

# Living Out Your Faith (James 1:1-8)

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Preacher: Brett Sanders

[0:00] Amen. Amen. You may be seated. Children, we are ready for Children's Church at this time. And thank you so much, praise team, for leading us so well in worship as we remember and we reflect on how good the Father's love is for us, what Jesus did on the cross.

What a great way to begin diving into God's Word. And I just want to say again how amazing job Clay did last week bringing God's Word. I'm thankful that he was able to do that.

And just what a great way to close out our summer in the Psalm series. And many of you since then have come to me and said, well, we've heard Clay preach and sing.

We've heard Evan preach and sing. When are we going to hear you sing? And the answer is never, ever. And that's why I stand right here on the front row because this speaker is blaring at me.

I can't even hear myself sing. In fact, I had a, I think I told you this, Clay, I had a nightmare a few weeks ago that Clay came to me and he just said, my voice is gone. I'm going to need you to lead in worship today.

[1:07] This is a true story. And I told him, I said, no. I said, it's not going to happen. We'll just not sing this way. It's not going to happen. But I am thankful for your heart and the way that you lead us each week, Clay, and leading us so well last week.

In fact, somebody came up, actually it was Isaac came up to me after the service. And I took this as a compliment at the beginning. He goes, you know, I could really tell that Clay has been taking notes from you.

And I said, really? And he said, yeah. He went five minutes over. And I said, oh, you're funny, Isaac. I thought that was going to be a compliment at first. But no, today we are going to be starting a new series that I have been looking forward to for quite some time.

A series where we walk through the book of James. And hopefully you had a chance to grab a journal on your way in. If we ran out, that's okay. We'll have more next week.

We've got a few more that will be coming in this week. But hopefully you'll have an opportunity to grab a journal or at least take notes as we follow along going through this book over the next couple months or so.

[2:09] But James is an interesting book of the Bible. Throughout church history, many well-known theologians, including Martin Luther, took issue with some parts of James. In fact, Martin Luther called it an epistle of straw.

He really didn't care for this book very much. But it's been criticized for different reasons. Some criticize its infrequent references to Jesus. And it's true. It only refers to Jesus by name two times in the book of James.

We'll get to one of those times today as he introduces the book. And then the other time is in chapter 2, verse 1. And so, yes, he only specifically refers to Jesus by name a couple of times. But I would argue that Jesus is all throughout this book. But others have mentioned that it doesn't flow very well. It seems choppy. It seems difficult to find the structure.

I mean, it seems like James is jumping around all over the place. And then probably the biggest critique of all is when people say that James contradicts Paul. You know, Paul talks about that we're saved by our faith.

[3:12] And then James all of a sudden is talking about faith and works and how those things go together. And at first reading, some say that they contradict each other. Well, it's my hope and prayer that as we study this Bible, that first you'll understand why we study it.

Why we study it in the first place. And I would argue that hopefully by the end of our series that you will argue this same thing as well. That all of those things that we just talked about really are not points at all.

They really don't hold water. These critiques are not valid. In fact, James has long been one of my favorite books of the Bible. I can remember in college I told a pastor of mine that was discipling me working through.

I said, you know what? Over the next couple of weeks I'm going to memorize the whole book of James because I like it so much. He's like, well, let's set some better goals. Okay, let's set some more realistic goals.

Needless to say, I did not memorize the whole book of James. But it's been one of those books that has been so influential in my life that I've really looked forward to taking time and studying it, studying through with it as a church.

[ 4 : 20 ] And if you're still looking for even more reasons to study this wonderful book, in preparing this week, David Platt gave two really great reasons to study this book.

He said to begin with, the first reason is to examine the relationship between faith and works. When you look at this relatively short book of the Bible, what you'll notice is that James refers to faith 14 different times in these few chapters that we find in the book of James.

He refers to faith 14 different times specifically. And again, I would argue that faith is an overarching theme throughout this entire book. And then he also mentions the relationship that is here.

Out of the 108 verses the book of James has, there's 59 different commands that we find in these 108 verses. You see, obedience is everywhere when you look at this book of the Bible.

