

## DON'T QUIT, STAY THE COURSE

Welcome to **Wk 2 of Spirit & Truth!** As we said last week we are going to spend the next 9 weeks looking at God's greatest vehicle for taking the Gospel to the world. Of course that vehicle is the CHURCH! The church is more than just a place we go to on Sunday to sing songs and listen to someone preach God's word. The Church is a living organism made up of followers of Jesus who have been filled with the Holy Spirit and have been given the directive of taking the message of salvation to the world!! Last week we learned about how we are empowered to be witnesses to the world by preaching the Gospel with our lives and calling people to respond. Today we are going to learn how as followers of Jesus we should respond when facing difficulties that are designed to hinder our mission. So if you will find **James 1** I am going to **PRAY** for us and then we are going to dive in.

The Book of James is written by James the half brother of Jesus. Even though originally he rejected Jesus as the Messiah he eventually became a key leader in the Jerusalem church. James' audience was made up of Jewish believers who had become dispersed into various places as a result of Christian persecution in and around Jerusalem. **James 1:1 (NIV) James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations:** If you were following along in your reading plan this week you would have read about some of the persecution that the early church faced. For example the time Peter and John were arrested because they were preaching at the Temple not too long after the day of Pentecost.

**Acts 4:1-4 (NIV) 1** The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. **2** They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. **3** They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. **4** But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

Or the time Stephen was stoned to death for preaching about Israel's rejection of the Messiah and rejection of the prophets of old.

**Acts 7:54-59 (NIV) 54** When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. **55** But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. **56** "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." **57** At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, **58** dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. **59** While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

The Book of James is considered to be the earliest written book of the NT and it gives instruction on wise Christian living that is practical to everyday life. Due to the fact that James is writing to those who have experienced persecution, his main emphasis is on godly behavior and uncompromised obedience to the word of God as a true sign of one's faith. In fact, through His epistle James identifies for us what it is that makes up a true believer.

It is here in Chapter 1 that James gives us **THREE TESTS** that can be used to identify a true believer especially in the face of adversity.

### **Test #1 - The Test of PERSEVERANCE**

**James 1:2-12 (NIV)** **2** Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, **3** because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. **4** Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. **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. **6** 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. **7** That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. **8** Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do. **9** Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. **10** But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wildflower. **11** 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. **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.

Trials are just part of life in a fallen world. Whether you follow Jesus or not you will face trials of all sorts. But for those of us who are following Jesus God wants to use our trials to test our perseverance so that we will finish what He has for us to do regarding His mission. Do you know what tests do? They are designed to see what you are learning so that you can address those areas where you are weak. Just like in school testing shows where you are proficient and where you need to improve with the ultimate purpose to equip you for a productive life. So notice what he says we need to do when we face the test of perseverance.

First we need to consider it pure JOY! Not the difficulty itself, but the result of what God is trying to bring about IN the difficulty. The word “consider” also rendered in other translations as “count” means to evaluate your situation from God’s perspective. And what is God’s perspective? It is to make you better as a Christ FOLLOWER! To make you STRONGER in your FAITH. To enable your faith to SHINE brightly in the midst of a broken world so that others may come to faith in Jesus. **4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.** One of the beautiful things about persecution is that out of it God expanded the church numerically and expanded its reach in the world physically. When trials come we need to ask the question, “What JOY is God going to bring out of my situation?” **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. 6 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.** There will be times when we just do not understand WHY or WHAT exactly God is trying to accomplish when we come into a certain trial. That is when you and I need to ask God for wisdom to be able to understand. And guess what, God is cool with you asking Him! But whatever we do, first consider it JOY!

Secondly, place your confidence on your POSITION in CHRIST rather than your position in the world. Worldly status means very little when it comes to difficulties.

We obviously know this for those of us who are of humble means. And for those of us who are rich, ultimately our riches can do nothing to prevent us from passing away like a wild flower underneath the scorching sun. Neither of these will bring us relief or comfort in times of trial. There really is only one thing we can find comfort in! **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.** Those who are able to endure are those who place their hope and security in Christ Jesus. Rather than put confidence in our worldly status let's instead put confidence in our position in Christ. After all, worldly stuff will pass away, but the things of Christ are eternal. **Test #1 - The Test of Perseverance**

### **Test #2 - The Test of BLAME**

**James 1:13-15 (NIV) 13** When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; **14** but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. **15** Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. Satan uses difficult circumstances in our lives as an opportunity to lure us away from God and he is oftentimes successful not because he has irresistible power over us, but because we give into our own evil desires and we fail to trust God. Most of the time it isn't even Satan we are having an issue with but it's our sinful desires and sinful hearts that put us in situations where we are tempted to do wrong and sin. We are to blame more often than not. We need to be honest that we are to blame and we need God's grace and power to overcome our flesh. In fact, as we mentioned earlier, the difficulties we face are the results of sin and brokenness in our world which we have created by doubting God's goodness and by allowing Satan to tempt us to look outside of God for satisfaction in life.

