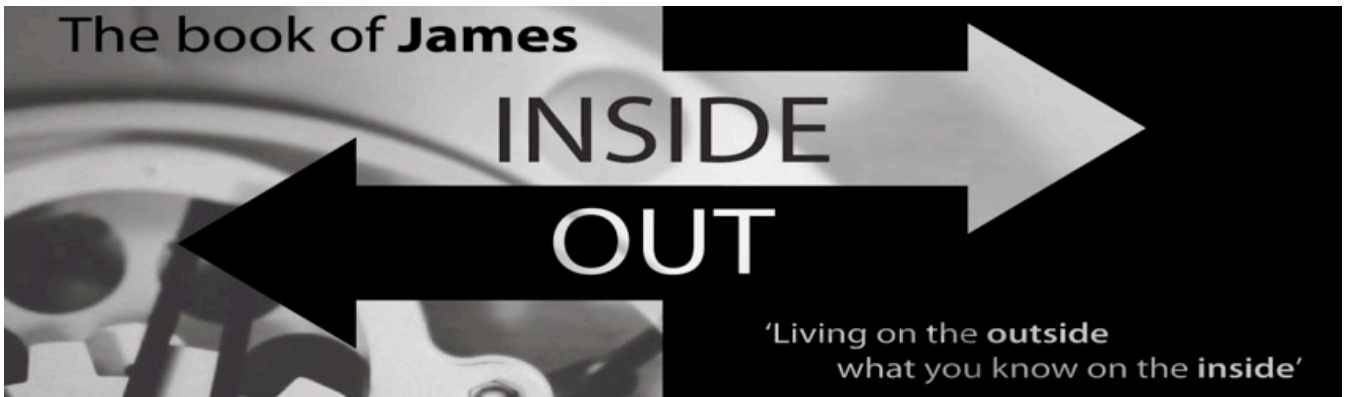


James 1:1-18 Inside Wisdom Outside Trials



I find the process of the transformation of a caterpillar to a butterfly fascinating. The work that happens inside is clearly seen on the outside. This is not always true of us as Christians. The work God has done on the inside in our hearts isn't always seen in our actions.

The book of James is about *living on the outside what you know on the inside*. That is why we called this series INSIDE OUT.

I know I am always saying salvation is not about what you DO but what has been DONE by Jesus in his death and that is right. Salvation is a gift but once you are saved it is about what you DO. John Calvin captures it beautifully when he says “*we are saved by faith alone but saving faith is never alone.*” Belief is to be seen in our behaviour. Our Doctrine in our doing. We are not just to have profession of faith but practise. Our Christian thinking must be matched by our Christian living. James wants us to see what we believe affecting how we live.

James is a man who would say talk is cheap. James wants to see results. Of the 108 verses in the book, 54 contain commands. True faith shows itself in practical, godly living.

WHO is the letter from?

James, the half-brother of Jesus. He became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. James could have pulled rank by opening the letter, “James, brother of none other than Jesus Christ. I grew up with Him! I knew Him long before He became famous!” But James opens his letter by calling himself a *servant*. The word means, “slave,” and refers to those who are the property of their masters. They had no rights. They lived to do their masters' will. James adds, “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Who is the letter written to?

James wrote this letter to “the twelve tribes who are scattered among the nations.” This identifies his main readers as Jewish believers who lived outside of Israel. They had scattered into many locations because of the persecution that arose. From **1:18** they are clearly Christians. They have new birth through the ‘word of truth’ ie the Gospel.

Word got back to James of some of the difficulties that they were encountering: trials from without, conflicts within. Some were lapsing into a superficial, formal religion that professed orthodox beliefs, but practiced selfish, ungodly lifestyles. Their outside living wasn't reflecting the inside reality of who they were in Christ.

People often say imagine if James wrote to Lakeshore church what would he write. Well we don't need to imagine because what he wrote that is in the Bible is what he would write to us. It is God's Word to us today at Lakeshore. I know we are going to be unsettled and more than that challenged by what he writes. We have our own way of thinking about how we show that we are a Christian. We are going to find out the short list we have is not the list James has. Sins will be exposed; we will need to confess and

repent. I hope that in ten weeks time we will be radically different to whom we are now. As individuals and as a church.

God has called each of us to bring the gospel to a particular job, school classroom, neighbourhood, or sporting team mate as missionaries. People in your network of relationships have needs and God has placed you in the midst of the need in order to bring heaven to earth. The gospel to human hearts. Through your outside living. So what James calls us to is basic but radical Christian lives. Please begin to pray towards that end today.