Genuine faith acts. Genuine faith works. And we see that as we study this book. But also in addition to seeing that relationship, another benefit of studying this is to explore the impact of our faith on life in our current context in this city.

[ 5 : 31 ] But also how that faith plays out as we look at the context outside of this. And as we look at the context outside of just our city here and thinking about how we interact with this world.

How we think about missions both here, right outside these doors, but also throughout the world.

This letter, James addresses many areas of life in which our faith should practically impact everything.

From trials, to poverty, to riches, to materialism, to favoritism, to social justice, the tongue, worldliness, boasting, making plans, praying, and what you do when you're sick among many other things.

You know, I mentioned earlier how some will argue that it feels like James is jumping around all over the place. And it almost seems hard to follow the train of thought that goes throughout it. But he returns repeatedly to how faith impacts not only the details of our lives, but also the lives of people around us.

Both locally and globally. Platt notes, he says, Faith moves Christians to lead Bible studies in workplaces and neighborhoods, help addicts in rehabilitation centers, serve food in homeless shelters, teach orphans in learning centers, care for widows in retirement homes, provide hospice care for the elderly, train men and women in job skills, tutor men and women in reading, rock sick babies in hospital, help patients in AIDS clinics, teach English to internationals, and the list goes on.

[ 7 : 05 ] And on and on and on and on. Faith moves Christians to take steps of radical obedience to make the gospel known all around the world.

So why study the book of James? Because when we study and apply this book to our lives, we will be forced to think how we live our lives and what we're giving our lives to.

You can't read this book without reflecting on your own life and thinking about how this is challenging you in your walk with Christ. So this is the wonderful reason that we study this book in a direct way without holding back any punches.

James will challenge us to live the lives Jesus has called us to live. To be sure, the dominant theme of James as we work our way through it is a true faith in Christ is a faith that works.

Another way of saying it is living out your faith. That's going to be the dominant theme that we work through as we walk through this book. In other words, you can't call Jesus Lord of your life if you're not willing to let him be the one who is calling the shots.

[ 8 : 15 ] This week, we're going to be looking at the first eight verses of James chapter one. So if you have a copy of God's Word or if you're able to grab one of those journals on your way in, I would encourage you to follow along as we read these first eight verses together.

It says this, If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God.

As I was preparing this week, at the beginning of the week, I had every intention of working through 18 verses this week.

But as we began working our way through and as I began preparing this, I got to thinking, you know, a more manageable number might be eight. Because there's so many things that we can find in this that need more attention than just a passing thought or a glance as we walk our way through it.

And so what we're going to be doing is over the next few months is trying to follow James' example of how he teaches through this. He keeps it simple and he keeps it direct.

[ 9 : 59 ] And it's my prayer that as we work through this book over the next couple months, that this will be simple statements that are both direct and applicable to our lives.

This morning, I want us to see three things that believers are called to do. To begin with, I want us to see that we are called to be a servant of God. We are called to be a servant of God.

This is the example that James gives us right out of the gates. He says, James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ to the 12 tribes in the dispersion. Greetings.

You see, in this introduction, we are told a few things of significance. To begin with, we're told who is writing this book. It's James, the half-brother of Jesus. And we're also told that he calls himself a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, understanding who is writing this allows us to go back to Scripture and get a better picture of who James is. We're told in John chapter 7 that none of Jesus' brothers believed that he was the Son of God.

[ 11 : 05 ] We're told that none of his believers at the beginning of Jesus' ministry believed that he was the Son of God. Now, this makes sense to us, right? Who in here has an older sibling? Okay, can you imagine that they came to you and said, All right, listen, I just want to sit you down.

I want to tell you something really important. I want to let you know that I'm God. And my brother is sitting here on the second row, my older brother. And if he ever told me that, I would probably say, Look, I know that you believe that, but there's no way.

There's no way. I've seen the way you smell when you wake up in the mornings, okay? I've seen all of these things. And I'm sure Jesus' brothers, when he was sharing these things with them, nobody wanted to believe this because they're like, Look, you're a carpenter.

