



# HG18: James 1/6 'Trials and Temptations'

James 1:1-18

## Home Group Sermon Notes

13th September 2009 - Pauline Woolnough

**Frederick Nietzsche said "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger."** More or less what James is saying here in the opening paragraphs of his letter to the early scattered and persecuted church. It's one of the earliest letters, written probably before AD50. Through his letter James will encourage us but also challenge us. He will confront us about the reality of our faith, is it all talk or is it backed up with actions. Do our lifestyles contradict our claims that we are Christians and followers of Jesus Christ? James's central theme is that genuine faith will produce good deeds, so be prepared to be challenged and be prepared to be excited and above all pray that God may accelerate the work of His Holy Spirit in us individually and as a church and move us on to a deeper level of spirituality. Let's pray that The Holy Spirit will bring his words to life in our hearts and use them in his work of transforming us into the likeness of His Son leading us to a deeper commitment to Christ and his mission. In this first of our home group studies on James he will speak to us of trials, testing and persevering, he will warn us against a lukewarm faith that doubts God's goodness and his desire to answer us and he will advise us on the dangers of temptations and how to deal with it.

**"James a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ."** James 1.1. Although James is thought to be half brother of Jesus, Bishop of Jerusalem and high up in the leadership team of the early church in his letter he chooses to introduce himself as a servant, implying complete obedience, absolute humility and total loyalty and indicating that his peace and freedom comes from submitting completely to the will of God. Following the martyrdom of Stephen, persecuted Christians were scattered throughout the Roman world. These early believers did not have the support of established Christian leaders so James wrote to them to encourage them in times of persecution.

**Trials: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance."** James 1:2-3. At first sight we may say "some encouragement".... "where's the comfort?" It seems that right at the beginning of the letter, James starts out by trying to "sell" troubles, trials and testing's to the early Christian and therefore to us. Many of the people may already have faced difficulties with the expectation of more of the same to follow. Surely the letter can only get better. He warns that there will be all kinds of trials, trouble will come their way, so of course, it'll come *our way*. There is no suggestion here or anywhere that the Christian life will be easy. There will be sorrows and disappointments which will sorely test our faith, temptations that will seek to lure us away, hurts that will cause us to take offence and move away from others and from God, there will be sacrifices we will need to make, there may be ridicule or unpopularity to face because we are Christians, some of these seem small compared to the suffering of Christian brothers and sisters in other parts of the world in the persecuted church. It's not about if troubles come it is when trouble come. Why are we therefore always so surprised and disappointed when trouble does strike. We can't say we haven't been warned.

James insists though, that these troubles should make us stronger. They should strengthen and purify us, not wound or weaken us. They are not meant to make us fall or turn away from God, instead they should make us stronger and help us grow in faith and because of all this, we should be glad, we should welcome them, or at least try and bravely accept them. The problem is that what we really want is wellbeing, good health and financial security at all times so we find these difficult times hard and the tendency is to rebel against them. James wants us to see these times as a path leading to spiritual maturity. In the middle of every difficulty there is an opportunity for God to work in us and change us to be more like Jesus. Unlike exams we may not know the time and day when tests and trials will come our way, but we *can* prepare ourselves now by being disciplined, by resting in Christ daily, reading his word, and looking for opportunities to put our faith into action by sharing our lives and our possessions with those in need.

Winston Churchill said, **"If you are going through hell, keep going."** (easy for him to say!!!) No doubt many of us have been tested, tried, and tempted this year, at times we may have thought that we were beyond our limit, out of our depth yet God commands us to trust Him, which is not always easy when we are in the thick of a crisis and so here James gives us a way through, he tells us to ask for wisdom.

