

Do Not Be Deceived (James 1:1-14)

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[0 : 00] James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations. Greetings. Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do. Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. But the rich should take pride in their humiliation, since they will pass away like a wildflower.

For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant. Its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.

[1 : 14] Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial, because having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. When tempted, no one should say, God is tempting me.

For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone. But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin.

And sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death. Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created. Welcome Pastor Albert. Thank you.

Thank you. Okay, for some, this is the third message you have heard from me. Had enough of me already, right? But, yeah, it's been really great and very, very inspiring during the camp.

[2 : 25] When I walked in on Wednesday morning, when Nick was about to give a message on that morning, when the worship team led worship, and Janet gave her little testimony just before, and I just looked around the chapel, and I just felt this kind of brokenness in amongst the people.

Not that I had the supernatural kind of zap from God, no. It's just because I kind of know a lot of you guys.

For some, actually, I hold you in my hands when you were babies. So, when I was, you know, I was there, and I just sensed that, yeah, a lot of tears, a lot of hurt, a lot of pain might have kind of grown up with a lot of you guys.

And, yeah, I was, I did not cry, but I was here, I was very heavy. But, somehow, I was expecting God as doing things.

As on Tuesday, Pastor William has spoke about God's love to the church and to, you know, to us and how to respond, you know.

[3 : 58] So, also, when, yeah, and then Nick was speaking about how special we are in God, and I was grateful to see the people's hearts were touched, and they would come out and respond in a very, you know, maybe first time, it was very courageous of them to actually come out in amongst the friends, you know.

There's something, this is something I need to do. So, it was great, yeah. But, I think, I think in our pain, in our sorrow, in our hurt, often we get deceived at times, you know.

Oh, it's, I didn't do anything about it. I couldn't do anything about it. It was people was hurting me, and my parents, my parents' fault. It was others' fault, you know, my mates' fault.

They hurt me, and now I'm bleeding inside. And often we have this kind of feeling and blaming on others. But, actually, during those times, even in times of hurts and pain, actually, our response to them can either make it better or worse.

So, it's not easy to differentiate the whole thing about suffering or, you know, going through circumstances.

[5 : 28] The book of James, actually, right in the beginning of the book, the first chapter we just read, do not be deceived. You know, we need to find out, you know, what the cause of the things that we are going through.

Am I accountable to it as well? Have I trusted God to change these things?

Or actually, my own sinful self to actually make that worse, make it even more messy? So, I think the Word of God will really want to teach us and show us, you know, with the right perception, it will help us to have right performances.

You know, if we have the wrong perception, and then we behave wrongly. So, let the Word of God teach us, okay? James, chapter 1, verse 1 to 18.

Actually, on Sunday and Saturday services, we actually, in this three months, we are studying the book of James. So, that was my first sermon for Sunday and Saturday last week.

[6 : 42] And I know you guys are doing Matthew, so it's fine. I mean, I think it was really good. From the beginning of the year, we all did the book of Ephesians, okay? And then we all had about six or seven sermons for sufferings, okay?

And now, on Sunday morning, Saturday, we're doing James. Actually, the first chapter of James dealt with sufferings. So, it echoes to what Pastor William has spoken about, about all these suffering topics.

And the book of Job, last week, was it? Yeah. I mean, you know, Job, I mean, the friends of Job, they might not have got it right.

But Job was not totally right neither. You know, was he truly 100% upright? Was he really, really fearing God? No, there was something in him.

He needed to really perceive and discern, you know, what he was encountering. So, I think this message will speak to all of us, okay?

[7 : 46] So, do we have, yeah, suffering, okay? Whether, you know, what sort of things were going through during those difficult times? Were they trials?

Were they temptations? You know, the book of James will have a bit of an answer to that. So, the 18 verses we have just read, okay? The dispersed Christian whom James was writing to, they were in difficulties.

And James wrote the whole epistles to them to really encourage them to look up to their God, who is gracious and steadfast, so that they can see clearer of the course of their situation and not being deceived.

