

A Faith That Works: Let's Get Real

Lead-in

Today we begin a new sermon series called *A Faith That Work* in the book of James. This book embedded within the NT written by the half-brother of Jesus, is packed full of practical action. God wants you to work out your faith because your faith works.

Have you ever bought something from the store and been utterly disappointed? I think the arcade store is a perfect example of disappointment. You spend \$20 and an hour trying to win tickets to redeem your winnings for a .50 toy. Ill never forget one time our kids won a paddle-ball and the first try the ball went flying across the room. And guess what? They lost their minds. **Why? Because the toy didn't work!**

Listen, I want you to know Jesus will never let you down. James is not pumping you up to believe Christianity is something its not. Many have tried their own way, called it Jesus, and found it didn't satisfy.

"The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried."—G.K. Chesterton

Today, as we read the Word, let's get real.

Let's Get Real- James 1:1-4

James the Just, the brother of Jesus, introduces himself this way: a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. On one hand James is writing to the church in complete **humility**. He didn't name drop Jesus as his brother, but His master. For James, he had committed himself to Jesus as his divine master and swore unconditional allegiance to his master. What does it look like to follow Jesus? James/Josh/???, a slave of Christ.

Think about this for one moment, how impossible is it to convince your brothers you are the Son of God.? This only happens unless you are God. James didn't believe until after the crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus appeared to James and he believed. James, a slave of God.

Now let's get real. After the initial opening, most NT letter writers' express appreciation to their audience in the form of a blessing. Not so James, he launches directly into what is most urgent. **Greetings, BAM!** As they say in Bulgaria, one of our mission partnerships, "Let's We Go!"

You will experience difficulty (1:2). James does not sugar coat real life. Real life is broken and difficult. Ask anyone over 25. Some people run to Christ because they want Him to fix their circumstances. James says you will experience... Christianity does not shelter you from any adversity; Christians will face difficulty. However, it is the **Spirit that shapes and radically redefines** how you **respond**.

Raise your hand if you are someone you know is going through something difficult. Let's get real, you will experience trials. Why is this comforting? Because **you are not alone**.

James knew first-hand the ugliness of life. His brother died on a cross. **Tradition says that James was thrown from the pinnacle of the temple and beaten to death with a club after the fall did not end in his murder.** You will have trouble. **This week some of you have lost your husband and father. Some of you lost a friend in the 10th grade. Some are dealing with illness, diagnosis, marriages falling apart, bill collectors calling.** You know what the Bible calls this? Various trials. **God knows what you are going through, He sees, He hears, He cares!**

What do you do (1:2)? Consider it joy. Listen to what the Bible does not say. It does not say consider all things that happen to you joy. Rather James is saying, ***“do not consider everything joy, but consider pure joy the trials of faith.”*** Through the Spirit, **you can view your difficulties as opportunities for rejoicing.** Wow! This is not real.

What is joy? Joy is an unnatural reaction of deep, steady and unadulterated thankful trust in God.

Remember what you know (1:3). Notice James did not say **feel joy** when you are under immense stress. The Lord instructs us to **count, consider, or regard** joy. Why? Because you **know**. Often in times of trial, you immediately fall back upon what **you feel (ouch)**, to what is comfortable, or what you have experienced. **Trials have a way of elevating our feelings and diminishing what we know is true.** **Have you ever wondered why temptation is strongest when you are stresses, hungry, or isolated?**

But God says remember what you know. **What do we know?** That God uses trials to perfect our faith and make us stronger Christians. It's God's way of saying, **“I'm working on it.”** The implication is that testing leads to approval.

I John 3:24 The one who keeps his commands remains in him, and he in him. And the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he has given us.

Eph 3: 17 I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love, 19 and to know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. **Remember what you know!**

Because of Christ, you will pass the test (1:3). God will never test you because he is a strict schoolmaster. When you are tested, rest assured that there is something genuine that will survive the refining process. **James assumes the Christian will pass the test!**

Testing of faith has thematic roots in the metallurgy process. In the ancient world silver was produced by smelting silver-bearing lead ore. They would crush the rock into powder and place it into a furnace. The dross (solid impurities) would float to the top and be skimmed. How would the silversmith know his work was finished? He could see his reflection in the metal.

Through trials, the Lord is purposely skimming away the trash from your life and making you into His image. You might only feel the heat, but one day you will confirm perfectly to His image! **Because of Christ, you will pass the test, you will look like Him!**

Let endurance have its full effect on you (1:4). You cannot short-circuit fortitude. The present imperative calls for the continuation of an action already in progress. “Let what God is already doing in you continue!”

What is endurance? Should you let others walk all over you? Endurance for James is a **military term and is used as a metaphor referring to the battles of life.** It describes a military endurance that arises from the roots of oppression and pictures an army encampment seeing the immediate danger but holding their line waiting for the right moment. **Endurance is engaged waiting, knowing God is faithful.** Endurance is the old military hardened military general that has been through the battle who you want on your side. **This virtue is only earned through the battles of life, put on the full armor.**

Response

So what? Endurance is not the end for James. It leads to something even more important. So that you may be mature and complete.

Listen to the Word: the Christian himself is the perfect work, you are the perfect work! You see, **perfection is full-blown character of stable-righteousness.** It is God looking into the silver and saying, “**you are ready.**”

How is this possible? Jude 24 Now to him who is able to protect you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of his glory, without blemish and with great joy, **25 to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority before all time, now and forever. Amen.**

Let's get real, life is broken but God is working. Jesus has made a way for you. Today, Jesus is working on you so that you may be complete, lacing nothing! Let steadfastness have its full effect.

