming bitter. Continuing in faith. James is not praising the trial itself.

He is praising the believer who remains faithful in it. Thirdly, having stood the test. This means the believer has been proven genuine. Faith that survives testing becomes stronger and more mature. Early in the chapter, James says, trials produce perseverance and spiritual maturity. The trial comes. Faith is tested. The believer endures.

God rewards faithfulness. Fourthly, receive the crown of life. And this does not necessarily mean a royal crown like a king wears.

The Greek idea is more like a victor's crown. A wreath given to an athlete who has won a race. And remember, each one of us in the Christian life, we're in a race.

[ 15 : 47 ] And we're seeking to finish well, because we'd like to hear the words from Jesus himself. Well done, my good and faithful servant. James is speaking about eternal life.

Heavenly reward. Victory through faithful endurance. And it points ultimately to a life everlasting with God. Fifthly, a promise to those who love him.

Notice James does not say, to those who are perfect. Anyone perfect? To those who never struggle. Does anyone not struggle?

To those who never fail. Hmm. He says, to those who love God. Real faith keeps turning back to God, even during hardship.

Love for God is often revealed more clearly in difficult seasons. James 1.12 teaches that trials are actually part of a Christian life. God sees faithful endurance.

[ 16 : 46 ] He sees perseverance, strengthens genuine faith. And those who continue loving and trusting God will receive an eternal reward. A simple illustration.

A tree with shallow roots falls in a storm. A tree with deep roots survives the storm, actually proving the tree's strength. Trials reveal where our roots are.

And here's a challenge. How do I normally respond to trials? Am I becoming bitter or stronger? Is my faith dependent on comfort?

What would perseverance look like in my current situation? Anyone can praise God in the sunshine. But James 1.12 is about the believer who still trusts him when the storms come.

Verse 13 to 15. Trials and temptations. Now let me try and explain temptation. Temptation doesn't usually show up looking dangerous.

[ 17 : 46 ] It shows up looking like a really good idea at the time. Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial. James draws a clear distinction between trials, which come from the outside, and can strengthen us, and temptations, which arise and come from within us, and can destroy us.

So James 1.13. Again, I'll split this verse, this time into four. Number one, when tempted. Temptation is an invitation to sin.

For example, dishonesty, lust, anger, bitterness, pride, revenge, and greed are some. I want you to understand this. Temptation itself is not the sin.

Remember, Jesus was tempted. This issue is what we do with it when it comes. The temptation is not sin, but what we do with that temptation can mean we can either sin or we can be blessed by God.

James assumes temptation is something everyone experiences, and I'm sure that's true of us all. Number two, no one should say God is tempting. Human nature likes to shift blame.

[ 19 : 01 ] Since the beginning, people have blamed others for their sin. Good example, the first man. Who did he blame? Eve. Who did she blame? The serpent.

People blame circumstances, and sometimes people even blame God. But James cuts that excuse off immediately. God may allow testing, but he never tries to lead someone into evil.

There is a huge difference between a teacher testing a student to help them pass an exam, and a thief who leads someone into crime. Number three, God cannot be tempted by evil.

A fact. God's nature is completely holy, and evil has no attraction to him whatsoever. Humans are tempted because something inside us responds to sinful nature, a sinful desire.

But there is nothing in God that evil can appeal to. This reminds us that temptation does not come from God's character. Number four, nor does he tempt anyone.

[ 20 : 09 ] God never plants evil desires in a person's heart. James will explain in the next verse that temptation comes from our own desires when they pull us away from God.

And so, God tests faith. Satan tests, or tempts, to destroy. Our sinful nature responds to temptation.

A helpful distinction. Trials can strengthen us. Trials, to weaken and destroy us. Or say, temptation tries to weaken and destroy us. The same situation can become either a trial that grows our faith, or a temptation that leads us into sin.

Example, financial pressure can become a trial that teaches trust, or a temptation towards dishonesty. It's a practical lesson.

James is teaching personal responsibility. Instead of asking, why did God make me do this? We should be asking, how can I respond to this temptation in a godly way?

[ 21 : 13 ] It also teaches, God is completely holy. God never leads people into sin. Temptation is not God's fault. But believers must take responsibility for their response to temptation.

So it's down to us. Simple illustration. A doctor may test your heart on a treadmill to make you stronger and healthier. A thief tempts someone to steal for destruction. One aims for growth, the other aims for ruin. God is never the thief. Temptation follows a progression. Desire, followed by sin, followed by death. Importantly, God is not the source of temptation. Our own desires are. God tests, but never tempts. The truth is that the problem is not outside us, but inside us. Temptation is like a bait on a hook. It looks attractive, but hides destruction. Verse 16 to 18, God's goodness and new birth.

[ 22 : 13 ] Every good and perfect gift is from above. So every joy in this world is meant to lead us upward to the giver. In contrast to human instability, God is unchanging and completely good.

