



INTRODUCTION

Stephen Jory has been called Britain's Greatest Counterfeiter. His infamous life of crime began in his early twenties when he bribed a perfumer in order to obtain the recipes for some of the best-selling perfumes. After mass producing the fake fragrance, Jory would sell it in designer bottles as the real thing. Reportedly he sold nearly \$500 million worth of phony perfume before being arrested. However his prison experience didn't reform or deter Jory's criminal lifestyle. After being released he began a counterfeit currency operation. He and his gang perfected the forgery of the British sterling pound in 20 pound denominations. Before Jory was captured in a police sting called Operation Mermaid (1998), his counterfeit currency had flooded the British markets. It is reported that his bogus currency made up two thirds of the total counterfeit bills in circulation between 1993 and 1998. So effective was his work that the Bank of England was forced to change the entire design of the 20 pound note and add more security to deter others from following in Jory's footsteps.

Counterfeits, forgeries, imitations, and knock-offs abound in every market and in all walks of life. Sadly, this also includes the church. Some who have professed faith in Christ are eventually discovered to be phonies and frauds. The Apostle John would lament, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (1 Jn. 2:19). Our hearts long for authenticity and genuineness. We might be able to identify counterfeit bills, forged documents, imitation watches, and knock-off purses through careful examination, but how do we discern between genuine and counterfeit faith? The book of James gives us a series of tests to authenticate and identify Real Faith.

BACKGROUND

The author of the book is apparent through both its title as well as the first word – James. Most modern letters are signed by the author at the conclusion, but ancient writers introduced themselves immediately. The question is "which James"? There are several men bearing that name who appear in the pages of the NT. Luke 6:16 speaks of James the father of Judas (not Iscariot), but little else is known of him. There is James the son of Zebedee and brother to John (Mt. 4:21). These two were known as the "sons of thunder". It is believed that this James was one of the first disciples to be martyred. We encounter James the son of Alphaeus (also known as James the less) in Matthew's gospel (Mt. 10:3; 27:56). But the logical and historical identification of the book's author is James, the half-brother of Jesus (Mt. 13:55; Gal. 1:18-19). This man, whom Paul would title a "pillar" of the church (Gal. 2:9), grew up in the same home, ate at the same table, and learned the same carpentry trade as Jesus; however, it is widely held that he did not believe that Jesus was Messiah during His earthly ministry (Jn. 7:5). It seems that James became a believer and follower of Christ only after His resurrection appearance (1 Cor. 15:7). From that time on we find James actively involved in the leadership of the early church (Acts 1:13; 12:17). So much so that by Acts 15 he is the spokesman that presents a wise and peaceful resolution to the Jerusalem Council. James has been given a couple of nicknames that speak well of his character in the matters of prayer and piety. From his many hours of kneeling in prayer James was identified as old "camel knees". He is also spoken of as "James the Just" (or righteous) which highlighted his desire, as a Jew, to adhere to the Mosaic Law. James was also a man of great wisdom, faith, and humility. He calls himself the "servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (v.1). He does not boast of his familial relationship to Christ, but rather demonstrates his submissive relationship as a bond-slave of the Savior. In using the titles "Lord Jesus Christ", James points to our Savior's deity and sovereignty ("Lord" – meaning master, sovereign), His earthly name and purpose ("Jesus" – meaning salvation), and His prophetic name ("Christ" – meaning anointed-one, Messiah). Under inspiration of the Spirit of God he writes on the subject of Real Faith.

James has a target audience in mind as he writes, "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (v.1). The "twelve tribes" is another way of referring to Israel as a whole. Many of these Jews were living outside of Palestine because of the Diaspora (dispersion) due to persecution. They

WHEN? THE REALITY OF TRIALS (1:2)

had been scattered abroad like seed blown by the wind at the time of sowing. The book of James is a General Epistle which means two things: (1) it was not written by Paul, and (2) it was not written to a specific church or group but is broader in address. The audience is quickly narrowed with the first two words of verse 2, “my brethren”. These are fellow believers in Christ. Simply put, James is writing to Jewish believers who have been dispersed throughout the Roman Empire due to persecution for their faith (Acts 8). In the face of intense opposition these believer’s would have been tempted to compromise their values and beliefs in order to escape persecution or improve their economic situation.