You're just like our dad. I saw you work in the shop. You smell. I saw the way that you looked when you woke up in the mornings. It was a little scary. There's no way. And so I'm sure that you can understand that they wouldn't believe this, that it would probably take something significant for James to believe that his brother Jesus is the Son of God.

It would probably take something like a resurrection. It would probably take something pretty miraculous like that, which is exactly what happened. In fact, when you look at 1 Corinthians 15, it tells us that Jesus appeared to his brother after the resurrection.

[ 12 : 22 ] And from then on, James went on to be a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, he's mentioned alongside Peter and John as pillars of the church.

He is presiding over the Jerusalem council that you read about in Acts chapter 15. One of the most significant events in the book of Acts, he is presiding over this council. He not only becomes a follower of Jesus, but he becomes one of the strongest leaders in the movement of God that takes place immediately after Jesus' ascension.

Not only does he become a follower of Jesus, but he becomes one of the strongest leaders in the church. And as remarkable as these things are, there's something else that stands out even more than these things.

And that's the nickname of James, or at least what church history has referred to him as. He was called Old Camel Knees. Old Camel Knees. And I could probably give you, unless you've heard this before, I could probably give you a hundred guesses, and you'd never guess why James was called Old Camel Knees.

I want to say this. Next time you see a camel, which I realize for many of you may be never in your life, but if you ever do see a camel, I want you to take a moment, look at its knees. Maybe if you see a picture of it, maybe if you can look one up, take a picture of it, and what you'll see is camels have the most calloused, hard knees that you've ever seen.

[ 13 : 48 ] Because if you see a camel get up and down, you'll see that it gets up onto its knees to begin with, and gets down onto its knees, and that's how it gets up and down. It uses those knees significantly, and it has these big calluses that are on its knees.

And what I love about this is it reminds us of why it is that James was given this name. James was given this name because of his constant kneeling in prayer. James was known around, everybody knew James as a man of constant prayer.

And so this, I guess, joking way of calling him old camel knees was a way of showing that he spent significant time kneeling in prayer before God.

Even as one of the pillars of the early church, one of the leaders in this remarkable movement of God, James shows us where his strength comes from.

James shows us his dependence on God with his devotion to prayer, which is one of the things that prayer does. Have you ever thought about that? Why pray? Well, one of the things that prayer does is it shows in a very real and practical way our dependence on God in our most difficult situations of life.

[14:58] prayer expresses our total desperation for God. When do you pray most? You pray most when you're most desperate. Whether that's the loss of a job, the loss of a loved one, a difficult diagnosis, in that desperation, in those moments, you become a prayer warrior because you are desperate for God to work.

Prayer shows our dependence on God in our life each and every day. And I would argue that many times prayer does not play a central role in the life of the believer or the church for that matter because we aren't attempting anything that requires prayer.

I would argue that we don't pray because we're not trying to do anything that requires prayer. We're not attempting anything where we're saying, God, I need you to work otherwise this is not going to work.

We're not doing anything where we're saying, God, I'm going to depend on you in this because I know on my own strength that I will never be able to do this. And so we must live lives that depend on prayer.

And I think that's what you begin seeing in James' life. He underwent much persecution. He is able to see a lot of, there's a lot of good things and there was a lot of bad things that was going on.

[16:16] But in the midst of all of those things, James was dependent on prayer. He was dependent on his, my hope and prayer that we as a church are so hungry to see God move that we are so committed to following God's call on our lives to make his name known that we must pray to God in desperation to help us to fulfill the call to make his name known.

As the early church was growing, as James was settling into his role as the leader of the church there in Jerusalem, he remained on his knees in prayer because he knew where to go for strength. Martin Luther is reported to have said that one time reflecting on a very demanding day, he was reflecting on all the things that he had to get accomplished that day and it was just a very demanding day and he was said to said this.

He says, I have so much to do today that I must spend the first three hours in prayer. Is that how we view prayer? I've got so much going on that I need to pray.

