

# ***THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST***

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

## **JAMES LESSON 1 (Chapter 1)**

### **Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Timothy Sparks and Ben Bailey.

### **Ben Bailey:**

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials” (Jas. 1:2). I’m Ben Bailey.

### **Timothy Sparks:**

And I’m Timothy Sparks. Welcome to our study of the Book of James. We are making this lesson available on CD or DVD. If you would like to have a free copy, feel free to contact us, and we will be happy to send it to you at absolutely no expense. We’ll even pay the postage. Also, if you would like to give a copy of this lesson to a friend, we’ll be glad to send you an extra copy for that purpose. We would even be willing to mail it directly to a friend or a relative for you, in an effort to assist others in their study of God’s Word. We invite you to visit our website at [www.thegospelofchrist.com](http://www.thegospelofchrist.com), where you will find a list of the lessons that we offer at no cost. On the website, we also have streaming audio and video lessons available.

The Book of James is a very practical book, which serves as the book of “wisdom literature” in the New Testament.

### **Ben Bailey:**

The Book of James is much like the Book of Proverbs, in that it is extremely practical. It’s about living up to our faith, and living our faith in our daily lives. James 1 teaches us about how to live faithfully to God, and about how to be sure that we are not double-minded. James begins by saying, “My brethren count it all joy when you fall into various trials” (1:2-3). Why? “Knowing that your faith produces patience,” and that patience produces good works. All these things work together to help us grow as Christians. When we experience trials or tribulations, and when our faith is tested, we can produce virtue and good works out of those situations, and that, in turn, can help us be a better child of God. Many times, we don’t look at trials as a joy. We often look at trials as troublesome, and as something that causes us pain and problems. But to a child of God who is trying to live faithfully, those trials can help him grow and be encouraged in his faith. Maybe a person is struggling financially, and they make it through that trial. From that point on, perhaps they aren’t as dependent on money as they once were. It helps them put more trust in God and in the power of prayer than in the almighty dollar. When someone is facing a sickness or a difficulty and they make it through that trial, they probably aren’t as enamored with this old world as they once were. Likely, they want to go to Heaven more. James begins his epistle with a paradox, which is sort of “a truth standing on its head to

get noticed.” James says, “Count it a joy when you fall into various trials.” This is foreign to the way we usually think, but it helps us view things from a spiritual mindset.

### **Timothy Sparks:**

The Book of James provides instructions on the “common sense of Christianity.” In the day in which we live, common sense is not all that common. James offers up common sense for devout, faithful Christians. To those in the world, it doesn’t make any sense to “consider it all joy when you fall into various trials.” The world around us bemoans any kind of heartache or hardship. Yet James says that such should be an occasion for rejoicing. He even explains why—“knowing that the trying and testing of your faith produces patience.” Be careful what you ask God to give you. Sometimes, the way He helps us to have patience is by testing and trying our faith. God is concerned about how we hold up through such trials and testing. We’re going to learn that when we go through these things, we need to consult with God through prayer and through His Word. In James 1:22, we find what is probably the key verse of this book: “Be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” Before he comes to that point, however, James says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (1:5). We learn from James 1:5 that we need wisdom from God concerning how to deal with our trials and tribulations. Perhaps the trial is in the form of persecution. [James wrote his epistle to the twelve tribes, which were scattered abroad because of persecution.] We need help in understanding. We need wisdom to help us know how to handle these trials, so that we can become more complete, more mature Christians. We need to ask God for wisdom to help us realize that the things we endure in this life are really part of His perfect plan. We learn from Romans 8:28 that “all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” God is the One Who is control. We, therefore, need to ask God for wisdom to help us understand these things.