He is not trying to trip us up. He gives us good gifts. The greatest gift is spiritual birth through the word of truth, making believers first fruit of his creation, a sign of something greater to come. So our God is good, he's consistent, and he's unchanging. He is not the source of your temptation, but he is the source of your blessing. So the big picture here in verses 1 to 18 is, growth through difficulty, trials are tools, not obstacles, steadfast faith, and God rewards consistent trust, not divided loyalty.

We need to have a right perspective. Early status is temporary. Spiritual reality is eternal. Personal responsibility. Temptation comes from within, not from God.

God's unchanging goodness, he gives life, not destruction. So what we can learn from these verses is that James 1, 1 to 18 teaches that God uses life's pressures to mature our faith while calling us to trust him fully, live wisely, and take responsibility for our own spiritual choices.

[ 23 : 39 ] If you have your Bibles open, I'm going to read the last part of the chapter. Verse 19, Listening and Doing. My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and after looking at himself goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it, not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it, they will be blessed in what they do.

Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves and their religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this, to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the word.

[ 25 : 02 ] So, here's a clear practical insight into James 19-27. A passage that shifts from hearing truth to living it out.

Perhaps this is the harder part of the chapter. We don't just need to hear the word but do it.

Otherwise, church becomes like a spiritual Netflix. You watch a lot but nothing changes.

Verses 19-20. Listening and overreacting. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. James highlights the core mark of maturity, a word called restraint.

Quick reaction, especially anger, often leads us away from God's purpose. Righteous living begins with a teachable spirit, listening carefully, speaking thoughtfully and controlling emotional impulses. We love to be speaking to God but we find it much harder to listen. James 1-19 which I'll try and explain. My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this.

[ 26 : 13 ] Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. Now this is one of the most quoted verses in James because it is so practical and so challenging.

James moves from teaching about temptation and God's truth to how believers should behave in everyday relations. He gives three commands. One, be quick to listen.

Two, be slow to speak. And thirdly, be slow to anger. Simple words but very difficult to live consistently. Now again, I've split this verse into four sections.

Number one, my dear brothers and sisters, he's saying, James speaks firmly but pastorally. He's not attacking them. He is speaking as someone who genuinely cares for his fellow believers.

Even correction is wrapped in love. Secondly, everyone should be quick to listen. This means eager to hear, ready to understand, willing to pay attention and this applies in two directions.

[ 27 : 19 ] Listening to God, firstly. Believers should be ready to hear God's word with humility. Secondly, listening to people. Yep. Good listening shows patience, wisdom and love.

Many conversations would improve if people listened to understand instead of listening merely to reply. I'll repeat that.

Many conversations would improve if people listened to understand instead of listening merely to reply. James is teaching humility. I may not know everything I need to hear first.

God gave us two ears and one mouth. And perhaps as an indication we should be listening should happen twice, twice as much as speaking.

Thirdly, slow to speak. James is not saying we should never speak. He means don't speak rashly. Don't interrupt. Don't react too quickly. Don't let every thought escape immediately.

[ 28 : 23 ] Words are very powerful. A careless spoken in five seconds can damage a relationship for years. James later spends a whole chapter warning about the tongue because speech reveals the heart.

Practical examples. Being slow to speak may mean pausing before responding, praying before reacting, asking questions before making accusations, thinking before posting online, resisting to urge, the urge to win every discussion.

And sometimes silence is wisdom. Number four, slow to become angry. James does not say anger never exists. There is such a thing as righteous anger against evil or injustice.

But human anger is often impulsive, self-centered, prideful and destructive. Most anger flares up because we feel insulted or ignored, frustrated or not in control.

James warns about a quick temper. Anger often distorts judgment, damages relationships, says things that cannot be unsaid.

[ 29 : 36 ] A moment of anger can undo years of trust. And that is why James says slow, pause before reacting. Now notice the sequence.

Quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. Unfortunately, we usually reverse it. Quick to speak, quick to anger, slow to listen.

James says wisdom works the other way around. Simple illustration would be a spark in a fireplace can warm a home. A spark in dry grass can burn down a forest.

Words and anger work like that. Controlled properly they help, uncontrolled they destroy. Main lesson we can learn teaches mature Christian character.

Humility in listening, wisdom in speaking, self-control in anger. It is really about having a heart shaped by God rather than ruled by emotion.

[ 30 : 35 ] A short summary on that, James tells believers to listen carefully, speak thoughtfully, control anger, because spiritual maturity is often revealed by how we respond to others.

Verse 21, the thought here is removing and receiving. Get rid of all moral filth and humbly accept the word planted in you. Spiritual growth requires both removal and reception.

Remove what corrupts, sin, pride, impurity, and receive what transforms. What transforms? God's word. The word is described as planted, it has life in it, but it must be received with humility to grow and save.

Verse 22 to 25, doers, not hearers only. Do not merely listen to the word, do what it says. How often do we listen to a sermon and we say amen?