Or do we view prayer, I've got so much going on that I don't have time for this right now. I've got so much that's going on, I'm dealing with so many things that I just, I don't have time for that now so I'm just going to push it off to the side.

[17:38] Or are we so dependent on prayer that we're saying, God, I've got so much going on that I must pray now. I must come before you because I need your help in this.

As we recognize that we are called to be servants of God, let us do so with a deep commitment to prayer. I think we will realize that this is essential to our living out our faith.

But the next thing that I want us to see that we're called to do here is that we are called to be intentional in how we view trials. We're called to be intentional in how we view the trials that come in this life.

Verses 2 through 4 are some of the most well-known in this book and it says this, it says, count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness and let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Most New Testament letters, after the initial introduction, they have a warm little greeting there.

After you realize that Paul is writing this letter, most of his letters start with, I'm so thankful for you, it lifts my spirit when I think about you.

[18:50] Now there's a few exceptions to that, but most of these letters, they follow this pattern of like, hey, this is Paul writing and let me just welcome you and I'm so grateful for you, let me have a

word of encouragement.

James is like, alright, I'm James, servant of God, let's get right into it. And he gets right into it by diving into these trials. He jumps right into exhortation.

Douglas Moo, he notes, he says, by placing trials in the position of prominence in this letter, James suggests that the tough times the believers were facing were a key reason for his writing to them. By placing it right here at the beginning, he's saying that this is going to be something important. And we do this all the time today. When we send text or emails, if we're sending an email to somebody where there's something really important that we want them to know, we're going to put it at the beginning.

If it's going to be a long email, but there's one thing that we want to make sure that they get, we're going to put it right at the beginning. We're not going to try to bury it in a long email, but we're going to say it right out of the gates.

[19:56] And James, right out of the gates, is saying, hey, these things that you're going through, remember, let's put some perspective on them. Remember where you're looking in them. See these trials as beneficial to your walk with Christ.

Moon knows, he says, the purpose can be accomplished only if they respond in the right way to their problems. But what problems is James referring to here?

What trials are these people going through that he's referring to here? And as you look at the letter, you can see any number of things. Poverty is most likely on the list because of how often it gets addressed throughout this letter.

But by stressing that these trials were of various kinds, of different kinds, he cast an intentionally wide net to say that all of these things that you're going through can serve a purpose in your walk with Christ.

James intentionally does this, including the many kinds of suffering that Christians undergo in this fallen world. Sickness, loneliness, bereavement, disappointment. He says, consider it all joy when you go through these things because they have the ability to produce something in you.

[21:10] Now, before we get too far on this, I want to make sure that you understand what this passage is not saying. It's not saying that in the middle of a trial that joy and excitement are the only emotions that we're going to be feeling.

For example, Jesus at Lazarus' tomb didn't walk around telling people they just need to feel better. You just, you know, he saw everybody crying there at this tomb of Lazarus. He didn't walk around and say, God, stop.

Just consider this joy, okay? Stop with us. Stop with all the crying. Stop doing this. Just consider it all joy, okay? He didn't do that. What did Jesus do at the tomb there? He wept.

He cried with them. As believers, we experience many emotions and sometimes sorrow and joy go hand in hand. So don't read this and think, well, I'm really struggling with this trial right now.

I'm really struggling with what I'm going through, so I must be some subpar Christian because I can't consider it pure joy right now. No. But also, as you walk with people who are going through a difficult trial, don't use this verse lightly.

[22:19] Don't use this verse lightly. The right thing at the wrong time can sometimes be harmful. No one was better at mourning with those who mourn and weeping with those who weep than Jesus.

So let me encourage you. Be like Jesus. And in the midst of trials, help others keep their eyes fixed on Him. Help others see Jesus clearly through those.

But we do clearly see from this passage that trials have the ability to produce something great in you. If I were to say who in here wants their life to look more like Jesus, I would hope that all of us would raise our hands and say, yes, I want my life to look more like Jesus.

But then I said, all right, well come over here, let's sign up for more trials in your life. Let's sign up for just as many trials as you can possibly get in your life. I would hope that not everybody would just come right over here and start signing up and say, yes, give me more trials.