### **Ben Bailey:**

There is a proper way to ask God for such wisdom, which James discusses in verses 6 through 8. “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” When we ask God to help us, we need to have faith that God **will** help us. Why should we ask if we don’t believe He will actually help? Jesus taught in Matthew 7:7, “Ask, and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you.” Here is the point: If we ask, and if it is according to God’s will, we will receive it. We need to realize that we have to ask in faith, in obedience, and in belief that God will be faithful to His promises. James says that if we don’t have faith, we are like a wave of the sea, tossed to and fro, depending upon which way the wind blows. James says, in essence, “Don’t just think that ‘maybe’ God will give it to me. If you think like that, you are like a double-minded man who is unstable in all his ways.” Being double-minded means that one minute we think that God will answer our prayer, and the next minute we think that He won’t. We are unsure. If I ask God to help me have more patience, then I’d better be ready, because God **wants** me to have patience. He’s going to help me get it. If I pray for wisdom, God will show me how to deal with struggles in my life. So when I pray, I must not think, “Maybe God will give it to me, and maybe He won’t, but I’ll go ahead and pray anyway.” Instead, I need to believe, and know that when I pray, God loves me, cares for me, and that He will give me those things (such as wisdom) that I need.

### **Timothy Sparks:**

Another thing we learn from this passage is that we should ask God for wisdom to help us understand that the trials in our lives are actually going to help us become more mature Christians. Of course, when we ask, we have to ask “in faith.” Jesus said that when we pray, we are to “believe.” We also need to ask God to help us understand how we can have joy in our trials. James makes the statement, “Consider it all joy when you fall into various trials.” The Christians in James’ day were undergoing **severe** persecution. We may not go through persecution to the extent that they did, but we do find a statement in the New Testament which makes it clear that if we are faithful Christians, we **are** going to undergo some type of persecution. Paul wrote to Timothy, “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12). In some shape, form, or fashion, Christians who are living faithfully to God **will** be persecuted. It might be a mild form of persecution, or it might be severe, but one way or another, the world around us is going to try to squeeze us into its mold. We cannot be conformed to the world (Rom. 12:2). We must resist the devil. If we do, he will flee from us, as James states later in this book (4:7). Prayer, then, can be a powerful and effective part of helping us to understand some of the things we may have to endure as faithful Christians.

### **Ben Bailey:**

Some people seem to be able to “have joy” in the midst of trials, while others are unable to do so. Why is this? James points out that, at times, it is because some people are too prideful. During trials and tribulations, some people are overwhelmed because they put their trust in physical things rather than in God. James says, “Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits” (1:9-11). James’ point is that the rich man who fails to depend on God will “fade away in his pursuits.” At times, people who have wealth have difficulty living the Christian life because of their pride and dependence on money. Some of the richest people in life actually aren’t all that happy. They may have a lot of physical pleasures, but the truth of the matter is that finding **real** happiness goes far beyond the amount of money in a person’s bank account. It must be found in things that have real substance—things like God, faith, and love that can provide true happiness. Although you may not have a lot of money, I can guarantee you this: If you put your trust in God, you can rejoice, no matter what happens. I’m reminded of the scene in Acts 5:40-42. Peter and John had just been beaten. They had been told not to speak of the name of Jesus anymore. What did they do? They “departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” Why were those men able to rejoice? They weren’t prideful. Instead, they truly trusted in God. Little wonder, then, that Paul (while in prison in Philippi) could say in Acts 16:25 that they were praying and singing hymns of praise to God. Even in the deepest darkest, ugliest moments of their lives, they still found joy in trials because they trusted in God. Paul would say in Philippians 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice.” It’s a lot easier to deal with trials and tribulations if you humble yourself. If you are a prideful person who puts all his trust in physical things, trials are going to be extremely difficult to handle.

