
Reflection

1. The New Testament's biggest characters all speak to the connection between being faithful to Christ and experiencing real world trials as a result (Mark 13:9-13; Romans 5:2-5; 1 Peter 4:12-14, 19; James 1:2-4). Why do you think this is so? How might the fear of suffering keep Christians today from being faithful? Which commands of Christ do you think are most vulnerable to disobedience today due to the potential for producing hardship in a Christian's life?
2. James places a higher value on Christian maturity than he does on easy and trouble-free living (1:2-4) and links the Christian's endurance of trials to God's favor and having the promise of life in Christ (1:12). What role does this teaching play in your everyday relationship with Jesus and the ministry you do in his name? If it's not a big part yet, how might this teaching change your life and ministry?
3. James teaches that while God might use trials in our lives, he is not the source of our temptations. We have our own desires to thank for those. What are the benefits to taking responsibility for our own desires? What things can Christians do to identify their desires and the temptations they pose and then to resist them—especially in times of trial and hardship?

Action

1. Take one command from the Bible (love your neighbor, make disciples, be merciful, do justice, etc.), and intentionally prioritize heightened, faithful obedience. Be prepared for potential trials and hardship due to the "world's" rejection. If/when the rejections/consequences come, work at considering the various trials as pure joy. Observe how intentional steadfastness turns into spiritual maturity and completeness. Share your experience with a brother or sister in Christ.

Pray

If studying in a group, pray for one another and for each other's spiritual growth throughout the coming week.

Living Faith [a study of James] – James the Just, a central leader in early church and the half-brother of Jesus, cares deeply for his Christian *brothers and sisters* and writes to them to encourage wise and faithful living. Bringing both a deep connection to Christianity's Hebrew roots and a solid recognition of the lordship of Jesus, James provides wise, practical, godly instruction on *living faith*—faith which is necessarily, consistently and broadly manifested in action. His teaching provides everyday ways we can apply our faith and thereby expect to grow.

Begin with Prayer – *Father, with an expectation that you will use this study to grow me/us more into the image of your Son, I/we open our hearts and minds to your Spirit. Amen.*

Follow Up on James and His Letter to the Twelve Tribes – What thoughts, questions, actions, etc. resulted in your life this past week as a result of last week's sermon study?

The Sermon's Main Point – *Consider It Pure Joy*

As Christians even hardships serve as opportunities for joy, knowing that God, who is supremely good and faithful, is at work helping us grow and mature.

Begin – Choose from the following questions to begin thinking about the study's topic.

1. How many times have you moved in your life? Which move was the easiest and which provided the most challenge?
2. Which of the following provides a greater temptation for you: a snack even though you're not hungry, goofing off even though you have work to do, social media even though you're with other people, giving your opinion even though no one asked you, or working even though you should be resting?
3. How would you articulate the differences between happiness, joy, contentment, glee, and serenity?
4. Over the past ten years, what's been an area of growth and maturation for you? What particular area of your life are you interested in growing even more in the next ten years?

Living Faith [a study of James]

Consider It Pure Joy

James 1:2-4, 12-18

Grasping, Sharing, Learning and Appreciating

James 1:2-4, 12

1. If James is writing to Christians who had to flee Jerusalem because of persecution (James 1:1b; Acts 8:1), what kinds and severity of trials might the readers of his letter be experiencing?
2. What does it require of a person to consider what is without a doubt a costly hardship as "pure joy" even as the person experiences the hardship's severe consequences? Can you give an example from your own life?
3. James links "trials" to "testing." What does he describe as the purpose of this testing? If steadfastness is an ongoing, committed, patient reliance on God, how does steadfastness lead to maturity and completeness in a follower of Christ?
4. What value must a follower of Christ put on mature faith (1:4) and on God's favor and gift of life (1:12) such that she/he would reconsider all trials as opportunities for joy?

James 1:13-15

1. The Greek word for "trials" can also be used for "temptations." The reader is required to use context to know which meaning is intended. Trials are exterior and temptations are interior. With this understanding in mind, what are the major points James makes in 1:13-15?

James 1:16-18

1. Describe the main point James makes in 1:16-18. What connection is there between knowing that God gives good gifts and the experience of trials and temptations?
2. What impact does the knowledge of God's unchanging nature have on a person who is experiencing hardship, especially if the hardships come as a result of believing in Christ?