

## Faith That Works

### “Trust Through Trials”

Do you believe *that* God exists, or do you believe *in* the God who exists?

“I believe that God exists”. In James 2:19, which is the book we are starting to walk through, beginning today it says “You believe there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder.” The demons believe that God exists, but they certainly don’t believe IN, or trust, in Him!

Consider this for a moment: Your life ends tonight. You stand before your Creator with no masks or facades. Your money, looks, talents, wisdom, power, prestige, & popularity won’t count in his court. One thing will. HOW YOU LIVED YOUR LIFE will answer this question: Do I believe that God exists, or do I believe *in* the God who exists?

This series is going to challenge us to examine ourselves and to answer the question: “*Is my faith the real deal or just an empty shell?*”

Many of you may be looking for affirmation that your faith is the real deal. You want to make sure that the life you are living is the life that God desires for you to live out. Some of you may be honest enough to admit that *your faith lacks consistency*. That it may waver, or ebb and flow depending on situations and circumstances. Still others here may be truthful enough to say that they have a genuine lack of faith; that it is an empty shell.

### True Faith is Faith That Works

Play on words: It’s a faith that works, that isn’t afraid to put action behind the belief in God and it’s a faith that works in the good times and is just as solid in the not-so-good times. The times of trials and testing’s in our lives.

“*Is my faith the real deal or just an empty shell?*”

And just in case you thought you should never question your faith - like you’re somehow hurting God’s feelings if you do - look how the apostle Paul issued the same challenge:

2 Corinthians 13:5 (NIV) Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?

As we study through James, will YOU take the challenge to really look in the mirror, to examine yourself and see if you are who you think you are?

I am saved by grace! I am saved by faith in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross and the blood he shed for me. Spot on! We can never be good enough on our own. We need the cross & the resurrection of Jesus. *We are saved by faith alone through grace alone, through Jesus Christ alone.*

You and I haven't been saved by our good works, BUT, it's crystal clear throughout scripture that we have been made *for* good works. We are called to do the good works God has created us to do! Our faith is to be lived out in *active obedience* to the will of God.

God does the saving. We do the serving.

Faith works. Faith is sufficient for our salvation. But faith is seen, it is revealed, it is lived – out, in good works. True Faith is Faith That Works.

Today we begin a journey into the New Testament letter we call James. The writing is full of interesting word pictures, practical wisdom, & easy-to-understand commands. It will challenge us to put feet to our faith, to *walk what we talk*, and *align our lives with our lips*.

Do you believe *that* God exists, or do you believe *in* the God who exists? Are you willing to examine yourself & ask: “*Is my faith the real deal or just an empty shell?*”

We may not like what we see - the hypocrisy, inconsistency, materialism, favoritism, & pride. **The good news is:** We haven't gone too far for God's grace. We can humble ourselves, examine ourselves, cry out to our Creator, and be fully forgiven and restored. Will you join me in this journey?

*Author + Audience before Application*

James 1:1 (NIV) James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

Easy to miss what's going on in our English translations. The original Greek text of the N.T. uses James' Hebrew name: Jacob. Every time the Jewish men of the N.T. have the name Jacob, it is translated to James, like it is here in James 1:1.

So, who is the author, James? The leader in the early Jerusalem church & none other than the half – brother of Jesus. Same mother, different father.

“James, why can't you be more like Jesus?” Listen like Jesus? He is mentioned first in the list of Jesus' brothers in Matt. 13:55 & Mark 6:3.

What would it take for your brother to convince you that he is God in skin? For James (and honestly his family as well) it must have taken something drastic b/c Scripture tells us in Mark 3:20 – 21, his family, including James, a one point, *thought that Jesus was out of his mind*.

Mark 3:20 – 21 (NLT) One time, Jesus entered a house, and the crowds began to gather again. Soon he and his disciples couldn't even find time to eat. <sup>21</sup> When his family heard what was happening, they tried to take him away. “He's out of his mind,” they said. In John 7:5 it said, “even his own brothers did not believe in him”.

What changed? How did James go from the point of believing that there is a God to believing in Jesus, his brother, as God? To go from doubting Jesus to be a leader in the Jerusalem church and writing this book? How do you get your family to believe that you're God? 2 Steps: 1) Be brutally beaten, killed and buried. 2) Convince people that you have risen from the dead.

That's where it all changed for James. This is the point where he began to move past the point that God exists and to the place that he put his trust **in Jesus** as God. Do you believe *that* God exists, or do you believe *in* the God who exists?

He opens the letter with *James, a **servant** of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*. Not, I'm the brother of Jesus and I know what I'm talking about!

Who is the audience? Jewish Christ – followers, who were dispersed, or scattered, from Jerusalem because of persecution. The Jews who didn't trust in Jesus, persecuted those who did, so they fled. James is a Jewish man writing to a largely Christ – following Jewish audience - the twelve tribes dispersed abroad.

Everyone reading this would have tied the author's symbolic identification by the name Jacob, to the father of the Jewish nation. When translated to English it becomes James.