**Jeremiah 17:9 (NIV)** "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"

Satan enabled by our lack of faith, not God, are the ones responsible for the difficulties we face. **Satan loves nothing more than for us to blame God for our troubles.** Think about it, he wants us to blame the very one who is trying to save us so we cannot be rescued. This is like the person who is drowning fighting against the lifeguard who is coming out to save them from drowning. Beware of the test of blame because ultimately sin is to blame for our circumstances, our sin or someone else's sin.

**James 1:16-18 (NIV) 16** Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. **17** Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. **18** He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

God would never purposefully lead us to sin. God only wants to give us that which is perfect and beneficial for us. He is unchanging in this regard and our difficulties do not change this fact! When difficulties come, Who will you blame? Who will you turn to in the midst of your trouble? Who will you trust to see you through? Here is the truth! God doesn't create the trials but He will certainly use them to change us and create an opportunity for something better. He doesn't

design the test but He will certainly use it to conform you to His image and bring about His glory!! When trials come there will always be **The Test of Perseverance and The Test of Blame**. But there is one more test we need to be aware of and that is.....

### **Test #3 - The Test of God's WORD**

**James 1:19-27 (NIV) 19** My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, **20** because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. There is one thing about difficulty I have found to be true in my life. Trials and difficulties will either bring out the BEST in me or the WORST in me. And the humbling thing is, it is pretty much a true indicator of where I am spiritually. I get it! We are all human and sometimes those struggles and trials get the best of us and cause us to become angry (Angry with God, Angry with other people, Angry with our situation and sometimes Angry with ourselves). The problem with anger that I have found is that I don't want to be angry with myself so I try to find someone or something to be angry with. Someone or something I can blame my situation on. Sound familiar? But in the end it all comes back to the condition of my heart! Rather than be quick to pop off or explode with anger let us stop, **LISTEN** and put a cap on our angry outburst and submit our heart to the word of God.

**21** 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. **MAKE ROOM** for God's word by putting away fleshly ways of dealing with and processing difficulties that are competing for space in your heart and humbly place yourself before God's word to be examined.

**22** Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. **23** Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror **24** and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. **25** 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. Prepare yourself to **DO** what God's word says. Allow your heart to be examined by it and make it a priority to Apply it to your life in all situations and circumstances. In doing so you are trusting God and the promises He has made to you.

**26** Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. Ceremonial ritual and routines are worthless if it does not produce heart change. And what is a true indicator of the condition of our heart? It is the tongue! **Matthew 12:34 (NIV)** You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. If you got junk coming out of your mouth, it means you got junk in your heart.

Religion and religious rituals do not change us. Only God's word applied by the Holy Spirit to our heart will bring true and lasting change.

**27 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 world.** Pure and undefiled religious activity (that which is a true exercise of faith and which God desires for us to have) is that which expresses unconditional LOVE for others and establishes a life that is not impacted or effected by a polluted world system. The proof that we are being changed is when unconditional love is present despite our trials and difficulties.

You see, whether we are in times of peace or in times of difficulty are we walking closely with God? If you are, then ENDURANCE and MATURITY will be ever present. God will give you what is PERFECT and BENEFICIAL. And ultimately, you will experience true HEART CHANGE!

## **Worship Comes Back Up**

### **Invitation:**

What Is your goal as a disciple, is it to grow spiritually or to become comfortable in this life?

Evaluate your heart! When difficulties come, what is your response?

**When it comes to difficulties can you count it all JOY? Do you place your confidence on your POSITION in CHRIST or are you too fixed on your position in this world?**

**Who are you blaming for your struggles? Are you giving Satan too much credit for your struggle? Are you too busy blaming God when He is the one you should be trusting? You can't find comfort and you can't experience healing when you're stuck in the blame game.**

**Rather than be angry about your situation will you allow God's word to speak to you in the midst of your trials? Will you STOP (blaming and ranting), LISTEN (to the WORD of God and to the voice of the Holy Spirit) and DO (Apply God's word to your life).**

Maybe something in us needs to change before we can enjoy the fullness of His goodness and in order for that to happen we must let God use our difficulty to expose in us that which needs to be changed. Count it all JOY because He is working something better for you.

**2 Corinthians 12:5-10 (NIV) 5** I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. **6** Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, **7** or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. **8** Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. **9** But he

said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. **10** That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Maybe you are here today because you are tired and have been worn down by the difficulties in your life. Will you press into Jesus? He wants nothing more for you than to first experience the JOY of His salvation and then for you to KNOW Him more intimately. Have you trusted Jesus? If you have, are you abiding in His word?