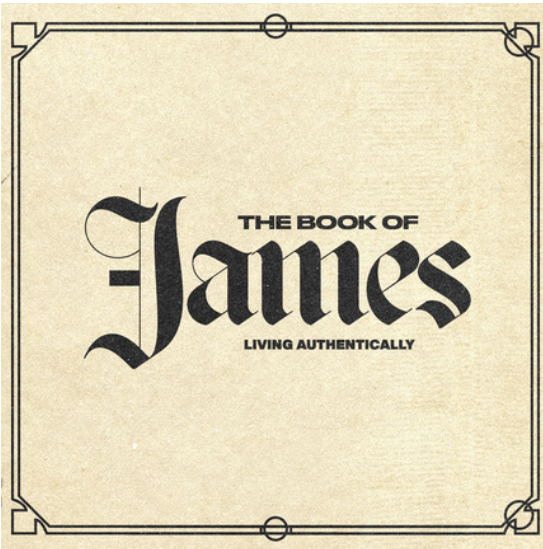


SERMON STUDY GUIDE



04.14.24 // Week 1 // “When Life is Hard”



The world's landscape rapidly changed after the resurrection of Jesus. As God's work of redeeming people continued, communities were formed. But the truth is we are still messy even while we are redeemed. James writes with a bluntness and candor that is unique in the New Testament. But amidst the direct, proverbial nature, he speaks truths that still land with us 2,000 years later. Here we learn how to put feet to our faith and live lives congruent with our beliefs!

ICE BREAKER QUESTIONS

- What's your favorite thing about springtime? Is it the blooming flowers, the spring cleaning, the longer days, or something else?
- What's the craziest storm you've ever experienced? Were you at home, caught outside, or somewhere else when it hit? What about it made it so memorable?

GOING DEEPER INTO THE MESSAGE

Let's read James 1:1-12

1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ: To the twelve tribes dispersed abroad. Greetings. 2 Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing. 5 Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly—and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind. 7 That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord, 8 being double-minded and unstable in all his ways. 9 Let the brother of humble circumstances boast in his exaltation, 10 but let the rich boast in his humiliation because he will pass away like a flower of the field. 11 For the sun rises and, together with the scorching wind, dries up the grass; its flower falls off, and its beautiful appearance perishes. In the same way, the rich person will wither away while pursuing his activities. 12 Blessed is the one who endures trials, because when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

Point 1 – Learn to appreciate the trials I am in for the purposes they produce.

“Consider it a great joy...whenever you experience various trials.” Are you kidding?! Jesus certainly asks a lot of us at times. And this is one of His biggest asks. How can we consider it great joy whenever we experience various trials? How could anyone find joy in trials?

How would you define the word “Joy”?

Joy isn't a happy, giddy feeling. It goes deeper than that. Joy is an unnatural reaction of contentment and deep trust in God through every situation. We don't rejoice because of the trial but because of what God can do through trials as a tool in our transformational process.

Have you seen those people who work out lifting really heavy weights, or do intense cardio, or do triathlons and they're smiling while they're doing it? Are they crazy? They are not enjoying the pain that their bodies are currently experiencing. But they do enjoy what the lifting, or the running, or the intense workout produces. They enjoy feeling better. They enjoy better sleep. They enjoy clarity of mind. They enjoy their clothes fitting a little better. They enjoy a lower blood pressure. They enjoy getting stronger. They enjoy being able to pick up their grandkids, or chase their own kids without being out of breath. All of the benefits are because they endured through the trial of exercise with an end goal in mind.

The same is true for the believer. James wants us to consider it pure joy when we go through trials because we know that trials produce endurance and that endurance will make us mature and complete (vs.4-5). Endurance is the ability to stay in place as something comes to challenge your footing. When we endure, we are able to stay the course and continue to be shaped by God through the challenging circumstances.

We can also have joy in the trials because we have the wisdom that we asked God for, and He gave us that wisdom generously (vs. 5). So we know that, even when we don't know when the trial will end, or what the outcome will be, He will use it for our ultimate good and benefit.

When God delays responding to prayer it is because he is expediting growth in our character that can only occur through endurance!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What trial(s) are you currently going through? How does this passage encourage you in your trial?
- How can you let trials shape your character instead of letting them shatter your hope? How will this help in enduring through trials?
- For what do you need to ask God to provide His wisdom this week? Which trial is too big to shoulder alone?

Let's read James 1:13-17

13 No one undergoing a trial should say, "I am being tempted by God," since God is not tempted by evil, and he himself doesn't tempt anyone. 14 But each person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own evil desire. 15 Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death. 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 lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Point 2 – Times of difficulty often reveal areas of vulnerability.

When a tire has a slow leak, they can submerge the tire in water and wherever the air bubbles are, that is where the leak is. When we are submerged under the weight of the trials of life, that's when we can see where the leaks in our maturity in Christ are. We can see those areas that need to be strengthened, reinforced, the holes that need to be plugged. Without the trials, we would have no idea where those areas of growth would be. We would go through life not knowing that there were areas of weakness, spots of vulnerability, etc. Trials show us areas we need to grow in our trust in God.

Going through trials are an affront to the comfort we like to enjoy. No one wants to get that perfect job and then get laid off. No one wants to have the long awaited baby and then find out that he is very sick. No one wants to buy that perfect house only to have one thing after another fall apart around them. We work toward a goal and find out that six things are in the way of the perfect outcome. These are the things that can, if we let them, draw us closer to Christ. These are the experiences that ever make us more like Him.

It's also good to remember that during times of trial, we may find ourselves facing temptation as well. It makes sense. When we go through trials, we may feel weaker and more vulnerable. Our faith is being tested and temptations promise us shortcuts out of our suffering and hardships. James 1:14-15 reminds us that God is not the one who tempts us. Temptation to sin comes from our own desires and hunger to go our own way. To fulfill our destiny and desires apart from God. Temptations are tools that are designed to draw us away from God. Think of temptations like a mouse trap that shows you the cheese but hides the trap.

I'm so thankful that in times of temptation, God shows us His goodness by providing us a way out of the temptation (1 Cor 10:13). Jesus was tempted but did not sin. He alone is able to empathize with our weaknesses and provide us the strength to overcome the temptations as they come.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What have you learned about yourself in times of trial? What were some of the positive things you learned about your faith? What were some of the areas of growth that you discovered?
- Have you ever noticed a temptation come up during times of intense trials? How have you grown over the years mentally, emotionally, spiritually and in your reactions when trials arise?
- Being vulnerable with a trusted couple of people about certain temptations can be helpful in navigating through the temptation successfully. How can you invest in these kinds of relationships where confession and accountability feel safe and healthy?