Twelve tribes reflects language that points back to Israel, which originally had twelve tribes – each tracing their lineage back to one of the twelve sons of Jacob. Represented the fullness of God's people. In the N.T. Jesus choose twelve disciples.

James is writing to people who are suffering for their faith. People have fled for their lives. He is writing to encourage them, to remind them that this is about true faith. This is something worth dying for. People who were probably facing much worse than you and I will ever have to face.

James 1: 2 – 4 (NIV) <sup>2</sup> Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, <sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. <sup>4</sup> Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Jacob's audience was experiencing, had experienced/would experience all sorts of trials - the same kind of stuff every person on the planet will face at some point. The difference between the believer and the non-believer isn't WHAT we face, but HOW and WHY we face it. If we identify ourselves with Jesus, we will experience trials & persecution. James knew it. Jesus knew it. Still true today.

**Why must I GO through this or How will I GROW through this?**

1st - Trials test our faith. Difficult days help us to see if our faith is the real deal or just an empty shell. It's easy to say we trust God when things are good...but when things go bad, will we still trust Him? How many of us who have spent very little time on our knees have been driven to pray when calamity is suddenly knocking at the door? Trials help us

to re-prioritize - to see what is really matters most. Trials make us consciously aware of our need for God.

2nd - The testing of our faith produces perseverance. IF you never strain your muscles, they will never grow. (Silversmith – testing – heat it up – dross/impurities – scoop it off – repeat – see his reflection)

3rd - *Perseverance* produces mature faith, perfect and complete, not deficient in anything. When we see tough times through these lenses, the question changes from: Why must I GO through this to How will I GROW through this?

### TESTING - PERSEVERANCE – MATURITY

Baking a cake. The ingredients on their own aren't that good but together they produce something good. God wants to use the trials to produce something good in us.

James then reminds us that God is NOT distant or too busy for us. He WANTS us to turn to Him for help!

James 1:5 – 8 (NIV) 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. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. <sup>8</sup> Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

Sometimes when we pray we don't know what God's will is, so we trust Him with the outcome, but this is one that we KNOW what God's will is. He WANTS to give us His wisdom! There is only one important step to having God's wisdom - We must ask in faith without doubting. We must remember that we are asking GOD - the Creator of all things - for help!

God would you: help me in this test? Help me persevere? Help me see what You are doing and grow to maturity? Show me what my part is? I can or need to do.

Faith that Works is more about WHO we trust than HOW we trust.

Story of the man and his son in Mark 9. (I do believe, help my unbelief!)

And here's the reality; ALL BELIEVERS WILL EXPERIENCE TRIALS, regardless of social rank. The question is, WHO will we trust during those times?

James 1:9 – 12 (NIV) <sup>9</sup> Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. <sup>10</sup> But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. <sup>11</sup> For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls, and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.

Jesus said it is hard for the rich person to enter the kingdom of God (Mark 10:24-25). Why is that? Because the rich tend to put their faith in their riches rather than humbly

approach God as needy sinners seeking forgiveness. But those who endure testing have their focus on an eternal crown, not an earthly crown. \$\$ can be here today, gone tomorrow. In a snap.

James 1:12 (NIV) 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.

It's easy to love God when he gives us everything we want. When we are comfortable. When life is going well. When it's all coming up roses. But what about when he puts trials in our lives to develop our character? To purify us and make us more like Jesus. What about then?

James tells us that when we persevere, when we don't give up but keep pushing through; when we "love Him through the trials and testing's", we will receive the crown of life.

### Trust God through the Trials

The testing of your faith may lead to some tough decisions you have to make. New challenges we might have to face. Maybe your worried you've got it all wrong, that Christianity isn't the right way. *If it was the right way, why would God let you suffer like this?*

When persecution drove the Christians out into the wider world, many of them had good reason to doubt. James is urging them to come to God with their problems, and to trust in His wise guidance. He says the same to us. You may have reason to doubt. Don't jump in and out of your faith. Keep in touch with God through the difficulties, and He will get you through. And when He does, you will receive the crown of life God promised to those who love him.

### Small Group Questions

1. What stood out to you in this week's message?
2. What is the best dish (or only dish) you prepare? What are the ingredients? How do you prepare it?
3. Read James 1:1 – 12. According to James 1:1, who was the author of this letter? How does he describe himself? Why do you think he didn't introduce himself as the brother of Jesus?
4. According to James 1, who is James writing this letter too? What does that mean? What were they dealing with when he wrote to them?
5. According to James 1:2 and the following verses, how should we react when times get tough? What is the challenge for you personally in his instruction?

6. What does James say is the end result of this “testing”? What encouragement does that give you?
7. If you made the goal of your life to become more like Jesus, even if it meant suffering trials and tests, how would that change your life? What decisions would you make differently? How would you adjust your priorities? Is it realistic?
8. What trial or testing are you presently going through? How have you seen God burning away some impurities? Has it been a painful process? Have you been growing through the process? Share about it.
9. In what present trial or test do you need God’s wisdom? Have you asked for it? What are we not to do when we ask for His wisdom? Why?
10. Close in prayer asking God to help you through the trials and tests that you presently face or will face in the future.