And often, as I said, you know, in our growing up, in our encountering of difficulties, you know, we often, you know, we go along with our feelings and thinking we, you know, blame other people.

You know, it's their fault. It's my parents' fault. It's all because we went to this school. That's why we get bullied and all these sort of things. I'm blaming to every other thing but myself, okay?

[8 : 57] But what, I'm not saying that, no, everything was, I don't have, you know, I'm not saying that we don't have anything to do with it about it, but I'm saying that we need to think and discern, okay?

So, this passage would really encourage us and remind us we are to trust in a good and faithful God. He knows everything that we go through. And we pray for wisdom in all our circumstances so that we grasp the truth behind them.

And we know better of our situation and then we will act and react in a godly way. So, let's have a look at this book of James, okay?

Now, the book of James, it was written just before, around these times. Now, this is A.D. 70 when Jerusalem was actually seized.

It was actually captured. Jerusalem, the temple was actually teared down, tore down by the Roman armies. Why? Prior to that, because the whole of the Palestine was actually, you know, Roman colony, okay?

[10 : 09] And, but always there was this kind of upheaval, the conflict between the Jews in Palestine towards the Romans.

Because the Romans, they were Gentiles, they were corrupt, they were unjust, and they forced the Jews to do certain things against their religions.

So, always there was a lot of this really zealous one, what they really call zealots, you know? It's like guerrillas, okay? They always kind of fighting against the Roman armies.

And it was about A.D. 50, A.D. 60, they had a lot of these upheavals and conflicts. And Roman army had enough of that.

So, A.D. 70, okay, the general took the armies and ran and just tore down Jerusalem altogether. A.D. 70, and you heard about these stories about Masada and these wars, and it was actually happening around those times.

[11 : 18] And the book of James was written just about 10, 15 years prior to that. And you could see there was a lot of, yeah, discontent about the Jews towards Roman armies.

And a lot of people from Jerusalem would just run away, go to various places, okay? So, James was written to the people, so they were dispersed.

Jerusalem was here, and they were just, because Jerusalem was not a desirable place to live anymore. So, they just fled.

Some fled to North Africa. Some would just go along to Asia Minor, that's Turkey today, and some across to Greece, and some in Rome.

So, the book of James, that was the brother of Jesus, and now he called himself a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. That was actually his, Jesus was his bigger brother, okay?

[12 : 25] And he was writing to the 12 tribes. What 12 tribes? That is a symbol for Jewish Christians, okay? They scattered amongst the nations.

So, they scattered among different places. Just like a lot of us, our parents, you know, we all, we didn't born here. A lot of our parents were not born here. Most of our parents were not born here.

We came from China, Hong Kong, because they really wanted to have a better place for you guys to establish the families.

So, they felt that New Zealand was a better place, okay? And then they fled. And these were people in dispersion, okay? So, James was writing to these, you know, for the first immigrants, I mean, lives would be hard.

I mean, probably we don't feel anything now. For them, when they first came from their own motherland, and to experience things, you know, it wouldn't be easy, okay?

[13 : 32] I remember when my granddad came over, it was in gold rush days, and they had to pay £100 for the tax, you know? £100, how much would that cost?

It would cost maybe about 10 years' salaries, you know? And then they were being ill-treated. It was a lot of discriminations. I remember when I came over, the first day in the school, and I was actually being bullied.

You know, I had my pie in my hand, and it was smacked out of me, and then, and just punched in my face, and then, and ching chong, gentlemen, put your finger up, you know? And that's what they sang, that's what they sang to me.

And I was the one, I was one of the only two Chinese in the whole school. And the other Chinese could not speak Chinese. You know, times were hard in those days.

And these people, they were in difficult times. And Paul, I mean, James, was writing to them to encourage them.

[14 : 39] But even though you're in difficult times, it doesn't mean that you are, you know, you can shift your blame. You really need to look into your hearts. What are the courses that we are going through?

Okay, so we'll have a look at that. Firstly, we see the definition of temptation. Okay, because it says that, you know, when tempted, no one should say, God is tempting me.