The first lesson from James is:-

When we go through trials, we should count it as joy, submitting to God, knowing that He is using it for our maturity.

So firstly...

1. God uses trials to make us better at trusting him

Read: 1:2

Trials or tests are the key idea in this passage. There two types:- 1. Those from the outside. Eg. Suffering or hardship, Sickness, loss of job.

2. Those from the inside. Ie Temptation- Attraction to sin.

At the moment we are thinking about OUTSIDE TRIALS.

James says: ***‘Consider trials’***. This means to think or regard something based on weighing and comparing of facts. It’s about deliberate and careful judgment from external proof, not subjective judgment based on feelings

This doesn’t come naturally otherwise we wouldn’t have to be commanded to do it.

Consider them what? ALL JOY.

Why? Not because it is a joyful experience. We are not saying we enjoy pain. Or saying it is not painful. It is not about pretending hard things are not trials. It is not saying like the Buddhists who say you are suffering because you have the wrong desires. So the way through trials is to deny your desires. He is not saying joy is the only response you have but you should have joy.

It’s not easy to describe what joy looks like. But I know what it isn’t and that is being grumpy, irritable, frustrated or even angry.

You might think you’re kidding aren’t you James? You obviously haven’t gone through what I have.

We think the best option is get rid of or escape trials. If ***life is a highway*** full of trials we instantly look for the ***first exit*** when one comes along.

When we were buying a house in Buderim I was trying to make sure we didn’t buy one on top of the mountain. I didn’t want to have to ride up the mountain every time I went home from a bike ride. I wanted to avoid that hard work. This is our approach to trials. We avoid doing the hard work.

Sure when you get sick you go to the doctor to get help. Sure if you lose your job you look for another job. But what if you don’t get better or you don’t get another job. What if church changes? What if there is a person a church you find difficult? Will you just escape take the easy option and leave? What if you can’t fix it with the resources you have? What if you can’t escape it? What if the sickness or disability lasts the rest of your life?

What if you have to stay in the difficult job? What will keep you going? What help you persevere? What will keep you going to work? When there is no way out where will you turn? Will you turn to God?

We think hard things are bad. But hard things are good gifts from God. James is saying these trials are good for you because of the **result** they bring. They cause us to put our trust in God. They are not a test to see if we have faith but a test that improves our faith. Trials are a required course in the school of faith.

It is like the **process of gold being refined**. It is put through a testing process so that it is better gold. It produces a better product through the process.

Read: 1:3-4

Trials are for us to grow. This is the goal of James. The goal of Bible. The goal of God. God loves us so much he doesn't leave us where we are and how he grows us is through trials.

God puts our faith under a testing process so that it is better faith. So that our faith in God is stronger. So that it is deeper. God is concerned about our character not our comfort. He is concerned with our holiness rather than our personal happiness. He wants us to be happy because we are holy. Happy because we have him. Not happy because we have stuff.

The Christian life is like training for a marathon. It takes endurance. It takes sticking at the hard times so you are ready on the day. It involves training when you don't feel like. It is realising there are no short cuts when it comes to building endurance. It is about doing the kilometres. If you want to finish on the day you have to do the drills in training. They are not optional. There is training in the Christian life. The compulsory training drill is TRIALS.

They are given by God. It is not just that he allows them. He gives them. That is the point of verses 16-18. This is why you receive trials with joy because that is how you receive gifts. With thankfulness and joy.

We all have muscles like we all have faith. Some are stronger than others. You don't know how strong or fast you are until you put yourself to the test. In the testing you grow stronger. If you keep taking the easy path you'll never grow stronger. If we always choose to live at the bottom of the mountain we will not grow stronger.

Let me tell you about Alan Stanley and his family. They are going to Singapore to live so Alan can teach in a bible college. This is as a result of going there for six months this year. When they were there they had many trials. Every week they sent an email with news and every week there was another trial. The kids got sick. Alan and Kathleen got sick. Alan came home considered and made a decision to do something so his faith will be tested. Taking themselves away from all that is familiar. All they know that gives them safety, security, comfort, ease. Choosing to go to ride up the mountain. Choosing the difficult option.

Our faith needs testing because we have so much. God wants to give us the opportunity for us to rely on him instead of our stuff. We are to consider trials as all joy but do you ever do that?

How are we able to think the right way about trials?

This is where we move to the Inside Wisdom.