**"If any of you lacks wisdom he should ask God who gives generously ..."** James 1:5. If we are to use these experiences to develop our character then we must ask God for the wisdom to understand them and when we ask him we must ask without doubting God's goodness and willingness to give. Faith requires that we believe that we will receive what God knows is good for us to have. This wisdom allows us to see God's world and our lives and His plans for them from His perspective. You have probably discovered by now that we learn more through the sad and difficult times of our lives than we ever will learn through the good and easy times. What is after all God's aim for you? Is it that you live a long happy trouble free life, well yes and no. I'm not saying that God doesn't want you to have all this but His first priority and main purpose for you is that He wants to change you into the likeness of Jesus. God wants you to look like Jesus, maybe not from the outside but from the inside, he wants you to have the mind and character of Jesus and how will he do that, unfortunately, sometimes the hard way, he will make you experience some of the things that Jesus experienced, pain, loneliness, rejection, loss.

We will all lose loved ones and we will all experience adversity, God doesn't want us to avoid it instead he wants us to deal with it by asking Him to help us through it, he would like us to welcome adversity because adversity is His best way of changing us. So because James knows that this is part of God's plan for us he tells us to persevere, to hang in, we must not lose heart and think it is a sign that God no longer loves us, or that he is punishing us but if we can rest in faith, hold on to our hope, God will mould our souls according to his perfect will. Problems force us to look to God for our help, we depend more on Him when we have no where else to go, its all too easy to just pay lip service when times are good. Rick Warren says in the Purpose driven life, **"You'll never know that God is all you need until God is all you've got"**

**Perseverance:** **"Blessed are those who persevere under trial, because when they have stood the test, they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. ...James 1 12. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created."** (James 1:13-18). James tells us to persevere, never to give in, character building takes time, its a slow process and you know that you are changing and maturing and the trials are doing their work in you, when you start to see God's hand in the random difficult times of life . There is no point asking "why me," ask "what can I learn" and then trust God. H Jackson Brown said, **"In the confrontation between the stream and the rock, the stream always wins, though not through strength but by perseverance."** Every test, every temptation can be an opportunity for us to mature spiritually and just as the athlete receives a medal at the end of the race so the crown of life is waiting for those who persevere. Eternal life is waiting for us, living with God forever.

**"The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in is high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position because he will pass away like a wild flower."** James 1:9-10. James tells us to be glad and content whether we are rich or poor. Christianity is a great leveller, the social and class distinctions don't or shouldn't exist in the church, they certainly do not exist in God's eyes. The poor man learns that he matters to God and he matters in the world, everyone has a purpose, everyone has a God given job to do, no one is more important than another. The rich man however learns that his riches cannot protect him from life's random trials. The problem with being rich is that riches can bring with them a false sense of security, but money cant buy good health, it cant protect us from losing a loved one, from accidents or natural disasters, and we all know because the Beatles told us **"Money cant buy you love"** and Joann Davis said **"The best things in life are not things."** What James is saying here is that life is so precarious and uncertain and disaster can strike at any moment so only a fool would place his trust in money and things that can be lost at any moment and urges us to put our trust in God as its it only God who can give things that will last forever.

**Temptation:** **"When tempted no one should say "God is tempting me." Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. 15 These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death."** James 1: 13-15. We will all be tempted and because we are human we all struggle with the same sort of issues. We do not HAVE to sin, because we have the power with Christ within us to resist sin, but unfortunately we would be kidding ourselves if we didn't admit that sometimes, if not often, we do sin. James doesn't mince his words he places the blame right where it ought to be, on us. WE are responsible. WE fall short. It is OUR evil desire that leads us to sin. We think that temptation comes from outside but God says that it lies within us. Mark 7 21-23 **"For from within out of men's hearts come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these things come form inside and make a man unclean."** If we didn't have the desire then we couldn't be tempted. Satan will exploit every weakness we reveal. But this is not his fault or God's fault, it is ours. Temptation itself is not a sin, its only becomes a sin if we give in to the temptation. The moment we make our commitment to Christ, Satan predictably zooms in on us, we appear on his hit list and become a target and the closer we walk with God, the more we grow in faith and maturity, the more he will use the desires in us to tempt us and make us fall. We can either ask God for help or we can blame God for the difficult situation we are in, and turn away and refuse to consult Him, but if we do we will separate ourselves from Him and He wont be able to help us and ultimately we will fall into sin. Recognise that is Ok to be tempted, its inevitable and identify what it is that makes you vulnerable, know and admit to yourself just what your weaknesses are because its guaranteed that Satan knows them, then try to avoid the situations that lead you to sin. Peter says **"Stay alert. The devil is poised to pounce and would like nothing better than to catch you napping."** 1 Peter 5.8 Msg Ask God for help. He is always available.