Now, what's this? Now, when James was writing to them, you see in verse 3, when they said, where you were in trials.

Now, you know the trials and the temptation, actually, in the original language, that's the same word. Perasmus. That is the same word.

In verse 2, when you're in trials, you know, all kinds of sufferings. And in verse 13, when tempted, no one should say, God is tempting me. You know, temptation and trials, same word.

[15 : 41] So it depends how you see it. Okay, God does not tempt us. Where in that kind of situation, one, we're looking at this, oh, you're being tempted.

Who tempts you? The devil. But eventually, he says that, yes, the devil can tempt you, but when you sin, the devil can't make me sin.

He says that it's my own evil desire that put, now, it's like he used the image of conception. Like, you know, having a fetus in me and mom, you know, in me in there and conceived.

And then, 10 months later, the baby came out and that was sin. All right? So he used that illustration to really, I think it was quite vivid to illustrate, it was not the devil who can make you sin.

It's when you sin, it's me, my own evil desire. Certainly, God does not want you to sin. God used the situation to test me.

[16 : 52] Pay Rasmus. But same word, Satan, pay Rasmus. But me, do I listen to Satan or do I listen to God?

You know? One of the biblical scholars puts temptation in a very interesting way.

Okay? Like, see. Can you see your house there? Okay. Now, see, just imagine, okay, we live in one of those houses, okay?

What's temptation like? Okay. Temptation is like things roaming around the street, lurking around the streets, okay?

I mean, it's normal in our lives. We are tempted, okay? The difficult things that happen, you know, we can either react, it depends how we react to it, okay?

[17 : 53] It's quite normal. But the thing is, when you open the door and allow that temptation to come into my house, that's where the problem begins.

When you go out, you know, go to work and then driving, I mean, surely, I mean, they're all over the show, you know, you can't do nothing about it. You don't need to quench it because it's all there.

But the thing is, if you want to take some or you open the door, please come in. Certainly, you know, that will, your evil desire will let that become, you know, conceived and then 10 months later, that's sin.

I think, yeah, I mean, so Jesus taught us to lead us not into temptation. You know, there are temptations all around. You can't do nothing about it.

But what we can do is to trust in God so that we can overcome temptations. And God uses those times to test me and I am to trust in Him.

[19 : 04] All right? That's the definition of temptation. And consideration in temptation. In verse 2, He said, consider it pure joy.

Consider it pure joy. What? Are you crazy? You know, when you're in difficulty, when you're in temptation, you know what? Consider it pure joy? I mean, it's bad enough to enjoy it.

And you tell me to enjoy it? To enjoy temptation? Are you crazy? You're naive, you're Christian, you know, faith. Why? Why? Well, Paul says that he is not ignoring the temptation, but he's saying that actually because through temptation, there are effects, impacts can have in my life.

And certainly, we'll have that hope. And that hope will really bring positive changes in my life. Okay? And he uses this word, perseverance.

Now, perseverance, the original meaning is like carrying heavy loads. Okay? Now, perseverance in today's term is like, I think we've watered it down quite a bit.

[20 : 21] You know, we're being patient. We persevere. Just, oh, just waiting at the lights. You know, oh, how come it's 20 seconds, still red lights. Come on.

Okay. And 20 seconds pass. Okay, we move on. Oh, I persevered through the traffic lights. Oh, I waited for my girlfriend just to get ready.

Well, come on. It's at 4.30. Go to church. Now, 4.30, you're still in your bedroom. What? You know, we think these were patience or perseverance.

But perseverance is really like your long time suffering carrying heavy loads. But you know you will need to. Because if you don't, things will fall in pieces.

Yes. I tell you, there was a story. Not a story, but a real life thing. When I was serving in Hong Kong in a family, it was a couple.

