

James 1:1-11

Benjamin Karner / General Adult

James / James' Letter; Suffering; Faith and Order; Wisdom; Doubt / James 1:1–11

Let's look at how James opened his letter.

James 1:1 ESV

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.

I. James' greeting ([James 1:1](#))

A. James referred to himself as a “servant”.

1. δοῦλος (doulos) - slave, servant

Roman slavery was much different than its more modern form. There were four major types of slaves in the Roman Empire. There were slaves who were criminals or enemies of the Roman Empire who were condemned to the mines to work. There were rural slaves that were akin to the chain gang. They were people bought by a master to perform manual labor. There were urban household slaves. In this arena, conditions varied and was normally only for a time. The master would provide food, shelter, and training in a skill. Most of these slaves were set free at some point in their lives. Finally, there were imperial slaves. These were people who served the emperor. They were in powerful positions.

2. Likely, this identification by James is more akin to imperial slaves.

James was in a position of power, but did not speak on his own authority. He spoke with the authority of his Master, Jesus Christ. He is a servant of Jesus Christ and when he speaks, he speaks with the authority of Christ. We must remember that any power or influence we may gain belongs to God because he is our Master, Lord, and King.

B. Loyalty to God means you are also loyal to Jesus Christ.

They are one in the same. He is as servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

C. James wrote to a multicultural church.

There are several ways to understand James' recipients. It could be literally, expect the ten northern tribes are the "lost tribes" after the Assyrian Empire conquered them. It could be understood as a euphemism for the unity of the church as the successor of the twelve tribes of Israel. I think it should be understood symbolically, rather than literally. James was aware of Gentile Christians who were being persecuted in other nations.

After his greeting, James addressed the problem of trials. How is the Christian to understand trials and suffering?

II. Trials ([James 1:2-8](#))

James 1:2-8 ESV

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. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given 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. 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.

This section is what you might call a chain argument.

A. Trials should be greeted with joy because they produce beneficial results.

1. James says that believers should have complete, overflowing joy when going through difficulties.

2. Trials aren't situations we put ourselves in. Trials are unanticipated and unexpected.

Think of the parable of the Good Samaritan. The man didn't expect to fall into the hands of robbers. We don't seek out trials to prove our faith. Trials are unwelcome and unexpected. There are various kinds of trials,

- Trials can come from external sources, such as Satan.

God allows Satan to test us, such as in the case of Job.

- Trials can be subtle and complex, such as in the Garden of Eden.

Adam and Eve's trials didn't come announced. It was a subtle temptation, not a neon sign. It was complex because it was veiled in trying to help them get better. Most of us can avoid the obvious. It is the subtle that traps us.

- Trials are the common experience of humanity.

Everyone will face testing. They are part of the normal flow of life. No matter when and how they come, they are to be received with joy. Why should I receive a trial with joy?

- Trials have a purifying quality.

They are a process in which something good is meant to develop. They develop character and strength. They aren't easy and they aren't meant to be easy. They are meant to be hard because it is in the struggle that we develop.

3. Testing produces endurance.

Endurance - ὑπομονή (*hypomonē*) - steadfastness, staying power, consistency, and determination under adversity

Endurance looks forward in hope of the results of the testing. It is a means to an end. The end is perfection and completion because we will be glorified after our time of testing on this earth.

4. Endurance's full effect is perfection and completion.

B. God gives wisdom

While mankind participates in his moral development, wisdom's only source is from God. We need wisdom to understand how to live. Wisdom is the gift of God and all you need to do is ask God for it. God gives wisdom generously.

C. Without doubt

James gave a vivid illustration of a life lived without asking God for wisdom.

1. Living without wisdom is like being on a rudderless boat in the open windy sea.

You aren't going to get when you want to go and likely are going to end up in a world of problems.

2. Living without wisdom leads to being a unstable and untrustworthy person.

A person living without wisdom will go where the winds take them and will change allegiances whenever needed.

II. Poverty and Wealth ([James 1:9-11](#))

James 1:9-11 ESV

Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

James changed the subject in verse nine to speak about poverty and wealth.

A. The poor should rejoice when they gain and the rich when they experience loss.

This seems like a strange thing to say. Why would role reversal be a good thing?

boast - *καυχάομαι* (*kauchaomai*) - brag about, rejoice in

B. The reversal of fortune allows for the gain of perspective.

Riches are transitory. You might have today and not tomorrow. Life is but a vapor. You can't take it with you and even leaving to your progeny might not turn out well for them. There is an inherent frailty to life. In a matter of moments, life can drastically change. What seems secure is not secure. Gaining God's perspective on the world is to gain wisdom.

Thoughts or Questions

Discussion Questions

1. How can we practically cultivate an attitude to "count it all joy" when facing trials?
2. How does the testing of our faith lead to perseverance and maturity?

3. What does it mean to be "lacking in nothing"?
4. The passage warns against double-mindedness. How does this hinder our spiritual growth and how can we cultivate single-mindedness in our pursuit of God?
5. How can we best support and encourage one another in the midst of trials, drawing on the truths presented in this passage?
6. How can we apply the principles of this passage to specific areas of our lives, such as relationships, finances, or career choices?
7. What are some challenges to having the mindset described in this passage?