

Sermon: James 1:1-27. “Trials and temptations”

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Sermon text and audio available for download at www.waitara.anglican.asn.au

● * The insurance policy

● **Protecting ourselves in every situation...**

verse 2

How much do we love insurance?!

We have house insurance, contents insurance, car insurance, fire and theft insurance, third party insurance, income insurance, health insurance, life insurance, life assurance, funeral insurance, and even pet insurance!

- I found out this week that for \$141.23 a year, Medibank private will insure our dog (who you met last week!) for up to \$8000 a year! Australian cricketer, Merv Hughes, had his moustache insured for \$370,000.

We insure things to protect ourselves. We want to protect ourselves against uncertainty and loss. We want to protect ourselves when bad things happen.

And we take out insurance because we KNOW that there is uncertainty in life. In our bible reading today, James calls these times of uncertainty “trials”. James is writing to Christians who are facing everyday trials of suffering, loss, persecution, financial difficulties, relationship struggles – all sorts of trials. So this is a book we can all relate to straight away, because we all face trials of different kinds in our lives.

And in this early part of James chapter 1, he goes straight to the point of his letter:

- * Verse 3: “The testing of your faith”.

James wants to remind us that the most important part of our lives is our faith. Whatever trials we face in life – suffering and sickness, relationships, financial struggles, persecutions, and even all the day to day stuff – getting a parking ticket, facing exams, sick children, a flat tyre, a car accident, you lose your job, you get a big electricity bill – whatever trials we face, big or small, our greatest trial any time these things happen, is the testing of our faith. This is what James wants us to understand in his letter – the most important question during any trial we face in life is:

- **How’s your faith in Jesus going?**

So if you’re facing relationship difficulties, James asks: How’s your faith in Jesus going?

If you’re facing sickness, James asks: How’s your faith in Jesus going?

If you’re facing financial struggles, James asks: How’s your faith in Jesus going?

When you lose your temper at someone who treats you badly, James asks: How’s your faith in Jesus going?

James sees every trial as a temptation.

- **Every trial is a temptation.**

Every time we face a trial in our life, no matter how big or small, it’s a temptation to weaken our faith a little. A temptation to trust God less. So when we face any trial in life, James wants us to confront our faith first of all.

● * The trials of joy...

And he starts us thinking about our faith by saying this:

- *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds...”*

Think about those trials you’re facing... sickness, relationships, finances, ... are you joyful about those things? And I’m going to say “No James. I’m not joyful when parts of my life are falling apart. How on earth are we supposed to be joyful when we face trials?”

But he’s not talking about being joyful **about suffering**. He’s talking about finding joy in the **opportunities** those trials give us to grow in our faith. Because... verse 3...

- *“because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”*

And there’s the joy. Trials test our faith. Trials tempt us to be weak in our faith. But even in the most difficult trials, with the greatest temptations, there is always, always, an opportunity for us to persevere and grow in our faith. And that’s the joy James wants us to find. The joy of opportunities to grow in our faith even in difficult times.

But it’s not easy, so James spends the rest of this chapter, and the rest of the book, helping us to live lives that grow in our faith. So let’s start with chapter 1... which I see as James’ 4 steps to finding joy in trials and temptations:

- *** The search for joy...**

- *** Step 1: Ask for God’s wisdom – verse 5**

- *“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all...”*

When we face trials and temptations, ask God for wisdom. Because God is generous. God wants to give us wisdom! God wants to help us face trials and temptations in life. God **wants** to see us grow in these times. So step 1 – ASK for wisdom, ask for God’s guidance. Instead of turning to the world for wisdom, turn to God.

- *** Step 2: Remember that riches fade away – verse 10**

It’s easy to be tempted by the riches of the world and take our focus off what’s really important. Riches pass away. Yet they are one of the greatest distractions AND temptations in our life. And we need to hear what James is saying here – riches are a trial. Riches are a temptation for our faith, and we need to persevere in overcoming the temptation to love riches and instead, to keep focussed on what’s really important – verse 12 – the crown of eternal life.

- *** Step 3: Take responsibility for temptation – verse 14**

When you’re tempted, don’t blame God!

- Verse 13: “When tempted, no-one should say ‘God is tempting me!’. For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desires, he is dragged away and enticed.”

We desire something that’s evil, that’s against God’s will, and that evil desire gives birth to sin, and sin will eventually lead us to death. But it **starts** when our own evil desires drag us away. We need to cut off sin at that first desire so it doesn’t drag us away.

- *** Step 4: Remember your purpose – verse 18**

Verse 18. God chose to give us new birth and he did it so we might be a kind of **firstfruits**. What does that mean? God has made us part of his new creation. That means we’re born again to be different from the world, and made to reflect God’s new creation.

How do we do that? Well, really, that’s what the rest of James is about.

But verses 19-25 give us a place to start – James gives us two challenges to help us be different from the rest of the world, and how to keep finding joy even when we face trials and temptations:

- * The life of joy...

- * **Challenge 1: Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry – v 19**

It's so easy to hear that and agree with it, but it's difficult to do.

Quick to listen.

Slow to speak.

Slow to become angry.

Say that over and over and over again. Some of us won't even be able to follow that when we go out to morning tea / supper! It's good advice, but James isn't just trying to give us good advice on how to be nice people. This is about being "**righteous**" – verse 20:

- *"Man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires."*

We're called to be different and to lead a life that is righteous. What does that mean? We're called to **live a life that reflects God's character**. We have a **God** who is quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger. And we need to reflect that character in our life.

So that's the first challenge for everyday life: quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. And that's an ongoing challenge, every day. Just like the second challenge...

- * **Challenge 2: Look intently into God's Word – verse 21**

- Verse 21: *"Get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."*

The second challenge James gives us is to turn away from the world's ways and accept God's word.

He's not just talking about reading God's word. He's talking about **accepting** God's word in the midst of every trial and temptation we face. That means listening to it, accepting what it says, and doing what it says.

If we want to stand out from the rest of the world and be able to overcome the trials and temptations we face, we need to be **staring intently into God's word** and not forgetting what it says. We're not to be like the man who looks in a mirror and walks away forgetting what he looks like. And that's hard in a world of distractions, which is why we need to keep **coming back** to God's Word.

It's like a great painting or a work of art. You can't just look at it once. It affects you and you just want to keep coming back to it again and again and again to stare intently into it. Why? Because it has an impact on you.

If we want to be different to the world, we can't just have a quick glance at God's word. We need to accept it and look into it intently, and continually.

- * The big idea

So the first chapter of James has a whole lot of information and directions for us. But he really has one big idea for us that continues through the book:

- Confront your faith.

With every trial in life, there's a temptation to follow the world's way of doing things. There's a temptation to be the same as the rest of the world. But God wants us to be different. He wants us to confront our faith and ask "How are these trials affecting my faith? And how is my life reflecting God's righteousness?"

And here are two great challenges to begin with:

1. Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.
2. Look intently into God's Word.