



October 30/31, 2010

James 1

“Ten Marks of Maturity” Part 1

Pastor Gary Hamrick

James, the half-brother¹ of Jesus, is the writer of the book of James. He was the leader of the church in Jerusalem according to [Acts 15](#). His nickname was Old Camel Knees, because he had such a deep prayer life that his knees were calloused from many hours of prayer. Church tradition indicates he was martyred in 62AD when he was thrown from the Temple wall. The book was written about 50AD, which makes it the earliest of all of the New Testament epistles. James wrote his letter to the Jewish Believers who were scattered beyond the land of Israel by persecution. The theme of the book is practical Christian living, which is easy to see since there are more than 50 imperatives. The book of James is essentially God's instruction manual for making mature Christians.

In this study we're going to look at ways to evaluate whether or not a person is growing in their relationship with the Lord and going on to Christian maturity. We'll also learn that the first two marks of a maturing Christian are perseverance under trials and putting God's Word into practice.

Persevere Under Trials

1. [James 1:2](#) says, *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials...”*
 - a. There are many kinds:
 - i. Trials in the world
 - ii. Trials in relationships
 - iii. Trials in health
 - iv. Trials from Satan

¹ [Matthew 13:55-56](#) tells us that Jesus had four half-brothers and at least two sisters. According to [John 7:5](#), they were not Believers at first.

- b. James is not suggesting that you throw a party when something difficult happens, or that you put on a “plastic Jesus face” so you can pretend everything is fine when nothing is fine!
- c. Albert Barnes² writes concerning how Christians are to understand a trial: “We are not to consider it as a punishment, a curse, or a calamity.”
 - i. In other words, every trial is not a reflection of a bad God, but of a fallen world
 - ii. We must know that we have a good God who will see us through, which is where the joy comes in, because we know that no matter what we face, God will never nor forsake us. ([Hebrews 13:4–6](#))
- d. [Psalm 34:15](#) – *“The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry.”*
- e. [Isaiah 41:10](#) – *“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”*
- f. Because we know that *“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble,”* we can have joy in him when we face trials of various kinds. ([Psalm 46:1](#))

2. Trials come for three reasons:

- a. Maturation
 - i. [Romans 5:3–5](#) – *“Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”*
 - ii. Trials build character in our lives and develop a deeper walk with God that we aren’t able to gain through other means.
 - iii. Someone has said that, “Character is forged on the anvil of adversity.”
 - iv. God grows us, matures us, refines us, and deepens our walk with him through trials.
 - v. “When a ship’s carpenter needed a timber to make a mast for a sailing vessel, he did not cut it in the valley, but up on the mountainside where the trees had been buffeted by the winds. These trees, he knew, were the strongest of all. Hardship is not our choice; but if we face it bravely, it can toughen the fiber of our souls.”³ – Billy Graham

² Albert Barnes (1798-1870), American theologian. <http://www.ccel.org/b/barnes/>

³ Dr. Bill Bright, *The Joy of Faithful Obedience* (Colorado Springs, CO: Bright Media Group, 2005), 53
http://books.google.com/books?id=VDr5QpK1c8cC&pg=PA53&lpg=PA53&dq=billy+graham+When+a+ship's+carpenter+needed+timber+to+make+a+mast+for+a+sailing+vessel,+he+did+not&source=bl&ots=n86FmCz5WV&sig=MD1Y2DjxuYholCO9CpaaOcrKji8&hl=en&ei=7tzRTOPOM4SglAff8LXQDA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBMQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=billy%20graham%20When%20a%20ship's%20carpenter%20needed%20timber%20to%20make%20a%20mast%20for%20a%20sailing%20vessel%2C%20he%20did%20not&f=false

- b. Correction
 - i. Sometimes the trials we face are brought on by our own bad choices; we know we are disobeying God and that he isn't pleased with our choices, but somehow we think he's going to just look the other way.
 - ii. God is actively involved in bringing correction when people make sinful choices.
 - 1. Biblical examples of people whose trials were a result of their own sinful choices include:
 - a. The Prodigal Son squandered his life on wild living until he ran out of money and hope, and it was only when he had to forage for food in the pigpen that he woke up to God's correcting work in his life.
 - b. Jonah disobeyed God and tried to runaway, only to find himself in the belly of a great fish.⁴
- c. Direction
 - i. Sometimes a difficulty can actually be the way God redirects our lives, and it could be that he has other purposes that we can't see until hardship moves us in a different direction.
 - 1. One example of God's redirecting work is Paul, who was on a ship sailing in the Mediterranean Sea heading to Rome when God redirected him to the island of Malta, where Paul was used by God to bring healing to a large number of sick people. [\(Acts 27-28\)](#)
 - a. The storm didn't come because Paul had done something wrong; it was just the tool, so to speak, that God used.
- d. No matter what form trials may take or for what purpose, God's promise is that he will bless the person who perseveres.
 - i. [James 1:12](#) - *"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him."*

Put God's Word Into Practice

- 3. The only thing worse than not hearing God's Word is hearing it and not putting it into practice.
 - a. To not hear the Word is ignorance.
 - b. To hear the Word and not put it into practice is disobedience, which is evidence of being self-deceived.

⁴ The Bible says a "huge fish" swallowed Jonah. [\(Jonah 1:17\)](#) The Hebrew word is *dag*, which doesn't necessarily mean a whale.

- c. **James 1:25** - *“But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it - he will be blessed in what he does.”*

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read **James 1:1-4, 12, and 21-25** to provide an overview for this study.
3. Spend time talking about experiences you've had regarding trials.
 - a. How were you able to persevere?
 - b. Were you able to see the Lord's hand in the situation?
 - c. Were you able to see the Lord working behind the scene, so to speak?
4. Read and discuss **Romans 5:3-5**.
5. Allow the people in your group to share their specific experiences about times when the Lord has used difficult times to bring them into a deeper level of spiritual maturity.
 - a. Read and discuss the quote from Billy Graham (See #2a above).
6. Allow the people in your group to share their specific experiences about times when the Lord used difficult times to bring correction in response to sinful choices and disobedience.
 - a. Briefly reviewing the accounts of Jonah and the Prodigal Son may jumpstart your conversation.
7. Allow the people in your group to share their specific experiences about times when the Lord used difficult times to redirect them to the place he wanted them.
8. Spend time talking about your reaction to Pastor Gary's encounter with the co-pastor of St. Luke's United Methodist Church⁵ in Washington, D.C?
 - a. Use this link <http://www.cornerstonechapel.net/player/?i=547> to access the teaching library. Move to 25:50 of the teaching to hear the account of Pastor Gary's August 2010 visit to the church his grandfather built when he was a pastor at St. Luke's in the 1950s.
9. How are you intentionally putting God's Word into practice?

⁵ <http://www.saintlukesmethodist.org/>

10. Spend time talking about your Bible reading plan and the impact the Bible is making in your life.
11. Close your time with prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person recognize that God's at work in the midst of their trials; to understand that the Lord is about the business of maturing them, correcting them when that is what is needed, and directing and redirecting them to the place(s) he wants them; to develop a deeper love for the Word of God that they might know the Word and put it into practice.