

# Pure Joy - James 1:1-8

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[ 0 : 00 ] Thanks, Connor. Good morning, everyone. So if you'd like to open up your Bibles on page, if you've got the church Bibles, on page 1213, we're going to be looking at James chapter 1, verses 1 to 8.

And that's James chapter 1, verses 1 to 8.

And as you open up your Bibles, I'm going to read from the original scroll. So if you're all following with me, I'm going to read like a letter would be read.

I might have somebody holding it down there for me and I might read. But anyway, this is the way we're going to do it. So, James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations, greetings.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

[ 1 : 22 ] Let perseverance finish its work so 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 this 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.

Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do. This letter starts like so many other letters.

The author stating who he is and who he's writing to. So right at the beginning, we can see that this letter is from James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 2 : 27 ] And it's written to the twelve tribes, the scattered. Just as the children of Israel were dispersed throughout the world in their exile, so also believers in Christ now at the time of writing are scattered, waiting for God to gather them home to himself.

We too today are also part of the scattered, so this letter is for us as well. James is a very practical book.

He doesn't go deep into doctrine, but he assumes that as believers, as followers of Jesus, that we know what it is to know Jesus, to be followers.

And so this book is very practical. This is written to us so that we know how we take, how we know what we take, what we know of Jesus, we take in our heads, and we put into our lives, being doers of the word.

And that's what we're going to try and explain today and over these following weeks, as we look at the practical wisdom to help us live as Christians. So it is to us, we have been called as God's people.

[ 3 : 58 ] We're called now to persevere, to have joy in trials. Consider with me a young couple in their early stages of attraction to each other.

They believe that theirs will be a lifelong partnership that will last forever. They are made for each other and nothing will ever come between them. Of course, at this stage in their relationship, they have every reason to believe this, but it's only a matter of opinion, isn't it?

It's their opinion, and one which has no substance yet, even if they are unwilling to admit it. In time, their belief will be tested.

There will be attractive temptations from other possible partners in the future. They will discover each other's likes and dislikes, which may not be so easy to accept or to adjust to.

Perhaps there will be an unwelcome or an antagonistic reaction from one of the parents involved, which just makes the relationship at times awkward and a bit difficult.

[ 5 : 12 ] However, if these times of testing are endured, the relationship starts to become more durable. And as time goes by, the conviction within them to marry becomes stronger and more settled.

This same process carries on into their marriage, having promised to forsake all other partnerships for life and in the course of their life together, maybe by the experience of fighting off temptations or of dogged determination to save their marriage in times of coolness, or just the shoulder-to-shoulder facing and bearing of the difficulties of life.

Their minds become more and more determined or redirected away from the thought of fidelity. What began as a tentative belief ends as a fixed, unchangeable constant in life.

The same can be said for the Christians undergoing trials. James says, for you know the testing of your faith produces perseverance or steadfastness, as other translations put it.

In the book of James, he refers to very ordinary struggles. As you quickly scan through the book, a few will pop up.

[ 6 : 36 ] There's lack of faith. There's doubt and double-mindedness. There's confusion, the need for wisdom, the love of money turning their heads from God, temptations of their own evil desires, anger, apathy, relational issues like fighting and quarreling, killing and coveting, pride.

They were struggling with slander. Some workers were not being paid for their work, so there was extortion on one hand and poverty on the other, leading to anger and arguments.

The call is still to rejoice or to consider it joy. What are we going to preach to ourselves when we face trials?

What are we going to say to each other when these things happen to us? How are we going to disciple ourselves or our children or each other? James makes it clear in verse 2 to count it all joy. But how do we do that? How do you even feel when I say consider it all joy when you face all types of trials? When you consider all that you're going through, if someone really knew what you were going through, they wouldn't say count it all joy, surely.

[ 7 : 56 ] In fact, if they did, it would sound quite trite actually, wouldn't it? What does James know about trials anyway? Well, James knew suffering.

James was the half-brother of Jesus, so he saw all that Jesus went through up to and including death on the cross. James was the leader of the early church in Jerusalem, so he would have watched and seen some of his own church members being persecuted for following Jesus.

He was under pressure from the religious leaders in Jerusalem for following Jesus, and he was even pressurized to try and renounce his faith in Jesus.

