

Shoe Leather Christianity
Lesson One - Enduring Life's Hard Knocks
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Overview of the Book of James

- The study material for this series was written by Pastor Johnny and entitled "Shoe Leather Christianity." **What do you think that term implies about the book of James?**
- Who wrote this book (verse one seems like a dead giveaway...but it's complicated)?
- **To whom was this letter written (hint: verse one)? What were they going through?**
- This letter is controversial. It almost didn't make it into the canon of scripture.
- Martin Luther called it: *"An epistle full of straw."* He later came around... somewhat.
- **Anyone know why James' letter was controversial to Luther and others?** (Eph. 2:8-10)
- *"There are no conflicts between James and Paul on the matter of justification by faith. We are not saved by works, but the faith that saves us leads to good works. Paul wrote about our standing before God; James wrote about our witness before the world."* (Wiersbe)
- The theme of this book is SPIRITUAL MATURITY. James gives his readers many direct COMMANDS on how to live as a MATURE Christian. *"There are over 50 imperatives (direct commands) in the book's 108 verses." James has a "practical bent" and is "interested in action rather than mere belief."* (ESV Study Bible)
- This book is incredibly PRACTICAL. I went through all five chapters and pulled out the essence of some of the key verses. Listen to what James will teach us through the Holy Spirit:
 - Ask God for wisdom and He'll give it to you...if you DON'T DOUBT
 - Remain steadfast under trials
 - Every good gift comes from God above
 - Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger
 - Be doers of the word, not hearers only
 - What is religion that is pure and undefiled?
 - Show no partiality among people

- Even the demons believe there's a God! The question: Do you know Him?
 - Faith with no works is dead!
 - Who can tame the tongue?
 - What causes quarrels and fights among church people?
 - You ask God for things but don't get them...do you know why?
 - God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.
 - Submit yourself to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.
 - Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.
 - Our life is but a mist.
 - Whoever knows the right thing and doesn't do it, for him it is sin.
 - Confess your sins to one another. Pray for one another.
 - The prayer of a righteous person has great power.
- Warren Wiersbe: *"Since the theme is spiritual maturity, we must begin by examining our own hearts to see where we are in the Christian life."* He gives five essentials in studying this book:
 1. First, it is essential we have been born again. No spiritual birth; no spiritual maturity
 2. We must honestly examine our lives in the light of God's Word (looking in a mirror).
 3. We must obey what God teaches us, no matter what the cost. We must be "doers of the Word and not hearers only" (James 1:22).
 4. We must be prepared for some extra trials and testings. Whenever we are serious about spiritual growth, the enemy gets serious about opposing us.
 5. Finally, we must measure our spiritual growth by the Word of God. We should not measure ourselves by other Christians, but by the Word of God and the Son of God.
- As a "growing" Christian who wants to be a "mature" Christian, I'm excited about this study!
 - Let's dig right in beginning in chapter one, verses two through four.

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- Beginning in verse two, James is asking us to do something that seems impossible, "Count it all joy..." It's important we study words in this passage carefully. The verb here is "count" or "consider" it all joy. **What does that mean?** (DECIDING how to account for something.)
- Let's look at what James DIDN'T say. He didn't say, "*You will FEEL happy, when you face trials of various kinds.*" He said nothing about feelings. He didn't say, "*Everyone knows trials are FUN for God's people.*" He wasn't illogical. He didn't promise fun or happiness, but he said God would enable us to count trials as JOY.
- Let's look at that word "joy." **How is joy different than happiness or fun?**
- It makes no sense to consider a trial as joy unless I can see a benefit at the other end.
- There's only one reason I would be willing to "count" trials as joy. Someone has made me a promise that I believe is true.
- For example, if a massive storm came through and destroyed your home and all your stuff, you'd be understandably upset. Let's suppose you had a wealthy uncle who called you up and said, "I know this isn't pleasant but count it as a good thing because I'm going to build you a new house and buy you new stuff. You just have to clean up after the storm, and it won't be pleasant, but ultimately I'll make sure this turns into a great thing for you. You'll be in better shape than before." Though still suffering, you'd be looking forward to the future.
- Happiness is based on emotions, but joy can exist in spite of my emotions. My emotions may be battered and beaten, but you can't touch my inner joy if it comes from God.
- Here's another word in verse three, "testing." That word translates "trustworthiness." It's root word is the picture of a "beam" of wood that has held up under great stress. (Gr. dokos)
- Let me ask, "Are you smarter than a fifth grader?"
- Here is information straight from a fifth grade science worksheet:

"Tensile strength is an important property of matter. It measures the amount of force a type of matter can withstand before breaking. Since wood is a material often used in construction, it's important to know its tensile strength. One simple way to compare the strength of different materials is by hanging increasingly heavier weights from them until they break."

- **What kind of wood do you think holds up the most weight? The least weight? Any guesses?** <http://www.gscdn.org/library/cms/65/14565.pdf>
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- **How does testing the strength of timber compare to testing our faith?**
- **Once your faith has been tested, how does that help you when the next trial comes?**
- God wants to use trials and challenges to grow mighty “oaks” in His forest of faith!
- Instead of timber, think in terms of muscles. **When we lift weights what happens to our muscles in the short-run? Over time though what happens to our muscles?**
- Look at another word, “steadfastness.” Trials build the “steadfastness” of our faith.
- That word translates: *Cheerful (or hopeful) endurance, constancy:—enduring, patience, patient continuance (waiting).*
- Now we said we would only be able to COUNT trials as JOY if there was a promise. Here’s the promise in verse four:

James 1:4 (NKJV)

4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

- **Does that mean sinless perfection? When the growth process is complete we say someone or something is what?**
- It’s been said, *“Just because someone grows older, that doesn’t make them mature.”*
- James wanted these Jewish Christians to allow God to use the trials, temptations, and persecutions they were going through to make them MATURE BELIEVERS.
- Back to our example of building muscle, if I run out of the weight room when it gets uncomfortable, how strong will I be? But if I hang in through the pain, there’s a promise of my “faith muscles” growing strong as I mature as a believer.
- Trials cause us to ask, *“God, what are you teaching me? What should I do in this situation?”*

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. 6 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. 7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

- If there's one thing we need from God in the midst of trials it's wisdom.
- It's clear this isn't just knowledge. James is talking about SUPERNATURAL wisdom that only comes from God. Verse five is more than just a suggestion or a tip. **What is it? Let's clarify, how do our motives come into play? What about alignment with God's purposes?**
- This promise comes with a condition we must meet in verse six. **What is that condition?**
- James uses a great "word picture" in verse six. **Ever see large boats tossed in a hurricane?**
- **What is the warning in verse seven?**
- **Have you ever known a double-minded person like James describes in verse eight?**
- Let's be REAL. Human doubt when we're faced with a problem is very REAL.
- **What advice would you give to a friend to help them overcome their doubt with faith?**
- If my choice for wisdom is between the God of the universe, me, or the world, I'll go with God!

So, What's the Takeaway?

- One way God brings us to SPIRITUAL MATURITY is through trials.
- James instructed us to DECIDE to COUNT trials as joy because God has promised to use them for growth in our lives.
- God has also promised to give us the supernatural WISDOM we need in every circumstance.
- But we only receive that wisdom by ASKING IN FAITH, without DOUBTING.
- Pastor Johnny has given us some questions to ask ourselves. (You might jot these down.)

- What did you learn about God from this passage?
- What did you learn about people in this passage?
- What did you learn about yourself from this passage?
- What is the Holy Spirit leading you to repent of from this passage?
- What is the Holy Spirit leading you to obey from this passage?
- Who do you need to share this truth with this week?