

## REJOICING IN OUR TRIALS (JAMES 1:2-4)

Icebreaker Question: Discuss how the first child can influence other children in a family. How do you think Jesus influenced the rest of His siblings? (The Bible is silent regarding the life of Jesus between the Luke 2:41-50 account with the temple leaders, when He was 12, and the beginning of His earthly ministry at the age of 30. (Luke 3:23)

1. Since James was the half-brother of Jesus, he had a strong awareness of His beliefs, values, and teachings. He was likely influenced when Jesus interacted with the teachers in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, James began as a skeptic, but later became a believer, a disciple, and a pastor of the church in Jerusalem. As such, he was greatly respected among Christians in his day. The real turning point in the life of James was the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. His brother became his Lord, and he was never the same.

Q1. Discuss what changes occur in our lives when Jesus truly becomes our Lord and our Master. Challenge members of your group to make Him Lord of their lives, if they haven't already done so.

2, James would have had many opportunities to hear the Lord teach, thus his writings have many similarities to the teachings of Jesus. The most striking comparisons are from the Sermon on the Mount. Compare the following passages from James and Matthew:

a. James 1:2 - "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials" and Matthew 5:10-12 - "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake".

b. James 1:4 - "Let patience have its perfect work that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" and Matthew 5:48 - "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect".

c. James 2:13 - "For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy" and Matt. 5:7 - "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy".

d. James 3:17 - "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable ..." and Matt. 5:9 - "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God".

e. James 4:4 - "... Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" and Matt. 6:24 - "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon".

f. James 5:2 - "Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten" and Matt. 6:19 - "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy ...".

g. James 5:10 - "My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an

example of suffering and patience" and Matt. 5:11, 12 - "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake ... for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you".

3. The Book of James teaches us that God-honoring faith is much more than reading and understanding the Bible. It is asking God to transform us from the inside out and putting our beliefs into action.

4. James teaches us that trials (or testings) cause our faith to grow. That is the reason for us to be joyful in the midst of trials. Yes, I said joyful not griping, whining, or complaining as we are facing them. Since our natural response to trials is not to rejoice, it will require a conscious effort to be joyful. Therefore, when we are able to remain joyful in the midst of our trials, we can be assured that God is growing our faith.

5. Facing trials (whether personal, financial, physical, or some other kind of trial), is not something that excites us, and definitely is not something we would ask for. However, God allows such tests to prove the quality and strength of our faith. In Philippians 1:12, Paul, while chained to a Roman guard, said, "I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel." Paul was in prison and going through serious trials in his life. But rather than fight, moan, or feel sorry for himself, he used the time to share his faith in Christ. Through our trials, God may be telling us to use the experience to witness to someone. From personal experiences, when visiting people with debilitating financial, personal, and other life challenges, *the key in the midst of those trials has been to keep a kingdom perspective, and not to focus on the trial, but the opportunity to witness or to serve.*

Q2. Ask members of your group if there is anyone who would be willing to share a trial that they have gone through, and how they have matured in their faith through their period of testing.

6. In James 1:3 and 4, the word "patience" can better be translated "endurance" or "perseverance". Christians must learn to withstand the pressures of a trial, until such time as God may remove it. But, as in the case of Paul, there will be times when God's response is, "My grace is sufficient" and He may not take away the trial. The end result could be that He might be glorified through your endurance.

Q3. Has anyone in the group known someone with a prolonged illness, whom the church, their family, or their friends have prayed for, but God has chosen not to heal them? Can anyone identify something good that has come out of their endurance under suffering?