### **Timothy Sparks:**

James' instructions to Christians "level the playing field." We learn that the lowly brother is to rejoice in that he is exalted, while the rich brother is to rejoice in that he has been humbled. While the lowly brother should rejoice in his exaltation that he is a Christian, the rich brother must come to realize that his riches do not elevate him. We all stand on level ground at the foot of the cross. There is no "BIG ME" or "little you." There is no clergy or laity. There is no rich or poor. There is no black or white, brown or yellow. There is no single or married. In the sight of the Lord, we are all one if we are "in Christ." In James 1:12, James says, "Blessed is the person who endures temptation, for when he is tried, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." There is a great blessing for those who go through this life and remain faithful, regardless of the trials or temptations they endure. We will be blessed if we are faithful, for when we are tried, "We will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love him." This concept of the "crown of life" also is seen in other passages, such as Revelation 2:10 where Jesus says, "Be faithful to death, and I will give you the crown of life." That doesn't mean that we are merely to be faithful until we die (although that definitely is taught in other passages). Rather, it means that we are to be faithful even to the point of death. We are to be faithful, even if it costs us our lives. Paul said at the end of his life, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that day, and not to me only, but also to all who have loved his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7-8). We might summarize this by saying, "loyalty leads to eternal life."

### **Ben Bailey:**

The trials we face, and the difficulties we endure, can make us loyal to the Lord. They can help us give up all the things that don't really matter so we can put our trust in God. In James 1:13-15, James emphasizes that when we experience these trials, or when we are tempted, we must **not** blame God. In these verses, James says,

"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."

Here, we see sin going from conception to maturity. When we are tempted, we must not blame God. So many times, when bad things happen to people, or when they fall into trials, they say, "Why is God doing this to me?," or "Why did the Lord let this happen?" God may not be doing anything to them. In fact, if we look at the origin of sin, aren't **we** to blame? Death entered in the world because of mankind's sin, and all have sinned (Rom. 5:10-12). Sin originated with man, not with God. Had it not been for us, this world would have been a perfect place to live in. **We** are the ones who messed it up; all of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23). We must not be so prone to blame God for our problems. Instead, we should realize where temptation originates. Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lusts and desires, and is enticed. What causes me to sin? It's when I don't control myself and my passions. When that happens, it gives rise to sin. Sin occurs when I put my own desires into practice. I live them out and bring them to fruition. When we sin or are tempted, we must not blame God. Realizing the source of sin, and understanding how sin develops, can help keep us from sinning. When we face temptations or trials, instead of wondering why God is letting this happen, maybe we should look inwardly, use a little introspection, and say, "Is there something in my life that isn't right, something on which I need to work? While God

is not the cause of my problem, is there a reason that God is allowing this to happen to me?” The Book of Job is a prime example. Job suffered many things—loss of family, loss of his business, loss of his wealth, loss of his friends, etc. Job was afflicted with a horrible disease, and his own wife even told him to “curse God and die.” As you read through the Book of Job, you find Job wondering why God is allowing all of this to happen to him. Job stays faithful, but he learns a lot about God. Through all these difficulties, Job ultimately learns to trust the Lord more. This is a lesson we, today, would do well to learn, too. Instead of blaming God, we need to allow our trials and tribulations to help us develop as God’s children.

### **Timothy Sparks:**

In James 1:16, James makes this statement, “Do not be deceived my beloved brothers.” Verse 16 connects verses 13 through 15 with verses 17 and 18. James does not want us to be deceived about the source of our temptation. It is not from God. Rather, it comes as a result of us giving in to our desires. In James 1:17, James says, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” James wants us to know that God is not behind our problems.” At the same time, he also wants us to know that “every good gift and every perfect gift” **does** come from God. The devil is not going give us anything good. He doesn’t want anything good for us. God is the One Who has done everything He can to provide a way for us to be delivered from sin. We learn from James 1:18, “He begat us by the Word of truth.” We are begotten by the Word of God. We are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible (1 Pet. 1:23). The Word of God lives and abides forever, as Peter would say. As we look at this passage, we learn about the essentiality of the Word of God and the truth, which then brings us to the key verse of the entire book, James 1:22.

