

THE CORNERSTONE OF OUR FAITH

JESUS CHRIST
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*Looking at the Man in the Mirror
A Study of James*

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about the author

Brother Tommy Brooks has been a minister for 28 years and is currently the pulpit minister for the church of Christ at Highland Heights in Houston, Texas where he has been since 2007. In addition to his evangelism duties, he also conducts a ministerial program for men who are preparing to be ministers, deacons, elders, and teachers in the church of Christ. He also hosts a nationwide conference call to share the gospel and provide encouraging lessons to promote spiritual development.

Brother Brooks has a strong belief in family and has been happily married to Sharon Brooks for 35 years. They have three daughters Yushekia, Tomekia, and Angela, and one son Thomas. He is also the author of *Life Without God Is Meaningless* (Ecclesiastes) in **The Cornerstone of Our Faith** series.

how to use this study

Each lesson in this *The Cornerstone of Our Faith* study has four major parts.

Every lesson begins with an introductory section called **The Foundation**. In this section, the author will give background material to help prepare your mind and heart for God's Word.

The second part of each lesson is called **The Cornerstone**. This section is always the heart of every lesson. The Bible is explored in detail to help us understand the text. Those who are accustomed to hearing African-American preaching can hear this section "preach." God's Word is powerfully presented so that all can understand.

The next section of each study is critical for the Word to fulfill its intended purpose. It is called **The Inscription**. Just as people take note of inscriptions on cornerstones or monuments, each lesson is written so as to drive home a point worth remembering and a principle worth following. It offers the encouragement to change attitudes or behaviors to align better with God's Word. To *know* the Bible is one thing; to *do* it is another.

Every lesson ends with a series of thought-provoking **Discussion Questions** that help you explore God's Word on a personal and a congregational level. These questions provide opportunities for group discussion and participation. Teachers can tell by the responses whether their students have really come to grips with the lesson.

introduction

Looking at the Man in the Mirror is a study of the book of James. The purpose of this book is to help us address spiritual solutions for the life issues facing everyone and especially as they pertain to our Christian walk. This study should be done with each person taking an introspective look at his own personal life by the mirror of God's Word. In this study, James tells us in plain, simple language how to practice our faith so that good works follow. He teaches us how we can develop a life that is righteous and pleasing to God; a life that will allow us to look into the mirror, God's Word, and be proud of the reflection we see.

Count It All Joy

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience
(James 1:2, 3)

FOUNDATION

James, the brother of Jesus, is credited with writing this book (Galatians 1:19). He was a leader in the Jerusalem church and known to be an extremely devout man (Acts 1:13, 14; 12:17). In fact, tradition says that he spent so much time in prayer that his knees became callused like a camel's knees. According to history he was killed while on his knees praying. He was one of the select individuals to whom Christ appeared after His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7). Peter reported to him upon his release from prison (Acts 12:17). Paul acted on his advice (Acts 21:18-26) and called him a "pillar" of the church (Galatians 2:9).

James' message to the twelve tribes scattered abroad, as well as to us today, is that if our faith is true, good works will follow. There is no such thing as true faith that does not show itself in a life of godliness and good works. It can be no other way; our belief produces our action. If we believe in the love of God, we will work toward producing that love in ourselves by the way we live.

One of the ways we show true faith is to accept those times when trials and tribulations appear to overtake us. During those times, we should rejoice knowing that God has a greater purpose in mind for us. James teaches us that we should see those events as a learning opportunity. It is during these times when our faith is tested that our patience has a chance to grow and mature. Owning our trials – enduring and working through them rather than running away – is beneficial for our spiritual maturity (James 1:2, 3).



Benefitting from Trials – James 1:2-11

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,” (James 1:2). Joy is a state of delight and well-being that results from knowing and serving God. It is in direct proportion to his walk with the Lord. Rejoicing is then possible because he is in the Lord (Philippians 4:4). Joy is a fruit of a Spirit-led life (Galatians 5:22). Sin in a believer’s life robs us of joy because it separates us from God. (Psalm 51:7, 8, 12; Isaiah 59:1, 2).

