
FAITH IN ACTION

Part 1 - Faith and Faithfulness

As we enter the New Year, it's natural to have some type of hope and aspiration for 2022 – I just wonder how many of these imaginings are shaped by the priority of being a disciple of Jesus first and foremost.

The main game for all of us as followers of Jesus, is learning to live in a constant state of connection to the Spirit. We must invite Him into every moment and learn to always be with Jesus in everything we do. How do we accomplish that in the chaos of life and the uncertainty of the world we live in? To experience the life of Jesus, to follow the way, we must adopt a lifestyle that reflects the life of Jesus. Practical down to earth ways of following Jesus – putting your faith into action!

James - “Faith in Action”

James wrote his letter to those under persecution and those engaging a complex and contrary culture to teach them how to deal with the stress and pressure of difficult trials. He was writing to Jewish Christians who had been forced to flee Jerusalem and are now scattered all throughout the Roman world (Acts 8:1-3).

James writes like a pastor to the church and is extremely practical. His God given wisdom is timeless and speaks as much to us today as it did to believers in the first century, helping us navigate the pressure and stresses we face in putting our Faith in Action today.

Introducing James

There are several James's mentioned in the New Testament, but this is the half-brother of Jesus (Matthew 13:55), now a church leader in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13).

James writes to the first century Jewish Christians (about 50AD) residing in Gentile communities outside Palestine, and to all Christians everywhere. James is very much concerned for persecuted Christians who were once part of the Jerusalem church.

James Summarised

The main teachings of the letter (12 in fact) are contained in chapters 2-5. These are kind of stand-alone topics linked by key words and a constant reference to Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. Both this letter and Jesus' famous sermon are a description of what it's like to live out your faith as a citizen of the Kingdom of God.

Through 'proverb' like wisdom statements, James' teachings are to do with practical things like what does love look like in our conduct and speech. How should we treat one another in the community of believers, rich and poor, patience and endurance, faith and deeds.

Faith comes up again and again in this letter describing what faith looks like, not necessarily when you work harder, but when you understand more clearly where you stand in Jesus.

In this first chapter, James outlines some of the book's main teachings and introduces all the key words and themes that are contained in the rest of the book.

Life Isn't Easy

James brings some godly wisdom to understand that although life isn't easy, it is in the midst of these difficulties and trials that we grow in character and our faith produces endurance, leading us to maturity in our faith.

Because we live in a world where trials are going to come, now is the time to evaluate them. You might not get the answer to the question, "Why

has this happened?" But you might be able to ask yourself, "How am I now going to respond? How might God be using this?" And when we think about the fact that God is good and great, it is possible to evaluate what's happening to us.

Stress has become the buzzword of our society. In some ways it has even become the scapegoat, the excuse of a generation. James also knows stress can produce maturity when we handle it with Godly wisdom.

- + **Stress is Predictable** - James' point is obvious, stress is predictable.
- + **Stress is Problematic** - Stress not only happens, it also hurts. James knew that trials were not all alike and although these stressful trials are problematic, there is hope.
- + **Joyful in Stress** - Consider it pure "joy" when we face these trials of many kinds. James was implying that the trial was not joy in itself but what came afterwards was. (Hebrews 12:2)
- + **Stress is Purposeful** - Faith is tested through trials, not produced by trials. Trials don't produce faith, but when trials are received with faith, it produces perseverance.

Hang On

Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything (James 1:4)

The word "mature" sometimes translated as perfect (teleios), refers to wholeness, living a completely integrated life where your actions are always consistent with the values and beliefs that you have in Jesus. It has a sense of carrying work to its end, to become full-grown.

For James, faith wasn't a mental accent to a belief. Faith was acting according to your belief. Our faith has effects on us and how we live in the real world.

You're Not Alone

God is not asking us to just try a little harder in and of our own strength. God gives a supernatural ability to discern how to live consistently with the values and beliefs that we have in Jesus.

Knowledge is the accumulation of facts. Wisdom is the ability to deal with facts and use them in practical ways.

God gives this wisdom generously to all without finding fault. He's not looking with the record of past performance in hand weighing up what you did last time and if you applied your knowledge correctly – No, He's generously and freely giving wisdom.

The qualifier is that we must ask believing that He will give it. To ask God in a doubting way, shows that we are double-minded. If we had no faith, we would never ask at all. If we had no unbelief, we would have no doubt. To be in the middle ground between faith and unbelief is to be double-minded.

Reflection

As we start this year 2022 – another year of uncertainty, in so many ways, you can actually be certain of more trials, tribulations and temptations. They are a part of life. But if you lean into God, prayerfully pursue Him, and consider the outcome, think about what it will be like on the other side and allow that to bring you joy, you will endure and in fact find God faithful through it all. God promises to supply all that is needed to face all the stress and difficulties successfully. Prayer and practice are essential. We must walk the walk, not just talk the talk (James 1:22).

Faith in Action is evidenced in living a life where our beliefs and values in Jesus are lived out consistently in our lives.