



MAKING IT REAL 1 - PURE JOY

James 1 v 1 to 18

The first verse of this book is worth a look. There is a little by way of personal greeting so common in many letters. He names himself as author and this is almost certainly James the brother of Jesus. It perhaps makes the use of the term 'servant' rather poignant. He could have pointed out that, in fact, Jesus came from HIS family. He gives Jesus his full title (the Lord Jesus Christ). There is little doubt about how he viewed his relationship to his elder brother.

His letter is addressed to the '12 tribes scattered among the nations'. Some would say James is addressing Jews who have become Christian converts. This is a limiting view and most would agree that, just as the 12 tribes were God's people in the Old Testament, God's people in the New Testament are those who follow Jesus. So, this is a letter addressed to the whole church and was seen as important as it came from the leader of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15).

FROM THE PASSAGE

Once the introductions are over, James is straight into the issue of TRIALS. But his first statement sounds contradictory. 'Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of any kind' (v2). We would probably have written – try to avoid any kind of trial if you want to be happy. The original word here suggests as 'unwelcome or unexpected experience'. Jesus uses the idea when he tells the Good Samaritan story.

1. **Have you ever experienced a trial in your life that brought you Joy?**
Try to pin down why the event brought you joy.

James then goes on to suggest that to become a mature Christian your faith will need to be tested, which in turn encourages you to be persistent and maturity is the result.

2. **Do you sometimes wish God had created an easier way to becoming a mature Christian?**
Why is this the only way?
Does this mean we should go looking for hardship in order to attain maturity?

James then turns to wisdom and suggests that if you lack that quality, you should ask God for it and he will gladly give it to you. We need wisdom to know how to cope with trials so the two ideas are connected. Wisdom in the Bible is about knowing what God wants, so whilst enduring trials, we always need to know God's perspective. So we ask the question 'what is God teaching me' rather than 'God what are you trying to do to me.

3. **When we go through trials, have we ever blamed God for what we are going through?**
Do we find it easy to ask God for wisdom?

James piles on the pressure saying we should never doubt. So, we ask God for wisdom never doubting he will give it. But this produces a good outcome. People who trust God totally and without doubting him will not be 'blown around' (literally taken off course) or unstable in his/her faith. So as we face the trials of life, we count them as joy as we try to follow God's plan through thick and thin.

4. **Is this unrealistic? Would we be hard pushed to say that has always been our experience?**

The next section is about the person in humble circumstances. But it is sandwiched between two passages on trials. Clearly the two issues are connected. It would suggest that the Christian who suffers the trail of poverty is to take pride in his position as a believer. And the wealthy believer is to take pride in trials that bring him low. The flower being consumed in heat would suggest that a rich man should be prepared to be deprived of his riches

5. Should we be shocked by this apparent reversal.

Is it unrealistic to think that 21st century Christians can live according to these values when they live in a consumerist world?

James returns to trials in v12 and emphasises the quality of a person who perseveres when trials hit him. Then he turns to temptation. The over-quoted phrase 'I can resist anything but temptation' comes to mind. We should never accuse God of being the tempter; James makes clear that temptation comes from within our own evil desires. Again, it's connected to wisdom – when we think we know better than God our own desires kick in and we put ourselves in danger of falling into sin.

6. 'Every good and perfect gift is from above coming down from the Father.' V16

Do we sometimes forget this?

How easy is to drift into an 'I know best' way of thinking?

Look at the process of desire leading to sin leading to death - is it easy for us to be dragged into temptation like this?

Suggest ways of resisting temptation

THINGS TO DO

Take some time to think about these things

1. Have we drifted into thinking we are one of God's most important disciples (verses 1 & 9)
2. If we are enduring a trial or have recently been through the mill ask God to make his presence and his peace known to you.
3. Do you need to ask God for wisdom to cope with a difficult time in your life?
4. Do you need to ask God to deliver you from a temptation that's really getting to you?

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

During the coming week remember God is always with you by His Spirit

He wants the best for you

He wants to help you with your temptations

He is with you in whatever trials you are facing

He wants to give you the wisdom you need

HE LOVES YOU