

The Nuts and Bolts of Christian Living, James Series

Sunday April 27, 2025

Sierra Vista Community Church Las Cruces

Character by Fire, James 1:1-18

Introduction—We begin a new Biblical series through the book of James today. This will be 10 weeks, taking us to June 29, 2025. This book is a pivotal, foundational, and solid in its Christian living principles. That is why I have titled the series the Nuts and Bolts of Christian Living. If you are new to the faith or searching for truth, I pray you will do your very best to be here throughout this series. God wants us to be solid in our beliefs and moldable as we allow His teachable moments to come to life. Life is difficult enough without an instruction guide, but with our Biblical instructions, life can really be pure joy as James reminds us today.

This will also bring back some basic Christian life applications to those of you who have been Christ followers for some time now. Repeat, refresh, and resume are all ways to realign us with the Kingdom mission to make Jesus our King.

Background—James was Jesus' brother. He was not too big on the idea that His brother is the long-awaited Messiah. It wasn't until the resurrection that James became a true believer. Jesus made sure he appeared to James to show him that He was truly the Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:7) James became the overseer of the Jerusalem church. He was known for his callused knees as he spent hours in prayer. He wrote this epistle 30 years after Jesus' death. You will sense his passion all throughout this amazing book in the Bible.

Sometimes it takes a real awakening for us to believe in the true Christ who has come to give us life. As we go through James, open your heart and your mind to hearing, obeying, and becoming more Jesus-like in your own life.

Stand & Read—James 1:1-18

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations:

Greetings.

Trials and Temptations

² Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. ⁶ But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. ⁸ Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

⁹ Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. ¹⁰ But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. ¹¹ For the

sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.

¹² Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

¹³ When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, 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 the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. ¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

Pray

1. **Character development begins with testing, verses 2-4**

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

- a. When we are tested in life, we must change our mindset from “this is going to be bad for me” to “this will develop my character.” The mind God has given us is underused. So many times, we may not realize the gift He has given us in the power of our minds. It takes a disconnect of the current wiring schematics in your brain to a new connection of wires in your brain. This is done over a process of time.
- b. So now when we read **verse 2**, and it says for to consider it pure joy whenever we face trials and temptations, we truly can.
- c. “This trial is going to develop my character.”
- d. *Without these trials, our faith goes untested. Untested faith becomes a weak faith.***
- e. James can say this to us today because his faith was tested as well. He knew what it was to go through a time of unbelief. And that is really our dilemma today.
- f. A trial comes our way, and we want to blame this person or that situation. Our faith crisis is really our unbelief that God could be allowing this opportunity for character development.
- g. **Verse 3**—James explains in detail the purpose in the testing of our faith. It produces, it gives way to, it changes us, and it gives us the assurance of perseverance.
- h. Perseverance is a term that means the ability to do something, in this case, go through a trial or temptation, in spite of the degree of difficulty, the opposition, or even failure.
- i. Failing does not mean God has given up on you. Don’t be afraid to fail. When you fail, you are developing your character since failure should drive us to succeed in the long run.
- j. **Ephesians 1:13-14**—And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were

marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

- k. In the perseverance of the saints, you are guaranteed to succeed.
- l. Paul said it best in **Philippians 1:6**—being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.
- m. **Verse 4**, When you have persevered, then you are a mature Christian.
- n. We talk about mature Christians, and this is what it means to be one. You have been tested, and you have developed your Character. You can't skip over that part.
- o. Studying and reading the Word of God are mandatory for instructions, but until those are put to the test, we can't be a mature believer.
- p. Once we mature in our faith, completeness follows as well, it says in our text in **verse 4**.
- q. When we are complete, we don't have a need for anything James says. We have our Bible, we have our church family, and we are ready for battle. We are ready for the test.

Illustration— "In 1972, NASA launched the exploratory space probe Pioneer 10. According to Leon Jaroff in *Time*, the satellite's primary mission was to reach Jupiter, photograph the planet and its moons, and beam data to earth about Jupiter's magnetic field, radiation belts, and atmosphere. Scientists regarded this as a bold plan, for at that time no earth satellite had ever gone beyond Mars, and they feared the asteroid belt would destroy the satellite before it could reach its target.

"But Pioneer 10 accomplished its mission and much, much more. Swinging past the giant planet in November 1973, Jupiter's immense gravity hurled Pioneer 10 at a higher rate of speed toward the edge of the solar system. At one billion miles from the sun, Pioneer 10 passed Saturn. At some two billion miles, it hurtled past Uranus; Neptune at nearly three billion miles; Pluto at almost four billion miles. By 1997, twenty-five years after its launch, Pioneer 10 was more than six billion miles from the sun.

"And despite that immense distance, Pioneer 10 continued to beam back radio signals to scientists on Earth. 'Perhaps most remarkable,' writes Jaroff, 'those signals emanate from an 8-watt transmitter, which radiates about as much power as a bedroom night light, and takes more than nine hours to reach Earth.'

"The Little Satellite That Could was not qualified to do what it did. Engineers designed Pioneer 10 with a useful life of just three years. But it kept going and going. By simple longevity, its tiny 8-watt transmitter radio accomplished more than anyone thought possible.

"So, it is when we offer ourselves to serve the Lord. God can work even through someone with 8-watt abilities. God cannot work, however, through someone who quits."

Application—Are you being tested? Have you studied for the test? If you haven't been tested, it is coming! Be ready!

2. Character development takes time to process, verses 5-8

⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. ⁶ But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. ⁸ Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

⁹ Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position.¹⁰ But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. ¹¹ For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.