It is with this knowledge that James writes with focused aims, purposes, and themes to these displaced, discouraged Christian Jews. He wants to clearly show that Real Faith demonstrates itself through godly living. James will challenge his audience to move beyond mere words into actions. Real Faith may be stretch and tested, but it does not break, it perseveres. The purpose of the book is to encourage believers in the midst of great difficulty. James does this through exhortation, confrontation, and illustration. Of the 108 verses contained in this power-packed book there are 59 commands. Faith is a decisive theme being referenced some 14 times through the book. This is a practical letter written to meet the needs of ordinary people going through the ordinary problems of life. James has been categorized as Wisdom Literature and called the Proverbs of the NT. So this letter is not a doctrinal treatise like Romans, nor a defense of the gospel regarding Christ’s person and work like Galatians or Colossians. James seems to assume his audience knows those things. This is a practical handbook for Christians living in a hostile world. Swindoll comments, “These believers knew Jesus was the Way of Life but they needed a travel guide for walking in the Way of Life. So do we!”

So let’s open the travel guide and begin to discover the way marks that are a real help to real people in the midst of real problems as they seek to live out Real Faith. James wastes no words as he begins. In fact, this is one of the shortest introductions in all the NT epistles. In one short verse the author is identified, and the audience is conventionally greeted (*chairien* – literally, be glad, rejoice). Not only does James not waste words, but he also does not mince words. He addresses the “elephant in the room” head on. In the first twelve verses he answers three key questions. When, why, and how do believers face difficulties? He wants us to understand that **real faith endures trials**.

James addresses “brethren”. These are fellow believers who had been dispersed because of persecution and adversity. No doubt they were displaced, disillusioned, and perhaps depressed. Life’s painful trials have touched every generation of Christians throughout history. This will include you and me. While we relish the times of life that have an upbeat tempo, you don’t have to live long to recognize that the melody of life is often played in a minor key. We all face heartaches, hurts, sickness, disease, catastrophes, discouragements, suffering, and ultimately death. Trials of life eventually visit everyone, without exception.

1. Trials are a definite fact (1:2a).

Notice James uses the word “when” (not “if”) to speak of the inevitability, universality, and unavoidable nature of trials. Job, who certainly experienced great trials, reminds us, “Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7), and “Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble” (Job 14:1). Paul told the Corinthian believers, “There hath no temptation [trial] taken you but such as is common to man” (I Cor. 10:13). Difficulties in life are ordinary human experience. Like death, trials are unavoidable and inescapable. They descend upon Christian and non-Christian alike. Don’t buy into the false teaching that becoming a Christian makes you exempt from trials. God’s Word reveals countless individuals, who loved and served God, yet were allowed by God to face deep testing (IE - Abraham, Joseph, Job).

James further explains that trials visit the rich just as they visit the poor (vv.9-11). Those who trust in their financial security to shield them from hardship will ultimately wither, fall, fade away, and perish. Poverty is a tough test, but prosperity can be a tougher one because of the added temptation to be self-dependent rather than God-dependent (I Tim. 6:10). Better to be poor financially and rich in faith than to be financially well off and spiritually destitute. James encourages the poor to rejoice that in Christ you have gone from rags to riches. To the rich he writes, rejoice that you have learned dependence on Christ, not many wealthy do (Mt. 19:22-24). Trials have a way of “leveling the playing field”. They are designed to force us to depend on our spiritual resources rather than our material ones.

WHY? THE REASONS FOR TRIALS (1:3-4, 12)

Along the trail of life we will all “fall” into trials. This term “fall” (*periptpto*) speaks of undesirable events that assail us without warning. The same word is used in Jesus parable of the Good Samaritan of the man who “fell among thieves” (Lk. 10:30). He was suddenly and unavoidably surrounded as he “fell” victim to the thieves’ assault. The word is used to speak of the Paul’s ship that unexpectedly encountered a sandbar and was shipwrecked (Acts 27:41). The point remains, trials are sure to come as part of individual, human experiences.