And we know this because James was stoned to death by scribes and Pharisees for refusing to do this. That's how committed he was to Jesus.

It's safe to say that James has known suffering, and so he can say this. He's not saying that trials are joyful things in and of themselves.

[ 9 : 09 ] It's not like, well, I've just lost my job and my mortgage is in arrears. My wife crashed the car, wrote it off, and now she's facing a long road back to recovery.

Not to mention, my dog had to be put down last week due to a horrible infection. Oh, and did I mention that my mother is suffering from cancer? And it's really not looking good. But you know what?

It's all joy. It's great. No. That's not what he's saying. And on the day when I'm feeling down and low about all these things that are happening to me, I just put on my happy face and I grin and I bear it. No, that's not what he's saying, either. Horrible things happen. We do face trials. And the Bible is full of compassion for us when we do that.

When life is hard. Ecclesiastes chapter 3 says that there is a time for everything. Verse 4 specifically says that there is a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance.

[ 10 : 18 ] It's okay to find life hard. Think about Jesus. He wept when he heard that his friend Lazarus had died.

Paul instructs us to weep with those who weep. scripture says that there is sadness and hurt and pain. It doesn't minimize it.

But yet James still instructs us to consider these trials joy. To consider. It's more about thinking and feeling.

The question for us is how do we regard trials? How do we think about trials? How do we consider trials? Do we see them as a burden and an inconvenience?

Or as something that is part of life? But which God can use to shape and form us? As we consider our trials we should have a perspective which looks beyond the present to the future.

[ 11 : 32 ] Pure joy is not necessarily a present happiness but joy in anticipation of God's future for us. These very trials and the testing of our faith produce perseverance or as other translations put it steadfastness.

Like the couple we were thinking of a minute ago over years of courtship and marriage times of testing lead to an unshakable commitment to each other. Isn't that what we want with Jesus?

Consider it pure joy my brothers and sisters whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

Jesus in Luke chapter 8 15 when describing the seeds falling on four types of soil says that the seed that falls on good soil stands for those with a noble and a good heart who hear the word retain it and by persevering produce a crop.

Again Jesus says in Luke 21 when talking about the end of the age starting in verse 17 it says all men will hate you because of me but not a hair of your head will perish.

[ 12 : 55 ] By standing firm you will gain life. It is when we persevere that the fruit comes.

trials in life are a test. They test our humility don't they? They test whether or not we think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think.

They test whether we have some imaginary idea that we're so good God should never have to test us. Trials also test our love for worldly things.

They test whether or not we are succumbing to earthly treasure. when earthly things are ripped out of our grasp we find out whether or not we are worldly or not. Tests in life suffering pain and sorrow loss they also test whether or not we are heavenly minded whether or not we really live with an eternal perspective and trials in life also test what we really love.

all of these things test the strength and the character of our faith. They test our humility whether we can take suffering willingly because we know that we deserve nothing more.

[ 14 : 12 ] Think of Jesus without sin the perfect man who went around helping people all the time but yes he suffered horribly and he definitely didn't deserve it.

So it's not about what we deserve trials test whether we have our affections set on things above or here. They test what we really love.

Look at the testing of Abraham. Was there anything dearer to Abraham than Isaac? Yes God was and the test revealed who Abraham loved most.

He loved Isaac Genesis 22 says that but he loved God more. verse 3 you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

Understand what God is doing. He's making you stronger. He's producing perseverance. He's making you more formidable strengthening your faith and your usefulness.

[ 15 : 20 ] Just like gold is purified or refined in the fire we are being made more Christ-like as we mature. One person has described it like this trials are employed by God to give us what we most want.

Trials are employed by God to give us what we most want and if we are Christians that is not comfort but conformity to Christ.

Being conformed to Christ is worth so much more than comfort. For the believer this idea of being matured is good news as we look forward to the day when the trials will end and we are presented as perfect in the new creation.

what do you most want? Do you want comfort or conformity to Christ?

Call to maturity. Verse 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete not lacking anything.

[ 16 : 36 ] The Greek for mature is also translated as perfect. This is the virtue that Noah exhibited when he was described as blameless.