- [21 : 22] It was actually, the girl was really, really good friend of Simo. And they all grew up together at church. But when she was dating, we knew that that guy was, he was not really genuine.
- But he just liked her. And she was just, you know, when you fall in love, love is blind. Love cannot see. And she just went for her. And I was not a pastor at the end.
- I was just kind of serving my intern. I couldn't say too much about it. And everyone didn't look, you know, didn't think it was a good matchup. But anyway, they got married.
- And eventually, yeah, they got married. Things were okay. But when the son was born, the son was born with such a handicap.
- It's just from the head, there is nothing down there. There's no responses. No nerves. Nothing. You know, he had to stay on the specially made chair.
- [22 : 22] It was just morning and that's 24 hours caring. Okay. And her husband just took off.
- Just took off. Just like that. Just left. No one could find him. Okay. And she was just end up just for, I think it was for 16 years.
- Okay. 16 years that a mother persevered through all these difficult times.
- 16 years. 16 years. 16 years. The boy had passed away. 17 years. 17 years. And she kept her faith.
- It was really, really difficult financially, emotionally. Practically, you know. But through that, God has really transformed her life to be a strong.
- [23 : 25] I mean, it's hard. It's hard to answer these questions, you know, rationally. Very hard to answer. Very hard to comfort, too.
- But as you see, it's not 16 days, not 16 months. It's 16 years. You know, even at times when we go back to Hong Kong, we see her. You know, she's still strong and serving God.
- Things I can't, we can't, as pastor, I cannot respond or explain. All right. But during those difficult times, she persevered.
- And in these sort of testing, she considered, yeah, she cannot answer those questions, but she considered God was with him and he has a purpose in her life.
- Same to us. And often when we are in those situations, you know, people, you know, as the problem was, Job's friends was trying to explain things, right?
- [24 : 33] But the best thing to do was just to sit alongside. Just to sit and be with the one who suffered. And let God speak to them.
- And often, no words can actually comfort. And at the end, Job was kind of, his eyes were open when God asked him more questions.
- You know, I heard about you. Now I truly see you. And this sister truly see God after these sort of perseverances. Her life elevated to another level.
- And often I think if we don't go through these sort of things, you know, we would be naive. You know, we would think life should be all smooth and things should be all gone all right.
- And if it does happen to us, we just would not know, would not appreciate, cannot have this empathy toward those who suffer. So consider it's joy.
- [25 : 48] Yeah, in a sense, yes. Consider because God allowed it and he has a purpose in it. We don't pray for it. We don't want to ask for that kind of suffering.
- But when we consider that God has a purpose and we should be joyful in following and trusting him. And thirdly, oh, and sorry.

Anything happen? No. And he says that in verse 12. He says that blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because having stood the test, the person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

That crown of life, it was not the real crown that the king, the emperor, the Caesar had with all the jewels on, the heavy metal ones.

No. It was the one who made of leaves as a wreath when the marathoners finished the race, you know, the one who finished first.

[26 : 56] So he received that crown, that wreath. And today, I think in a lot of sports events, especially in marathon, they still put that wreath onto the one who came first, right?

So it was always in the Bible said, you know, in a marathon of life, we consider to persevere, to trust in God, to run the race.

And at the end, God will give us this crown. And that crown will last. Not like the one, you know, not like those wreaths that, you know, those leaves will dry up one day.

But we'll run the race, and God will bring us and give us this crown of life. And that's why we have hope and to run, consider this joy to go through this test or this temptation.

And lastly, our attitude, disposition towards temptation. There was two. One, we should trust and pray.

[28 : 02] In verse 5 and 6, if any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask. Ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of sea blown and tossed by the wind. Now, I think for wisdom, for Jews, they would understand very clearly.

The whole book in the Old Testament, the Book of Proverbs, talked about wisdom. But that wisdom is not the human intellect, not the, you know, how much knowledge we know.

But it's the beginning of wisdom is to the fear of the Lord. So I think all the, when the Jewish Christian, when they read about what James was written, when you lack wisdom, you ask God.

Oh, yes, they knew. Yeah, that wisdom is to how to interact, how to encounter things in life, especially in difficult times.

[29 : 08] We don't have the wisdom, we don't know how to handle it. Pray, ask God, but by faith, you know, should not waver. We should believe that God will hear our prayer and He will give us the wisdom.