### **Ben Bailey:**

In James 1:21-22, we are told to “receive with meekness the planted Word, which is able to save our souls.” Earlier, in verse 19, James said, “Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” Swift to hear **what**? The Word of God. Why? So that we can know that God does not tempt us, but instead gives us good gifts. Slow to speak about what? Slow to speak out against God or against our trials. And slow to wrath—wrath against God because of our trials. We need to be quick to hear that it is not God who tempts us, but our own desires. In fact, God is the One Who gives us the good gifts. We must not be quick to speak out against God, or quick to get angry when bad things happen. God has given us **two** ears and **one** mouth. If we did **twice** as much listening, and **half** as much speaking, we would be a lot better off. God doesn’t tempt us. Our trials and temptations come because of our own desires. Thus, we must continually look to the Word and the will of God. We must “receive with meekness the implanted Word, which is able to save our souls.” When we hear the Word of God, and we put that Word to work in our lives, it can do nothing but bring us good and save our immortal souls. Romans 1:16 tell us the Gospel is God’s power to save people. Where is the power located? It is not in me, and it is not in you. Nor is it in some religious figure. It is in Jesus and in the Word of God. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except by Me” (Jn. 14:6). The writer of the Book of Hebrews said, “The Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). True wisdom says, “I must understand that prob-

lems in life can help me. I am not going to blame God for those problems. Instead, am going to look to the good, and give God the glory. I'm going to be swift to hear the Word of God. I'm going to be slow to speak out against God, and slow to get angry about things that happen in my life. I'm not going to blame God. Instead, I'm going to turn to the Word of God as the divine guide to my salvation."

### **Timothy Sparks:**

In James 1:22, we read, "Be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." If anyone is not a doer of the Word, but only hears the Word, James says that person is like someone who looks at himself in the mirror and then goes on his way, immediately forgetting what kind of man he is. In James 1:25, James says, "He who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." God has given to us the perfect law of liberty. The Bible should serve as a mirror to the soul, because it reflects the perfect anatomy of the soul. It shows us what we **should** look like, and simultaneously reflects what we actually **do** look like. Are you living up to the standard of God's Word? We learn from James 1:26 that those who do not practice their religion, but who instead have an unbridled tongue, practice their religion in vain. The person who doesn't bridle his tongue has no self-control. This person's religion is vain. From James 1:27, we learn that "pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to visit the fatherless or the orphans and the widows in their affliction, and keep himself unspotted from the world." We practice "pure religion" when we take care of those who are in need, and when we make a concerted effort to keep ourselves undefiled and blameless in the sight of God. As we look at the Book of James, we see a book of true wisdom that discusses the practical side of living the Christian life, and that provides a "common-sense" guide to real Christianity.

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## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR JAMES LESSON 1 (CHAPTER 1)

1. In the Bible, various books can be categorized as “poetic literature” (like Psalms), prophetic literature (like Isaiah and Jeremiah), etc. What type of literature would you classify the Book of James as being?
2. According to James, why should we rejoice when we experience trials and tribulations?
3. What is the key verse in the Book of James?
4. To whom did James write his epistle?
5. Explain the meaning of the phrase, “ask in faith, with no doubting.”
6. In 2 Timothy 3:12, Paul told Timothy that those who “live godly in Christ Jesus” can expect something to come their way. What is that “something”?
7. Explain the connection between Revelation 2:10, 2 Timothy 4:7-8, and James 1:2.
8. Name something, according to James 1:13, that God will never do.
9. Explain the context and meaning of James 1:16, “Do not be deceived my beloved brothers.”
10. Explain the connection between James 1:18 and 1 Peter 1:23.
11. In James 1:17, James referred to the fact that with God, there is “no variation or shadow of turning.” Explain that statement.
12. Explain the connection between James 1:21-22 and Romans 1:16.
13. According to James 1:5, we are to pray for something to help us understand how to handle various situations in life. What is that “something”?
14. What is “the perfect law of liberty” of which James speaks?
15. James listed two items as falling under the category of “pure and undefiled religion.” What are those two items?
16. What is the connection between James 1:22 and James 2:24?
17. What does it mean for someone to be “double-minded”?
18. Explain Jesus’ statement in Matthew 7:7, “Ask, and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened unto you.”
19. What is the point Paul was trying to get across in Romans 12:2?