2. Trials have different forms (1:2b).

James continues his thought on the reality of trials with the phrase “divers temptations”. The term “divers” literally means multi-faceted, or various. It is used to stress the great variety and diversity of trials. Like Joseph’s many colored coat or multi-colored stones, trials come in a variety pack. We all alike face trials, but not all our trials are alike. What God allows into my life may differ in form, timing, and severity from what God places in your life. No matter how frequent or frustrating, epic and life changing, whether small or big, major or minor, we do well to remember that God’s grace is sufficient for every trial, whatever its form (II Cor. 12:9).

Discussion: What are some of the various trials that believer’s might face? *physical, financial, familial, etc.*

Transition: Real Faith has learned the “when” of trials. They are a definite fact of everyone’s life but present themselves in different forms. To assume the Christian life will be trouble-free will lead to inevitable disappointment. We must understand the reality of trials. Life involves a mixture of difficulties and blessings. Trouble may not be here at this minute, but it is coming. Someone has said there are three types of Christians, those going into a trial, in the midst of a trial, or coming out of a trial. This truth is not meant to discourage us but rather prepare us for when we face the difficulties of life. To encourage our hearts, James is next going to help us see the reasons for trials. He removes the outer casing to show us the inner workings of trials.

It is only natural for our hearts and minds to ask “why” in the midst of trials. We may wonder if they are the result of our sin and wrongdoing. But Abraham, Job, and Joseph were not given trials because of sin, quite the opposite. These men are known as “the Father of faith”, “a perfect and upright man”, and a picture of the Savior in the OT. God allows each of us to experience trials not to cause frustration but fruitfulness. Not for our agitation but maturation. James uses the word “temptation” (*peirasmos*) in two different senses in chapter 1. In verses 1-12 it refers to a testing or proving of our faith that comes from God with a goal of our maturity. In verses 13-15 it refers to a solicitation to evil that comes from Satan with a goal of our misery. God wants us to stand, Satan wants us to stumble. God desires our best, Satan desires our worst. When we ask “why”, we must start with the givens that God always is and always does good (1:17). James reveals several reasons for trials.

1. Trials present proof of real faith (1:3a).

Someone has said, “a faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted”. This word “tested” (*dokimion*) is a positive term that refers to a means of authenticating something. Like a prospector biting into a gold nugget to test its quality. God allows our faith to be tried to prove its validity and value. Peter uses the same word when he writes “that the trying of your faith, being more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto the praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (I Pet. 1:7). Your trial is God’s means to prove that your faith is genuine. He has entrusted you with a test of authenticity and genuineness. Real faith stands the crucibles of life.

Illustration: When a potter bakes a pot, he checks its solidity by pulling it out of the oven and thumping it. If it “sings” it’s ready. If it “thuds”, it’s placed back in the oven. The character of a person is also checked by thumping. Been thumped lately? How do you respond? Do you sing? Or do you thud? The true character of a person is seen not in the momentary heroics, but in the thump-packed humdrum of day-to-day living.

2. Trials promote patience of real faith (1:3b).

The testing of our faith brings about “patience”. When James speaks of patience (*hupomonen*), he is dealing with a virtue that is being developed within the Christian. It is not a passive resignation to unpleasant situations, but rather a willingness to remain under the load. Patience is steadfastness, perseverance, and brave endurance. A tenacity of spirit which hold up under pressure while awaiting God’s time for dismissal of the test or His reward. We should not think of God as some mad scientist trying to torture his subjects to the breaking point. He is more like a personal trainer that expertly applies weight and pressure to tone, strengthen, and stretch our faith.

Illustration: A truck manufacturer knows the load capacity of the truck they have built. With an understanding of the design of the chassis and frame, the engine and transmission, they recommend a maximum gross vehicle weight rating (GVRW) or how much weight the truck can properly support and haul. God, who made us and knows our frame and remembers that we are but dust (Ps. 103:14), will never place upon us more than He knows we can remain under by His grace (I Cor. 10:13).