**"Every good and perfect gift is from above coming down from the father of heavenly lights..."** James 1:16-18. James ends this first section by reminding us that God is Good and there is nothing that comes from God that is not good. No matter where we find ourselves and whatever situation that comes our way, God is a Good God who can only give good things to those who love him, he is unchanging, always the same loving Father, he doesn't choose to give good things one day and bad the next, he is the creator of the heavenly lights the sun the stars and moon, these may change and cast shadows, but he never does. And the purpose of this good God is that all should be reborn into a new life and into his family. So James's first challenge to us through this first study is simple. Let God change you through all the trials, hurts and temptations that life throws at you. Let him change your life and mould your character, let the troubles produce in you joy and perseverance. Let your darkest times produce in you your most heartfelt and intimate worship. Let Him be the one that you turn to immediately, when your heart is broken, when you lose a loved one, when you discover you are sick, when you have lost your way and feel you have no purpose left in life, when you feel abandoned. Turn to God and ask Him for His help and when you feel strong enough ask Him what it is he can teach you through it.

What God is wanting to do with us as individuals and as a congregation is to make us a people that look like Jesus, that develop the character of Jesus and grow into his likeness. We can read his word but that doesn't always do it the only guaranteed way to for us to change and grow to be like Jesus is if we have trials and temptations that shape us and turn us swiftly to him for help. The fruit of the spirit give us a beautiful description of what Jesus character is like , "love joy peace patience goodness faithfulness gentleness self control." God produces patience in us by allowing the trials that need patience, He teaches us joy when we turn to him in the midst of sorrow and we learn self control when temptation provides us the opportunity to exert it. God wants us to look at adversity not as the world views it but to see it from his perspective, a gift to help us mature spiritually. What he really wants you to do with the use of James letter is ... He wants you to grow.



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## Home Group Discussion Notes

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COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION **BEFORE** THE MEETING!

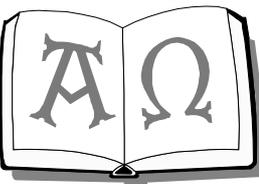
*Don't forget to take your Bible to House Group along with any previous/other notes that might be helpful.*

### Welcome/Icebreaker (10 mins)



### Looking Upwards - *Worship* (10 mins)

Songs of Worship; Prayers; Bible Readings; Meditations etc.



### Looking Upwards - *Bible Study* (40 mins)

Read through the above Bible reading (and any readings below and the references in the sermon notes) and answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss your answers in your Home Group.

- 1) God's aim is to make us more like Christ. In what ways have you changed since becoming a Christian and what do you think others would have noticed?
- 2) If able, share how God has used pain or trouble to help change you and make you grow.
- 3) What do you think of a good God's use of adversity to help us mature, is there a purpose behind every problem we face?
- 4) Are there areas in your spiritual growth that you are having to be patient and persevere with because there seems to be little progress? (*Confucius said: "It does not matter how slow you go as long as you do not stop."*)
- 5) What are you doing to help God bring about the changes, what preparations are you making?

6) Are there areas of your life that are less willing to change?

7) What strategy do you have in place to help you with temptation? Do you know when you are most vulnerable?

8) Faith in the persecuted church seems to flourish and grow, are there things we can do as a church to see the same spiritual growth when life is comfortable and without the fear of danger.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



### Looking Inwards - *Caring for each other* (15 mins)

Is there anything you would like to share with the group:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for help from the group?

*(Reflect with the Lord on your life at the moment and think if there is anything you would like to share and which you feel is appropriate. This is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however - 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!')*



### Looking Outwards - *Concern for others* (15 mins)

Is there anything concerning someone in: church; family; friends; or neighbours which you would like to share:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for possible action by the group?

*(Please be careful not to pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared).*