- a. Have you ever asked God for wisdom? I mean really asked Him? What happened? Did He do it? If He didn't, why not?
- b. When you ask God for something ask bold as wisdom, you are asking Him to deliver on this promise. When God doesn't deliver, it isn't because He doesn't want to, it is because you don't truly believe He can.
- c. **Verse 5**—James says ask God for wisdom and He will give it to us because of His generosity. He will even look past all of our faults it says. That my friends is a promise that I can get into.
- d. God, you will give me your wisdom and you will not count my issues against me.
- e. **Verse 6**—this is what many don't really read into. James says when we ask, we cannot doubt that God won't answer.
- f. We have to believe that He will do it. Without our faith in God that He can do all things, we get off track on His agenda for our character development.
- g. James says we become like the sea tossed around from the wind. We are indecisive.
- h. There lies the biggest problem for people of faith. We can believe that the God of the universe can save us from our sins, yet when it comes to giving us wisdom, we doubt He can, or we don't believe He can.
- i. What has happened is that we have developed a mindset of disbelief. We have connected wires in our brain over time that need rerouting into a different connection of belief.

Illustration—*Your Brain on Porn from Covenant Eyes*

The process of sensitization and desensitization impacts the prefrontal cortex in the brain. As dopamine receptors degenerate in the brain, changes take place in the prefrontal lobes. This region of the brain is responsible for our willpower, regulating our behavior, and making decisions based on wisdom and morals.

Normally, when emotions, impulses, and urges surge from the midbrain, the prefrontal lobes are there to exercise “executive control” over them. But when this region is weakened by

continual porn use, willpower is eroded and there is nothing to stop the sense of craving for pornography. As a result, the person experiences the urge, not just as a desire, but as an intense *need*. Neuroscientists call this problem *hypofrontality*. This person is no longer has mastery over his passions but is a slave to them.

- j. We must retrain our brains for believing God can do what He says He can do.
- k. If we don't, James says in **Verse 7**, we should not expect God to do anything for us in the area of wisdom.
- l. **Verse 8**, says we are double-minded or in other words, our brains aren't right with God.

Application—Have you allowed your character development to process over a period of time? Don't rush God in this area. Take your time and let the process work.

3. Character development depends on the Lord, verses 12-18

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. ¹³ When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, 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 the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. ¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

- a. Character by fire is the way God works in Christians. He cannot work through those unwilling to be molded, chiseled, or purified in difficult circumstances.
- b. Everywhere we read in Scripture, people have been put to the test, processed, and then depended on God for the results.
- c. **Verse 12**—James tells us that we are to persevere under trial, or in the ESV it says to be steadfast. We can do this only under the strength and admonition of the Holy Spirit. When we do we receive the crown of life.
- d. **Verse 13-14**—Temptation is not of God, so never say that. Satan is the tempter of all. He does not want you to trust in God, so he tells you to do it on your own.
- e. **Verse 15**—Is clear where sin will take you. Death. Not a physical death, but a spiritual death.
- f. Sin will take you farther than you wanted to go, it will make you stay longer than you wanted to stay, and it will cost you more than you could ever want to pay.
- g. **Verse 16-17**—We are not to be deceived. God sends the best gifts, not temptation.
- h. God does not change and He is always the One whom we can depend on.
- i. It is such a comfort to know that. He is always available and can be counted on to develop our character.
- j. Verse 18—James gives us this theological system in 1 verse that is so profound.

- k. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.
- l. God chose us as to be born again. He loves you so much that you are His desire. His Word proves it over and over again.
- m. James amazes me when he says that the early church were the firstfruits, meaning that you and I a direct impact of these Christians that went through so many trials and tribulations just knowing that we too could be born again!

Illustration—Our character development is dependent on the Lord. What does that mean and what does that look like. Good questions. Dependency on the Lord looks like this:

- **Pray.** Prayer is, among other things, an acknowledgment of God’s power, promises, and provision. When you pray, you show our dependence on God. The biblical command is to “present your requests to God” (Philippians 4:6).
- **Honor the Bible.** The Word of God has information, instructions, examples, and promises for New Testament believers. Read from the Bible every day. Check everything against the truth of the Word (Acts 17:11). And when there is a conflict between what the Bible says and what *anyone* else says, go with the Bible. “I will listen to what God the LORD says” (Psalm 85:8).
- **Do right.** At all times, in all situations, do what you know is right, and leave the results with God. Jocebed did right by saving her baby, Moses (Exodus 2:1–10). Daniel did right by defying the king and praying to the Lord (Daniel 6). David did right by standing up to Goliath (1 Samuel 17). In each case, their dependence on God alone was rewarded.
- **Be a living sacrifice.** **Romans 12:1** says to offer up your body as a “living sacrifice” to God. Acceptable sacrifices are purified from sin and dedicated to God. When you become a living sacrifice, you live for the Lord. You cease fighting for your own rights and give up trusting in your own strength. As you learn to become a living sacrifice for God, you will discover the truth that, “when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10).
- **Abide In Christ.** The Christian life is not a now-and-then rendezvous with God. It is making God your dwelling place, living with Him. Jesus put it this way: “Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me” (John 15:4). Depend on Christ as a fruit-laden branch depends on the grapevine. The branch attached to the vine is fulfilling its purpose.
- **Refuse to worry.** God cares for His children, even more than the grass that He clothes with flowers and the birds that He daily feeds. Yes, you have needs, but “your heavenly Father knows” (Matthew 6:32). Learn to “cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). Keeping some of the anxiety on yourself is to doubt God’s care.

Application—Are you depending on God for your Character Development? Or are you trying and trying and trying within your own strength.

Pray and Invitation—Song, Build My Life by Cory Asbury (Can also be in the worship set)