3. Trials propel perfection of real faith (1:4).

The Bible word “perfect” (*teleios*) is not sinlessness but maturity. God’s purpose in bringing trials into our lives is to grow us up into a spiritually mature believer. When endurance takes place it moves us into maturity which leads ultimately to a fully developed character. Trials should cause us to trust God more and thus bring about the bracing and discipline that is necessary for vigorous growth. A fully mature Christian looks like Christ, and Christ Himself was made perfect through suffering (Heb. 2:10). Often the times of greatest spiritual growth take place in the midst of great difficulty. This is God’s purpose. Trials are the “Miracle-Grow” in our spiritual process.

4. Trials provide praise of real faith (1:12).

James gives a final insight into God’s purpose for trials. When our faith is tested and found genuine, when we are strengthened and stretch through trials, and when we “grow up” in Christ there is a heavenly reward that awaits us. It is the “crown of life” given to those who endure temptation. The crown (*stephanos*) was a laurel wreath

that recognized achievement (military, athletic, political) in Bible times. However, this crown is promised to those who with a heart of love for Christ have remained faithful under the load of their God-given trial. What a joy to receive that crown and hear “well done”. What a greater thrill to place it back at Jesus feet as a tangle way to thank Him for His suffering on our behalf (Rev. 4:10).

Transition: Real faith understands the reality of trials. Real faith recognizes the reasons for trials. They are to prove our faith, strengthen our faith, mature our faith, and have our faith eternally rewarded. We have seen when and why trials enter the believer’s life. Finally, notice how we should respond to trials?

HOW? THE RESPONSES TO TRIALS (1:2-8)

How can Christians, standing neck-deep in trials, rise above their situation without dropping out, giving in, or falling short? James gives three practical commands as proper responses to life’s trials.

1. Real faith responds by counting with an attitude of joy (1:2).

We are not here referring to counting to 10 to “cool off”. The phrase “count it all joy” is the first imperative James presents. It is important to define our terms here. The word “count” (*hegeomai*) is an accountant’s term meaning to regard, think, or make a mental evaluation. The word also carries the idea to lead or to guide like a person at the front of a processional line leads those who follow. Purposefully (yet ironically), it stands emphatically at beginning of phrase intensifying it meaning. In other words, the attitude of joy is to lead our thinking in the midst of trials. This is dealing more with our thinking than feeling. There is a big difference between joy and enjoy. What is Bible joy? Epp has aptly defined it as “a deep seated confidence that God knows what He is doing and the results will be for His glory and our good.”

Trials can be joy-robbers if we do not have proper perspective. So “counting it all joy” means seeing life with God’s perspective in mind. Our joy is based on confidence in the outcome of the trial because we know the heart and intend of God is always for good. Someone has said, “Most people count it all joy when they escape trials. James said to count it all joy in the midst of trials.” What James is calling for is a

positive Christian attitude toward trials that he views as opportunities, under God's grace, for growth and development in the Christian life.

Illustration: At age 17, Joni Eareckson Tada dove into a shallow river and was seriously injured, becoming a quadriplegic. Some 40 years later she wrote, "My affliction has stretched my hope, made me know Christ better, helped my long for truth, led me to repentance of sin, goaded me to give thanks in times of sorrow, increased my faith and strengthened my character. Being in this wheelchair has meant knowing Him better, feeling His pleasure every day." She quotes Henry Frost, who said, "I feel it would have been nothing short of a calamity to have missed the physical suffering through which I have passed." By making the choice to rejoice, Joni has become a victor and not a victim.

2. Real faith responds by considering with an understanding mind (1:3).

The next command is "know[ing] this". James's word choice is again important. This is not just an intellectual knowledge, but rather an experiential knowledge (*ginosko*). It is a knowledge that allows one to evaluate their trial as an occasion for rejoicing. By knowing that God has a greater purpose in the testing, the believer is able to make the choice to rejoice. We must recall the truth of Scripture along with our own personal experience of God's sustaining power in past trials. The believer knows God's purpose in testing is to bring about spiritual endurance and maturity, so he must choose to trust and obey God during the trial. Weirsbe states, "God always tests us to bring out our best; Satan tempts us to bring out our worst. God fulfills His purposes as we trust Him. There is no substitute for an understanding mind."

