

THIS WEEKEND

at The Crossing



Nope: Nope to Comfort
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The Crossing Church
Las Vegas, Nevada

OPENING

This week we begin new ten-week series in the book of James called Nope. This word is one we use to vehemently say “no” most strongly! It means “no way in heck!” Here, James, Jesus’ half brother, teaches us how to say no to our culture and how to live a counter-cultural life.

SCRIPTURE¹

James 1:1-11 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. 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 it 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. Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. 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.

OBSERVATION

James, Jesus’ half brother, wrote to a group of Christians (The Way) that was enduring severe persecution. This group began in Jerusalem on the day after Pentecost when three thousand people became believers in Jesus. Thousands more who were all Jewish converts soon followed and the persecution that oppressed them caused them to flee from Israel. They scattered because their culture turned against them and Gentiles and family members rejected them. In this world we will face difficulties, but joy is possible even then. James himself was martyred when he refused to deny Christ – he died after being thrown from the top of the temple and then

¹ All scripture is NIV translation unless otherwise indicated.

stoned. Nine other of the twelve Apostles died in horrible ways and never recanted their faith in Jesus even though their lives would have been spared. We know what happened to Judas - John the Apostle lived into his nineties faithfully serving His Jesus.

QUESTION: When have you stood up for your faith when being mocked or derided for it? What did you say?

James didn't believe in the Lordship of his half brother before the Resurrection, yet led the Church in Jerusalem for three years afterward. During his lifetime, James wrote to fellow Christians asking them to consider what God was doing through their trials. He encouraged them to look forward to the joy that would come as a result of those trials. He said that God was trying to produce perseverance in them through those challenges that were not a waste of time or energy nor were they random. Today, they are also for testing our strength and faith. This is a purifying process which eliminates our impurities and moves us along on our journeys toward wisdom and maturity and completeness. God, in His wisdom and purposes, choreographs events throughout our lives. **Romans 8:28.**

QUESTION: What are you going through now that is strengthening you in your faith?

APPLICATION

Pain is the pathway to growth. That's an unwelcome thought, but a foundational one in our faith walk. We wish we could become more fit by watching football, or become wiser without studying, or gain promotions without working hard, but the truth is - spiritually, relationally and physically that doesn't work. We have doubts just as John the Baptist did when he sent followers to ask Jesus, "Are You the One?" We can also be double-minded. This means hedging our bets when we don't believe God will help us. If one way fails, we are still safe. But when God is one of many options, then in reality He is not any option at all.

QUESTION: What areas of doubt about Jesus do you still have? What areas in your faith do you not have any doubts at all?

We don't get to choose our trials in life or when they come, but we can choose how we react to them. Our choices are intentional - we don't meander into spirituality. Instead, we go through seasons of pain that force us to grow our faith.

QUESTION: During which seasons of your life do you typically have problems with doubt?

Our natural reactions to trials are quitting, doubting, and comparing. Our better choices are: **1) Persevering.** To persevere means "remaining under" in Greek. Remaining under pressure means not quitting, or giving up or running away. When God is for us He is our partner, bringing good out of fear and pain. **2) Praying.** God will give us wisdom, direction and insight into making right decisions. When we pray, instead of asking "why?" why not ask "What are You trying to teach me?" or "What is Your purpose behind my pain?" or "What do You want me to do next?" or "When will the pain stop?" **3) Not comparing.** It seems to us that others' kids are more appreciative than ours, or others have more money than we do, their marriages are better than ours, or their lives are easier. When Peter asked Jesus what was going to happen to John, He told him, "Mind your own business, Peter. I'll take care of John." (Not a literal translation!) God deals with us uniquely through His sovereignty.

QUESTION: As you are going through something difficult today, how is God answering your "what" or "when" questions instead of the "whys" we shouldn't be asking at all?

If we're not careful we can think that when everything goes right we did it, and when everything goes wrong, God did it. But God's ultimate goal for us is not our comfort – it's to make us more like Jesus. He works like Michelangelo who tells us, **“I created a vision of David in my mind and simply carved away everything that was not David.”** That's what Jesus, our great Sculptor, is doing in us – chipping away at everything that is not like Him and doing it using trials.

QUESTION: What areas of your life are you waiting for God to chip away? What can you do more of in your devotional time to help Him along?

Last weekend we had six services attended by 12,000 participants at our three campuses and 230 new believers who were baptized. How amazing is that? That is God's grace amidst our trials when believers put aside discomfort and move past pain to obedience and joy. **Acts 1:1-8**

QUESTION: Reflect on you Easter week and tell us what impacted you most.

QUESTION: If you invited someone to Easter services, what did they say about their experience?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, grant us wisdom, increase our faith and make us more like a reflection of Your Son. In Jesus' name. Amen.

QUESTIONS

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QUESTION: What are you going through now that is strengthening you in your faith?

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QUESTION: During which seasons of your life do you typically have problems with doubt?

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