Give me more hardships. Give me more difficult things. But those trials in our life can produce something in us that God can use in a great way. The truth is what we do with trials, how we view them is essential to them producing this deeper faith in us.

[23:30] You see, trials don't automatically produce steadfast faith in us. It's not a nice, clean equation like in algebra where you can plug in two things and then you get a product.

It's not there you can just say, you know what, give me more trials, give me more trials, give me more trials and that's automatically going to be a deeper faith in Christ. J.D. Greer, I believe it was, who was speaking on this passage, he says, these trials are oftentimes like a foot that's poised in the air.

He says, they can either help you to step forward in your faith or they can lead you to go further back in it. But seeing these trials, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus in the midst of them allows us to grow in this walk with Christ.

But what do, but what you do with them matters because your faith is what is under attack. Charles Spurgeon beautifully reflects on this passage when he says, note the essential point that is assailed by temptation.

Your faith is the target that all the arrows are shot at. Faith is vital to salvation as the heart is to the body. Therefore, the javelins of the enemy are mainly aimed at this essential grace.

[ 24 : 42 ] Your faith is peculiarly obnoxious to Satan and the world. If you had no faith, they would not be your enemies. Faith is that blessed grace that is most pleasing to God and therefore most displeasing to the devil.

By faith, God is greatly glorified and by faith, Satan is greatly annoyed. He rages at faith because he sees in it his own defeat and the victory of grace.

But when we remain faithful, when we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus in the middle of the storm, it produces something amazing in us. You see, the byproduct of believing in the promise of God even when it's difficult is joy.

Joy is the byproduct of believing in the promises of God even when it is difficult to do so. Now, I don't know what each of you are going through right now, but my guess is that in the room this size, many of you are dealing with some very difficult things.

Many of you are maybe dealing with things that no one else knows about, but let me encourage you to keep your eyes on Jesus. 1 Peter 5, 6, and 7 says this, Humble yourselves, therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all of your anxieties on you, because he cares for you.

[ 26 : 10 ] Who cares for you? Jesus cares for you. The he in that statement, because he cares for you, is central to understanding how this provides comfort to us.

You say, I could get up here and say, cast all of your anxieties on me because I care for you, and the truth is, I do care very deeply for each and every one of you, but you casting your anxieties on me is not going to help you a whole lot because there's not a lot that I can do about those things, but Jesus is saying, but Peter's saying here that cast your anxieties on him, cast your anxieties on Jesus because he cares for you.

The one who spoke the world into existence, the one who freely laid down his life to give you life, he's the one that cares for you, and so keep your eyes fixed on him and let that produce in you this endurance that nothing else can in the midst of those trials.

But the final thing that I want us to see this morning is this, that we are called to be consistent in where we look for wisdom. We're called to be consistent in where we look for wisdom.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith. With no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

[ 27 : 30 ] For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord. He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. James went from saying that you may lack nothing to saying if you lack wisdom, then ask God.

The implication is clear here. Wisdom is something that we are going to struggle with in this life. Wisdom is something that we're going to need constantly in our lives to give our lives perspective, to understand what we're going through in this life.

And James, in his very direct and clear way, gives us an imperative of what to do when we realize that we are lacking in wisdom. In those moments where you feel like you are lacking wisdom, where you're lacking perspective, James says, do what I do.

Pray. Get on your knees and ask God who gives generously, who gives to us what it is that we need. He's a good father that doesn't just give us everything that we want.

He's not a genie in a bottle, but he is a good father that gives us what we need. But he says, he says, ask in a way that is in faith without any doubting.

[ 28 : 39 ] Now, this doesn't mean that we're going to go through this life and just be able to have no doubts in anything that we ask of God. That's something that I would struggle with very much.

But he's saying to be consistent in your walk with God, to be consistent in how you ask for these things. Moo was, again, very helpful here.

He says, James is not claiming that prayers will never be answered where any degree of doubt exists. For some degree of doubt, on at least some occasions, is probably inevitable in our present state of weakness.