In other words, I agree. And then go home and don't do the doing part. Remember, truth only transforms when it is applied. Verse 22 to 23 is one of the central messages of the whole book.

[ 31 : 44 ] Hearing without doing leads to self-deception. James uses the mirror illustration. Hearing only equals glancing in the mirror and forgetting your reflection.

Doing equals looking carefully and acting on what you see. The perfect law that gives freedom shows that obedience to God is not restrictive, it actually leads to freedom and blessing.

Some Christians suffer from spiritual hearing loss. They hear sermons every week but never change the batteries. Now, I will come back to the mirror illustration later.

Verse 26, controlling the tongue. If anyone thinks they are religious but cannot control their tongue, James is basically saying your religion needs a software update.

Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves. speech is a key test of genuine faith. It's easy to appear religiously outward but

controlled words expose the heart.

[ 32 : 49 ] True spirituality includes disciplined communication. Verse 27, what true religion looks like. Religion that God our Father accepts is this, to look after orphans and widows and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

In this insight, James gives a powerful definition of authentic faith. Compassion in action, caring for the vulnerable, personal holiness, staying unstained by worldly values.

It's both outward, love for others, and inward, purity of life. The big theme verses from 19 to 27, you have spiritual maturity shows in self-control, especially in speech and anger.

God's Word demands action, not just attention. True faith is visible in how we speak, how we serve and how we live. And religion is not a performance, it's transformation.

A simple takeaway for home study, James 1, 19 to 27 teaches that real faith listens, listens carefully, responds humbly, acts obediently, speaks wisely and cares deeply for others while living a clean life before God.

[ 34 : 05 ] Let's go back to the mirror illustration. Have you ever looked in a mirror in the morning, noticed something wrong and then walked away and done nothing about it? Some people treat sermons like mirrors.

They look, they nod, they agree and then walk away unchanged. That would be rather strange, wouldn't it? Too clearly, but not respond.

And that's exactly the picture James gives us in chapter 1. He says, God's word is like a mirror. It shows us who we really are, not just on the outside, but on the inside.

The danger is this, we can hear the truth, agree with it and then walk away unchanged. James challenges us with a simple but searching idea. Faith is easy to talk about until life happens.

Real faith doesn't just hear, it responds. He tells us that faith is revealed in everyday life, in how we handle trials, in whether we truly depend on God, in taking responsibility for our own hearts, in actually doing what God says, and in how we speak, care and live.

[ 35 : 11 ] Some people think that they're very patient and that is until they're sitting behind someone doing 20 miles an hour in a 40 mile limit. The storms of life do not prove God has abandoned you, they may actually prove he is growing you.

Remember, the Father is preparing his children for glory. In the end, the question is not, did I hear the word, but did it change me? Has it grown me in my Christian faith?

Remember, faith isn't proven by how loudly we sing on Sunday, but by how faithfully we live on Monday. No one gets to heaven and says, oh, I almost applied that message to my life.

The measure of spiritual maturity is not how much Bible we know, but how much of it we obey. So ending with this summary, James chapter 1 reminds us that real Christianity is not merely about what we know, it is about how we live.

But I would remind you that it is not by doing all these things that James challenges us with that we can get saved. No, works that we do can never save us.

[ 36 : 26 ] Only the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary can save us. As the scripture tells us in Ephesians 2 verses 8 to 10, for it is by grace you have been saved through faith.

This is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do, or, as some preachers put it, we are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that remains alone.

So James is encouraging us as Christians to do good works because we want to please him. Trials will come, but God can use them to strengthen and mature our faith.

Sometimes the trials even arrive before breakfast, and occasionally before we've had tea, which is surely one of the deeper forms of suffering. You know where my stomach is.

When we lack wisdom, James tells us to ask God who gives generously. Many of us ask everyone else first, friends, Google, the neighbours, even the dog, and then finally we remember to pray to God and ask God.

[ 37 : 43 ] James also teaches that temptation does not come from God, but from our own desires. The problem is usually not that the devil made us do it, often we were already there on our own.

At the heart of this chapter is a challenge, not simply to hear God's word, but to obey it. True religion, James says, is seen in everyday life, in our controlled speech, compassion for people in need, and a life that seeks holiness in a difficult world.

And perhaps the hardest verse for some of us is be quick to listen, slow to speak, which is challenging because many people are already halfway through their reply before the other person has finished the sentence.

So the message of James 1 is simple, but powerful. Genuine faith is visible faith. It listens to God, trusts Him in trials, resists temptations, temptations, and lives out the truth in practical ways every day.

James leaves us with one final question. Will we merely hear the word today, or will we do what it says? Let's me close in prayer.

[ 38 : 53 ] Heavenly Father, thank you for your word that speaks truth into our lives. Help us not to be hearers only, but doers of what you say. Search our hearts and show us where we need to change.

Give us wisdom to trust you, strength to obey you, and grace to live out a faith that is real. May our words, our actions, and our lives reflect you each day.

And it's all in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.