And secondly, to insist that God is a generous God. Verse 17, that's why this is the month, the verse of the month, you know.

In verse 16, don't be deceived, my brothers and sisters. When we are in difficult times, don't be deceived. You know, this is somebody's fault or what, you know, this is bad for me.

Don't be deceived. In verse 17, God is a God who is generous and who is faithful, okay.

Every good and perfect gift is from above. Everything that we can enjoy is from God. Coming down from the Father of heavenly lights.

[30 : 11] What does it mean? The Father who created all the heavenly light bodies, like moon, sun, stars. He is the creator of the heavenly lights.

And who does not change like shifting shadows. It's also another description of, like, the sun, you know. The sun comes up in the morning and you see, you're standing here, the shadow will be over there.

And the sun in the middle, at noon, the shadow will be so little. But when the sun goes down on the other side, the shadow will be there. And, you know, even though the sun, the moon, you know, they change in different times.

But he says that God doesn't change. Okay. He doesn't change. And because he's given us this new life through his word.

And there's something that really shows us that his faithfulness and his power. So in our trials, in our temptations, let us see clearer.

[31 : 28] God has a purpose in it. He does not waste a moment. He has his purpose to build me up. And even, I think, even non-Christians, when they look at difficult times, sufferings, they would have a sense of knowing that there must be a purpose in it.

Okay. There is a book. I see it in Pastor William's desk. And also, I think there is in the library. Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering.

Okay. In a chapter, one of the authors, Tim Keller, Timothy Keller, he was mentioning a counselor, a non-Christian counselor, very famous in the U.S.

And he thinks that, initially, he thought, suffering is bad for people. Really. Because, you know, I don't think God wants to suffer.

But God allowed that. That's different altogether, right? But God does not want you, because your life is too good. I just want you to go through some hard times. God's not like that.

[32 : 44] But God allowed that. Okay. God allowed that. It has a purpose in it. But it's, you know, it's traumatic. So this counselor says, no, no, yeah, suffering is bad for people.

But then, as he counseled people more, especially he came across this guy, Greg. And it was a normal kind of American guy.

He was a college professor, assistant professor. He was trying to write his book so that he can, you know, promote and to be proper, to be a professor. And he's got newly married and things, just a normal, you know, American young man.

But things happened, things went wrong. His wife went away, ran away with another guy. They had two children.

That was bad. And that really shattered him. And he was trying to write his book. If he doesn't finish his book, he will be demoted, you know. So, and things were just happening so sudden.

[33 : 52] And he really wanted to get his two children back. So, with two years lawsuits, and he spent a lot of money, a lot of stress.

And he was trying to write his book. And a lot, just things just went really hard. And he went to this counselor, you know. And he's trying to just talk and let him speak.

And there's really not much he could do. But then, things happened. His parents, who was living on the other side of the state, sold their home and came back and bought a house nearby.

So that they can look after the two grandchildren. By that time, he had the children back. He can look after them then. You know, even have the children, you still need to work.

And who's going to look after them, you know. But his parents were willing to do that. Christian parents. And he started to attend church in a more serious way.

[34 : 53] Serious way. And his friends at church and brothers and sisters really offered really practical help. And he went through those dark times.

And he found hope. And eventually, his life, his focus of life changed altogether. Yes, he finished his book.

He got promoted. But that was not important anymore. He appreciated the parents who really loved them. And he found God, you know, has purpose in that.

And, of course, the counselor didn't understand. Right? But he was amazed to see, wow, how come this life, you know, was really crawling through the tunnel. Now he's standing up and walking and running and jumping, you know, really happy.

Wow. This is what God can do to us. If we have faith to trust, to eyes to open, to see, you know, God does not waste any of these circumstances.

[35 : 58] He is willing, he's wanting to build us up through all that. So don't be deceived. Every good and wonderful things given by God.

He's not wanting us to, you know, it doesn't want to cause us to stumble and fall. He really wanted through all these difficult moments to test us so that by faith, we, our life, will be strong.

And to walk with him. So this is my message to you guys. Let's trust our God is a good God.