Now that you have heard this good news, God wants you to respond to Him. You can talk to him using words like this:

*Jesus today I **recognize** it is because of my (sin) bad actions that I need you. I **believe** Christ came to live, die and was raised from the death—to rescue me from my sin.*

***Forgive** me. I turn from me and put my trust in You.*

*I know that Jesus is Lord and King of all and I will **follow** Him.*

Notes

James 1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ: To the twelve tribes dispersed abroad. Greetings.

James

The greeting formula presents James the Just, the brother of the Lord, writing to Jewish Christian congregations scattered outside of Palestine (NIGTC).

Commentators have often marveled that James does not refer to himself either as an apostle or as Jesus' brother (ECNT, 48).

James the brother of Jesus came to faith only after the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7).

Clement of Alexandria relates that "James was thrown from the pinnacle of the temple, and was beaten to death with a club".

Hegesippus cites that "the Scribes and Pharisees placed James upon the pinnacle of the temple, and threw down the just man, and they began to stone him, for he was not killed by the fall. And one of them, who was a fuller, took the club with which he beat out clothes and struck the just man on the head

Servant

The term *doulos* is both an indication of humility, for the servant does not come in his own name, and of office, for the bearer of the title is in the service of a great king (NIGTC, 63).

Christians committed themselves to Jesus as their absolute divine master just as actual slaves had to swear unconditional allegiance to their human masters (ECNT, 47).

James 1:2 Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials,

After the initial epistolary opening, most NT letter writers express appreciation to their readers in the form of a thanksgiving or offer a blessing to God for his abundant spiritual provision. Not so James. He launches directly into exhortation (Moo, 52).

Count it

Through the Spirit, the initial treatment of trials calls believers to view them as opportunities for rejoicing (ECNT, 44).

This is a verb of thought rather than emotion. James is not commanding how one should feel, but rather how one should think about one's circumstances.

Great Joy

Joy is the proper perspective for the test of faith.

Great/pure an imperative that has been highly abused in interpretation. Everything/all does not form part of the direct object but identifies the type of joy one should have (ECNT, 48). James is in effect saying, "do not consider everything joy, but consider pure joy the trials of faith."

Joy proves quite different from happiness, so that this verse does not support the idea that Christians must smile all the time.

Joy = an unnatural reaction of deep, steady and unadulterated thankful trust in God (ECNT, 48).

Whenever

The author assumes that this is a context for the Christian life, and that testing comes in a variety of forms (NIGTC, 67).

Jesus and James' words urge Christians to look on sufferings as an external trial, neither sees suffering as something to be sought, and both see an eschatological benefit (NIGTC, 67).

Experience

Christianity does not shelter one from any adversity; Christians will face trials (ECNT, 49). Yet, it is the Spirit that shaped the radically redefines how you respond.

Various

In Christ, you have instruction and wisdom not just for one specific kind of test but for many (ECNT, 49).

For the initial readers of James, the trials were extreme poverty and persecution due to following Jesus Christ. James deliberately casts his net widely, including that many kinds of suffering that Christians undergo in this fallen world: sickness, loneliness, bereavement, disappointment (Moo, 54).

3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

Know

Why can believers react to trials with so strange and unexpected a response as joy? Because we know that God uses trials to perfect our faith and make us stronger Christians (Moo, 54).

Testing

Most likely background refers to the refiner's fire.

Testing does a service for the Christian, for the virtue of fortitude comes out of the process (NIGTC, 69).

Even better, prove. The implication here is of testing that leads to approval, a proving of the worth of something (ECNT, 49).

Produce

Implies that there is something genuine that will survive the refining process. James already assumes that the Christian will pass the test (NIGTC, 68).

Endurance

Endurance is not a passive virtue but a steady clinging to the truth within any situation. Tamez expresses it as 'military patience.' (ECNT, 49). Endurance is not downtrodden passivity, but rather an engaged waiting. Patience is not letting others walk all over you.

Endurance for James is military patience, that is, a very active and heroic patience, one that watches for the propitious moment. Endurance is a military term and is used as a metaphor referring to the battles of life (Tamez, 43).

There is a military patience that arises from the roots of oppression; it an active, working patience (Tamez, 44). It is the catalyst that sets everything in motion.

Like gold from a refiner's fire, endurance comes out of the testing situation. Endurance is a new facet of the believer's character that could not exist without testing.

The early Christian church valued this virtue, for only those with such a tested character knew that they would stand to the end. The battle-tested soldier, the heroic metaphor, the tempered metal is more precious than the raw material (NIGTC, 69).

Paul values and used the word endurance 16x and it occurs frequently in Revelation.

Tempering (metallurgy) Tempering is a heat treatment technique applied to ferrous alloys, such as steel or cast iron, to achieve greater toughness by decreasing the hardness of the alloy. The reduction in hardness is usually accompanied by an increase in ductility, thereby decreasing the brittleness of the metal. Tempering is usually performed after quenching, which is rapid cooling of the metal to put it in its hardest state. Tempering is accomplished by controlled heating of the quenched work-piece to a temperature below its "lower critical temperature".

The way the silversmith would know if the silver was refined, he could see his reflection.

In short, “endurance is faith stretched out.” (ECNT, 49).

4 And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.

Endurance is not the end for James. It is indeed an important virtue, but it leads to something even more important.

Let

One must not short-circuit fortitude (NIGTC, 69).

The present imperative calls for the continuation of an action in progress (ECNT, 50).

The benefits of testing come only to believers who respond to them in the right way: Christians must allow endurance to do its intended work (Moo, 54).

Full Effect

The Christian himself is the perfect work: “You are that perfect work (Dibelious).

Complete/Perfection

What does James mean by perfection? No NT uses the word as much as James.

Noah is the perfect man of Jewish tradition: Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God (Gen. 6:9).

Perfection= full-blown character of stable righteousness (NIGTC, 70).

Likely what Jesus is urging all of his follows: **Matt. 5:48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**