Secondly...

2. Ask God for Wisdom

Read: 5-8

WISDOM is **knowing how to live God's way in God's world**. Or recognising reality and living in light of it.

The principal of the Bible College I studied at is David Cook. He tells a story to illustrate wisdom as 'recognising reality and living in light of it.' One day he was in his family wagon with his wife and five kids. They went to the car racing track in Bathurst. He drove the car to the top of Conrod Straight and looked down the straight. His kids were cheering him on to go as fast as he could down the straight. David thought:- that would not be wise to drive as fast as I could with my family in the wagon down Conrod straight so I won't. He recognised reality and lived in light of it.

Wisdom is asking these kinds of questions to help you recognise reality:-

“How can I understand this trial from God’s perspective?

How can I navigate through this storm in such a way as to bring glory to God?

How can this trial help me grow in maturity?”

God’s way in trials is to rejoice because you know it is helping you grow.

You ask for wisdom and God promises to give wisdom in James 1:5. James 1:18 tells us God chose to give us birth through His Word. He has done the hard thing of making his enemies his children and so of course he will give us what we need to live on the outside what he has done on the inside.

Thirdly...

3. Don’t give in to temptation

Read: 13-15

You can see why James says what he says here. We think trials are bad. And we know that when things go bad we go bad. So for example if financial troubles come we begin to doubt God’s goodness and we start doing things that are wrong to get money. Then we say God is tempting us through the financial troubles. We say this when we say why God.

But James says we are responsible in our **temptations**. The origin of sin is not God. God is perfectly **sinless**. We are utterly **sinful**.

There is no blaming anyone else. There is no blaming Satan. There is no blaming your upbringing. There is no blaming your parents. There is no blaming God.

James clearly says GOD DOES NOT TEMPT. God give us trials to draw us closer to him whereas temptations have the goal of drawing away from God to sin.

Where does sin come from?

Let’s think about the anatomy of sin.

- Step One: **Deception**. Temptation *always* promises excitement and fulfilment. It *never* comes along with the saying, “Would you like to destroy yourself and your family? Would you like to disgrace the name of your God?” It comes on with the enticement, “This will be fun! This will meet your needs. This will get you what you have been looking for. What can it hurt to try it?” It is like the bait on a hook when you go fishing. It is there to deceive the fish. At this point not sin.

- Step Two: **Desire**. At this point there is not sin. In fact desires are normal and natural. The desires for pleasure or the desire for intimacy. It is how desires are expressed that can be the problem. It is like the fish being lured to the bait because of the desire to eat.

- Step Three: **Disobedience**. This is where there is a sin committed. It is the fish taking the bait.

- Step Four: **Death**. The fish gets reeled in because he thought he was getting a satisfying meal but he becomes the meal. Sin is like a small crack in a dam that if not repaired it will cause the dam wall to break open and lead to massive destruction. The result of sin is also destruction – DEATH. It is not immediate physical death but spiritual death. Instead of receiving the crown of life you receive death.

It’s like we are carrying flammable liquid that only takes a spark to ignite and cause an explosion.

Giving into the temptation that comes with a trial is the wrong way to respond trials. It gets you killed. You’ve seen the sign – SPEED KILLS. See James’ sign says: – SIN KILLS.

To respond to trials in this way is like cheating on race day in the marathon. Taking a shortcut and winning. There is no win at all. There’s disqualification.

Since getting a permanent sickness it has taken me a few years to learn to consider the trial of my sickness joy. I have a long way to go to keep learning this. I think it can be easier to learn this with a trial

that is long term because you have time to keep thinking about it and learning the lesson. It is often the ‘smaller’ everyday trials that trip us up because we are not expecting them to cause us to sin.

Let me just share an everyday situation where I keep being tempted and sinning. It is each morning when it is really earlier before I have woken up and a little person comes next to my bed; taps me and says ‘Daddy can I have some weetbix.’ I am woken up and after trying to pretend it is not happening I get angry and say something out of anger. I am tempted and I sin. Instead of remembering this happens each morning so preparing for it when I lay down to go to sleep at night by praying that I won’t give in to sin. I am trying to make sure when I get woken up to see it as an opportunity to serve one of my daughters as I start the day.

I am praying that God would keep showing me sin in my life as I preach through James so that I can confess it and repent. Will you pray with me about yourself that God would do the same for you?

So James’ first lesson is:-

When we go through trials, we should count it as joy, submitting to God, knowing that He is using it for our maturity.