Rather, he wants us to understand that God responds to us only when our lives reflect a basic consistency of purpose and intent, a spiritual integrity.

In other words, our prayers are answered when we consistently and faithfully look to God for those answers. We're not double-minded in it. It says that we're not looking in different places.

[ 29 : 41 ] We're not coming and saying, God, I want you to share with me your wisdom. I don't know what to do in this situation, so I'm asking you what I should do. And you do this on Sunday and then on Monday you go and you just, you put it in a Google search.

What should I do in this situation? Or you ask your friends who aren't believers, who may not have your best interest in mind. And you're saying, what should I do? What does God say? What does the world say? We're going back and forth and God, and what James is saying is here, God wants us to be single-minded in our asking for wisdom.

Single-minded in our devotion to Him. Now, this doesn't mean that we don't read good Christian books. It doesn't mean that we don't go to our friends who love Jesus and have our best interest in mind and have what God says in mind.

It doesn't mean that we don't go to counselors who love Christ and follow Him in their lives, but it does mean that we're not looking to this world for wisdom. We're single-minded in our devotion and focus on God.

And he says, that person is the one who asks and it will be given to them. That's the one who will be given wisdom. We must dig our heels in and say, I am following God.

[ 30 : 50 ] No more praying for wisdom on Sunday and looking to the world for it on Monday. I'm going to have a spiritual integrity that is consistently looking to God for strength and purpose in trials and looks only to Him for wisdom in this life.

You see, much of this passage today is wisdom for the believer. For those of us who have given our life to Jesus, for us, there is a hope and a purpose in these words.

For us, there is a challenge in this book for wisdom and to look to God for hope in the midst of trials. But I want each of you to know that this good news that we're talking about today is available to anyone.

It's available for anyone that sees Jesus as their only hope in life. Not the one that says, I want to sprinkle a little bit of Jesus on my life. Not the one that says, yeah, I'll take a little bit of that.

I want to continue living my life the way I am, but yeah, why not add a little bit of Jesus to it? No, not that person, but the one who says, you know what, Jesus is my only hope. I'm giving my life fully to Him.

[ 31 : 59 ] I'm making Him Lord of my life. Everything, my only hope is in Him. I have no hope apart from Jesus. And if you're here today and you've never placed your faith and your trust in Jesus and asked Him to be the Lord of your life, then let today be the day that you do that.

Let this message of dependence, hope, and wisdom be a message that can apply to you as well. And so wherever you find yourself today, maybe it's a believer who has been a believer for many, many years, let this message, let this passage be a word of encouragement to you to depend on God for everything, to go to Him in prayer, to live lives where we are dependent on Him to work and to move, a life where you are constantly looking to Him in the midst of those trials, a life where you're consistently going to Him to ask for wisdom.

If you've been a follower for your whole life or just a little while, let that apply to you. But maybe you're here today and this hope that we see in this passage is not hope for you yet.

Let today be the day that you say, Jesus, I need you. More than anything else, I need you to be the Lord of my life. And I want to follow you from this day forward.

Father, I thank you so very much for your word. I thank you for the book of James, the book that bears your half-brother's name. Lord, I thank you for that relationship that you had with Him for many years that has shaped and molded Him to be the one to write this book for us today.

[ 33 : 43 ] And so, Lord, I pray that as we work our way through this great book that it will not just be words on a page, but it will be wisdom and guidance and direction that we apply to our lives that point us to you as our only source of hope in this life.

And so, Lord, I pray that if there's somebody here today that's never placed their faith and their trust in you that today would be the day they go from death to life.

Lord, give them the boldness and courage to come find somebody. To say, I need Jesus. I need you to tell me how to have Him in my life. But, Lord, I also pray that for all of us that maybe have been doing this for a very long time, that we wouldn't just see this as another punch on the card, another trip to church, but that we would see this as a time going deep in Your Word and that Your Word applies to us today.

So, Lord, give us the strength and boldness to follow You no matter what it is that You're calling us to do. We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to invite you to stand.

We're going to sing a song of invitation. If God is speaking to you this morning, won't you respond as we stand together and sing?