3. Real faith responds by cooperating with a surrendered will (1:4).

There is a third imperative given by James. He says "but let patience have her perfect work". This phrase points to a cooperation with the work of God in our life through trials. He desires to develop Christ-like character and maturity in us, but if we resist His work we will short circuit the process. James reminds readers that it is their continual duty to enable perseverance or endurance to finish its work to achieve its intended goal. Don't interrupt the chain of events, but allow the trial to achieve its divinely intended impact on us. Surrender your will to God's will, He is working through the trial to further conform you into the image Christ.

Illustration: God has designed the caterpillar to be changed into a beautiful butterfly through metamorphosis. During a 10 to 14 day period inside the chrysalis a complete transformation occurs. If a well-meaning person tries to "help" the process along by prematurely opening the cocoon, it will destroy the butterfly to be. Metamorphosis requires struggle in order effect changed. So it is with our spiritual growth. We must remain surrendered even through the struggle until our transformation is finished, and we are found complete, lacking nothing.

4. Real faith responds by calling with a believing heart (1:5).

There is one specific area that James identifies that we are lacking in, that is wisdom. Many rely on their own knowledge and understanding to navigate life's tumultuous waters, but you don't pass this test with knowledge alone, you need wisdom. For wisdom is more than the knowledge (accumulation of facts). True wisdom involves moral discernment. It is seeing life from God's point of view. Wisdom is practical insights into the ways of God. Knowledge is learned, wisdom is given. Knowledge is gained through memorization, wisdom is granted through meditation. Knowledge is acquired through looking around, wisdom is appropriated by looking up. God alone is the source of all wisdom. The first step in gaining wisdom is a conscious need of it. When we recognize our human inability to handle a trial, we have but one option – pray. Asking God for wisdom in the midst of trials should not be our last resort, it should be our first response. In the midst of trials, don't wring your hands, bend your knees.

In fact, the phrase "let him ask" is another imperative. While we are graciously invited to ask, we are also directly commanded to pray. This word "ask" refers to requesting that something be given rather than that something would be done. While our first inclination is to ask God to "do something" (remove the trial), the proper prayer is to ask to be "given something". Ask for wisdom.

James 1:5 is one of the most beautiful and encouraging promises in the Bible. We must understand that prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, it is laying hold of God's willingness. We are not twisting His arm to do something He doesn't want to do; He invites us, He wants us to ask. God is saying, "ask Me for wisdom and I will not

scold you for asking (“upbraideth not”) but will generously give you the discernment needed not to waste your trial”. This is not automatic. You must ask for it.

In verse 6, James gives the guidelines for how to ask. There is one condition for receiving this gift of wisdom, “but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.” We must ask in faith. He is not referring here to saving faith, but sustaining faith. Praying in faith is praying and claiming God’s promises. It is an absolute confidence in God’s promises despite apparent contradictory circumstances. The opposite of faith is doubt. James likens the doubter to a “wave of the sea driven by the wind and tossed”. Waves are constantly up and down. Tides consistently go in and out. Many Christians ride the waves of life. When things are calm they float along fine, but when the storms approach they are swallowed up. James says that kind of person will not “receive any thing of the Lord” (v.7). Someone has well said, “Pray believing, and you’ll receive. Pray in doubt, and you’ll do without.”

Verse 8 further describes the doubter as a “double-minded man” (literally “two-souled”). This person has split affections for God and the world. He wants his own will and at the same time God’s will. Bunyan called him “Mr. Facing-both ways”. He is trying to hold onto the world with one hand and God with the other. This brings great instability to his life and ineffectiveness in his prayers.

Illustration: During the Civil War, a soldier stationed near the Mason Dixon line couldn’t decide whether to fight for the Confederacy or the Union. So he wore grey pants and a blue coat. During battle, he got shot in the pants and the back. You can’t have it both ways!

CONCLUSION

Trials are a reality of life. As a believer, we may not know what tomorrow holds, but we know the One who holds tomorrow. In the midst of trials, always remember that God is good and desires your best for His glory. He has allowed your faith to be tested to demonstrate its genuineness. Through the trial he is working into your life spiritual endurance and maturity. God has promised to give wisdom during trials when we ask in unwavering faith. May God help us to respond with a joyful attitude, an understanding mind, a surrendered will, and a believing heart as we anticipate the “crown of life” promised to those that love Him. Real faith endures trials.