Counting it all joy while facing one trial after another is not easy. As humans we find it is so much easier to complain, feel sorry for ourselves, and blame others. It is a part of our nature. We enjoy whining about how bad life is treating us although we are really good Christians. How many times have you encountered someone at the church building or in the grocery store, and it seems he cannot wait to tell you of his latest catastrophe or misfortune. In fact, what he needs is to recognize that God is at work in him. How much better it would be if that same person could say, when asked how he is doing, “I am doing great; God is busy working with me, helping me

grow in patience by allowing me this opportunity to work through and endure my trials.”

Of course, that isn't likely. As one writer puts it, just as a snake has to crawl to get around because it knows no other way, humans seem to have a need to feel sorry for themselves – we don't seem to know any other way either. But humans, however, do have the way of the cross. When we follow in Jesus' footsteps, we can continue to rejoice (Romans 8:28). Suffering should not be received with sadness or defeat, but with rejoicing because it leads to maturity and godly character (James 1:2-12; 1 Peter 1:6-9). There is no denying, however, that the unrighteous do sometimes prosper, and the righteous sometimes suffer (Psalm 73:2-12; Jeremiah 12:1-4).

Job is a perfect example of one who had true faith in spite of his trials and tribulations. He was met with multiple disasters. In a single day, he had his family, health, wealth, and reputation all taken from him. Job was a blameless and upright man, one who feared God and shunned evil. In spite of his trials, Job's faith never wavered (Job 1:1-22). In the end, Job was blessed for his strong faith in God by receiving twice as much as what he lost. (Job 42:10-14).

When we have a relationship with God, we can continue to rejoice even when troubles come. Jesus spoke of those who could rejoice even when persecuted (Matthew 5:12). The apostle Paul also wrote of rejoicing in suffering (Romans 5:3-5).

Our growth in faith leads to perfection and completion, where we lack for nothing. When trials and tribulations come, if we don't know how to handle them, we should pray to God for wisdom. He will provide us with the wisdom and knowledge we need to show patience and strength during the “valley times.” But when we ask for wisdom, we must ask in faith with no doubting. There should be no questions as to where our loyalty lies. Our faithfulness and devotion must be with

God, not the world. A show of instability is an indication that we are unstable in everything we do (1:6-8).

When you look into the mirror, do you see one who is growing to a spiritual point at which you can deal with trials and still maintain your joy as a child of God?

Dealing With Temptation – James 1:12-18

Temptation is the enticement to do evil where Satan is the tempter (Matthew 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5). Satan's intent is to destroy us through sin, leading to death and hell. God may allow testing for the purpose of bringing forth faith and patience, which ultimately honors Him. A blessing lies ahead for the one who endures temptation (James 1:12).

We are tempted when we are drawn away by our own desires and enticed (James 1:14). Once a person has been drawn away, desire becomes pregnant and gives birth to sin. When the full cycle is completed, sin in turn brings forth death. For the unbeliever, spiritual death is to be separated from God forever in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10, 15).

Paul explains that no temptation has overtaken you except what is common to man. God is faithful and He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation He will provide the way of escape, so that you are able to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:13). Look in the mirror of God's Word, what do you see? What is the mirror reflecting in your life?

Qualities We Need in Facing Trials – James 1:19, 20

If we are to endure our trials and tribulations so that we may benefit from them through our growth in patience, character and wisdom there are some things we need to keep in mind. James instructs us to always to be: (1) willing to listen; (2) slow to speak; and; (3) slow to wrath because the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God (James 1:19, 20).



James could not be clearer in what he is saying to us now as well as in the past. He advises us to experience joy, the peace which comes from trusting in God, when we are faced with trials in our lives. To help us to face our trials we should ask God for wisdom if we need to; but remember to ask in faith with no doubting. Finally as Christians, whatever our social or economic situation we should try to see beyond it to our eternal advantages. The poor should be glad that riches mean nothing to God, otherwise they would be considered unworthy. The rich should be glad that money means nothing to God, because money is easily lost. True wealth is found by developing our spiritual lives and not by developing our financial assets.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why does James recommend we count it all joy when we are faced with trials and tribulations? How do you handle your adversities?
2. Give an example of a biblical person who showed true faith during a time of extreme adversity. What happened to him? How do you think you would have handled the situation?
3. What is the nature of temptation? Is temptation sin?
4. If we are to endure our trials so that we may benefit from them through our growth in patience, character and wisdom what are some things we need to keep in mind?
5. **Group Discussion:** Discuss the impact of lesson one on your life so far as you look in the mirror of God's Word.