This is what Jesus intends when he calls his followers to be perfect therefore as your heavenly father is perfect. It suggests that we are to have a character like God's.

This type of maturity is produced by holding fast to faith in Christ while in the fire of persecution. The impurities in one's character will be burnt off in that fire.

The end result will be not just maturity but completeness or wholeness which means that not a single part of a God-like character will be missing or lacking in us.

If this is the end result of the trials difficult as they may be there is indeed something to rejoice about. We are being made whole and complete and mature not lacking anything.

[ 17 : 47 ] Here James invites us to picture ourselves in a state of spiritual maturity where we are rid of the jealousy or impatience or bitterness or selfishness or anything that now spoil the wholeness of our fellowship with God.

Do you hunger and thirst for righteousness being made right with God? If you long to be the person that God desires you to be you now have reason for considering it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds.

The trials can be opportunities for testing to develop in you the perseverance which when it finishes its work will leave you mature in Christ. Skip ahead to verse 12.

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.

As we are made mature or perfect through perseverance we will receive the crown of life which the Lord will give to those that love him.

[ 19 : 05 ] There are people who come, you see them and I see them, they come to the church, they profess faith, they might even get baptized, but then trouble comes into their life and they're gone and they may never come back.

maybe they got burned in a relationship or maybe they came along and they had to go through some struggle. A dear friend or family member died and it was just too much for them to bear and they walked away and maybe shook a fist at God on their way out and that was this.

You see perseverance through trial is the proof of living, mature faith. We've heard the call to persevere and the call to maturity.

Next we hear the call to prayer. Looking forward we can see that the day is coming once we have persevered and when we will become mature, lacking in nothing, but for now we all know that there are things we lack.

Or more specifically, one thing in particular we lack. Maybe you can't quite see life the way I'm describing it or that James is describing it.

[ 20 : 33 ] That we should be joyful in trials. Maybe that's something you can't quite get your head around. Maybe things are so difficult for you in some situation and all you can see is a mess with no possible purpose, with no opportunity to see how this situation could be resolved, let alone lead to maturity.

Well, if that's the case, you need wisdom. We need wisdom to see that all of life is somehow serving the purposes of God. Or perhaps you do see that in all things the Lord's hand is at work in you through certain pressures or trials.

And in that time, that will make you mature. But in the midst of all of that, you still don't know which way to turn. There's a fork in the road and you don't know which path to take.

You're prepared to persevere, but you don't know the Lord's will in that circumstance. In that case, you need wisdom too. Brian O'Driscoll, the rugby player, famously said in a post-match interview, knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit.

Wisdom is knowing that you don't put it in a fruit salad. It's funny, but it's true. If we say about someone that they know the Bible really well, all we have done is describe how knowledgeable they are.

[ 22 : 12 ] But if that same person knows how to use the Bible to understand life and to understand the world around them, if they're able to use the Bible to guide their behaviour and the behaviour of others, then the knowledge that they have of the Bible has passed over into wisdom.

The wise person will then be able to see life as James describes it in verse 2-4, and be able to make personal decisions with the view to being made mature.

We need wisdom to see that all of life is serving the purposes of the Lord. Verse 5, 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.

We are told to ask for it. We don't go to college for it. we are told just to ask for it. In fact, we are promised it if we do ask.

We are promised that when we ask for wisdom in faith, that we will receive it with abundance, because God gives generously. As we think about our own trials and times of testing, sometimes we can see no way out.

[ 23 : 32 ] We know that the problem facing us is just too big to overcome, or the temptation that we struggle with just keeps coming back and we can't resist. Or the person who we can't get through to is just so hard-hearted that we can't see how they could possibly soften.

We can't possibly see how God could act in this situation. if any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, because God gives generously.

We can easily fall into one of two categories when we face trials. We are either very quick to talk to God about our problems and pray about things, but then we are slow to share our burdens with others.

very often God uses people to share his wisdom with us. Alternatively, when we come across a problem, we can talk to everyone about it, worrying about it late at night, but we're slow to talk to God about it, and that is just exhausting.

We should be quick to bring it to God in prayer. Seek him and his wisdom and it will be given to you. There is that qualification of asking in faith though, isn't there?

