

# Message Reflections

a little something extra to keep you connected to Jesus this week

*Message Reflections accompany the [weekly message](#).*

I preferred Paul. For years, I'll admit, James was my least favorite book of the new testament. His tone is authoritative and commanding. He seems to be pointing the finger at the Christians who weren't doing "it" right, even calling their faith worthless. His approach seemed tactless and aggressive. Who is this guy, anyway? Who died and put him in charge (yes, I know)? Who is he talking to exactly?

This is when my bible reading actually became bible study. I looked into this James character. Here are some of the things I learned:

- 1) He was one of the half brothers of Jesus, the oldest of them.
- 2) He didn't believe Jesus was the Messiah until his resurrection.
- 3) Jesus appeared to him before he ascended into heaven.
- 4) He was the leader of the new Christian church in Jerusalem.
- 5) He never left Jerusalem.
- 6) He had a reputation for being so righteous that people called him "James the Just" and joked that his knees were callused like those of a camel from the hours he spent kneeling in prayer.
- 7) He wrote the letter (the book of James) around 50 A.D, when the early church was being persecuted. He knew his life was in danger, as the leader.
- 8) James was the deciding voice during the Jerusalem Council in 50 A.D. that determined gentile converts did not have to be circumcised to be part of the church.
- 9) His death has several different accounts, all of which speak of being violently martyred for Christ.

Learning all this information changed the way I viewed James and it completely changed how I read his letter to the 12 tribes of Israel. I was able to read it and receive it for what it truly is, the divine word of God. What I perceived as judgment became urgency and a protective warning. His authority became earned and respected. What I perceived as aggressive and lacking in tact became a necessary and assertive "come to Jesus." I have a love-hate relationship with the book of James now and it's because he challenges me the

most. He makes me the most uncomfortable so I know this is where I probably need to pray and listen the most closely and where there needs to be heart change.

James challenges, convicts, and calls all Christians to really live lives that reflect Christ in us. He contends that there is a difference between true believers and those who merely say they are believers. True faith always bears good fruit.

He starts his letter off by telling us how believers should view trials in our lives:

*“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” James 1:2-4*

I've had my share of difficult times. Unfortunately, none of us make it out of this life without facing “trials of various kinds.” Today I heard, “Faith is not produced in trials...it grows in them.” I can definitely agree with that. A few years ago, God brought me through a particularly difficult time in my life in such a way that I was able to come out of it with a stronger faith and trust in the Lord. So much so that I view trials much differently now. Do I still find myself worrying or feeling overwhelmed at times? Sure, I'm just flesh and bone. However, I enter these situations with a sense that I am about to get a front row seat to what God is going to do. I get to experience God's provision first hand once more. I'm not ready to call that “joy” just yet but maybe someday. I can't imagine the day I will be “perfect and complete” or “lacking nothing” on this side of heaven, but James says it can happen right here. If that is truly the outcome of hardship...eventually lacking nothing, I guess we really should be excited about trials!

In the next verse, it is as if James already knew we were going to be confused by verses 2-4. Verse 5 reads, *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.”* I find this particularly humorous. James is essentially saying “Don't ask me if you don't get it, ask God!” Actually, I think James knows the kind of wisdom we need doesn't come from human counsel but from the source of all wisdom, God himself. Now this makes sense! When I was on my knees on my bedroom floor, crying, not knowing the next right thing to do, my prayer was “Lord help me. I don't know which way to go. Show me what to do.” I can attest, God always comes through. He didn't give me the entire solution but always gave me the next step and that was enough.

In the next few weeks we are going to need to remember verse 5 as we go through the rest of this letter. James is going to be tough on us. He will not mince words and they may sting a bit. We may not know how to achieve what James has set before us but God knows and he will guide us if we ask. I will ask him for understanding, for him to reveal himself through these pages, for him to change my heart to reflect his and that I may act accordingly. Any time I pray a prayer like that I get a little nervous that he will answer it but I know he's got my back, so here we go!

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Have you been through a difficulty and been able to count it as joy?
- 2) Look up the definition of "steadfastness." How can steadfastness make us perfect and complete, lacking in nothing? What does that look like for you?
- 3) Have you ever asked God for his wisdom? Share how God answered.