[ 25 : 05 ] And let's face it, we can all struggle with that. We lack faith. We can't see a way out or a way ahead. Well, at those times, we need to take a step back and say, Lord, help my unbelief.

That in itself is an act of faith, throwing ourselves in God's hands at his mercy, and then we can ask for the wisdom we need to face whatever the trial before us is.

We do need to be careful how we ask, though, because it is possible to ask for something with wrong motives. maybe when we're asking God for something, we are really just wanting our comforts back, aren't we?

Or maybe we just want to get what we want. Our prayer, ultimately, if it is for wisdom, will be that our motives become kingdom motives.

What is best for the kingdom of God? As we mature and are shaped and molded into Christ likeness, our desires become God's desires, so our motives become purer.

[ 26 : 19 ] So even as we pray, we call out to God with right motives to give us the right motivation. We've already seen that God is a generous giver. When we ask for wisdom, he doesn't think, what?

You again? What did you do with the thing I gave you the last time? I'm not giving you any more until you show me results. That's not the way it works. God is a generous giver.

He gives to all who ask in faith. Finally, we hear the call to believe and not doubt.

James seems to skip ahead in verse 6. Let's read that actually. James seems to skip ahead in verse 6 because what follows isn't clear as to whether he's still talking about asking for wisdom but focuses more on faith and prayer and how we pray.

■■■ Chris he souha ■oc we ask.

[ 27 : 59 ] And then verse 6 raises the question of our sincerity in asking. Do we want to mature with God?

Do we really want to mature with God? Are we totally committed to his way of seeing things and his ambitions for our future?

Or are we keeping a door open for the world? Are we trying to have a foot in each camp? God's mind is clear, but we can be double-minded.

Faith in verse 6 is our absolute confidence that he will give what we ask. Doubting is our own inner uncertainty about whether we really want him to give or not.

Doubting isn't about whether God will answer, nor is the doubter the person who struggles with faith. Doubting is the opposite of Deuteronomy 6.5.

[ 29 : 03 ] Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. James is not saying that our prayers will be answered only if we have a perfect faith that never entertains any kind of doubt.

He condemns the believer who is trying to serve two masters at the same time. This doubter is the person who is not wholly committed to God, but plays it safe by praying, just in case.

They are interested in advancement in the world, but want to enjoy some blessings now and go to heaven when they die. Well, James says that they won't get wisdom. In fact, it says that they will

receive nothing from God.

As we come towards the end, this letter is intended for us to read.

It is written in a style similar to Proverbs, where it flows from one piece of wisdom to the next. We've seen a few of them already today.

[ 30 : 12 ] And as we continue to read the letter together over the next number of weeks, some of these things today will be expanded on, and others will be explained from fresh. But for today, I want us to remember that we are to consider our trials joyfully.

Not because they are joyful, but because as they test us, they make us persevere. And like any good relationship that undergoes testing, the result will be maturity and completeness and wholeness.

If we lack these things, which we do, we must ask God for wisdom and be prepared to receive it.

And also to get our lives in line with his will, having kingdom motives.

Not to be double-minded, not to be wanting to have a foot in both camps of the world and heaven, not to be like a wave so we are blown and tossed by the wind. The heart of this letter is that James wants us to be deep, sincere, consistent, faithful followers of Christ.

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[ 31 : 42 ] Like that marriage we spoke about at the beginning, that they are fully and wholly committed to each other. James wants us to be deep, sincere, consistent, faithful followers of Christ.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I pray that our heart would be your heart, and that same heart that James has for us to be faithful followers of Christ would be our heart's desire as well.

We realize that there is much this morning which is difficult to get our heads around. Very often we long for comfort, and we kick against conformity as we battle with selfishness.

Lord, we need your wisdom, and we need faith. Thank you that you are faithful and generous, and you give to all who ask in faith.

Thank you too that even faith comes as a good gift from you. Please give us humble hearts so that we can ask for faith, wisdom, and the hope of eternity.

[ 33 : 06 ] Trusting in the complete work of Christ on the cross, who has broken down the veil to you, that we have access to you. Please give us a right attitude for the kingdom.

Bring our motives under your motives, so we are motivated to see all of life as your plan to bring us and others to yourself.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.