

Think about that time when you experienced the frustration of living in two worlds? Nothing is more difficult than trying to keep two opposites separated. In fact, Jesus said you really can't. Especially when it comes to serving the things of God and the things of man.

Today we kick off our sermon series on the book of James, which I am calling Jim Time. And in our passage from chapter 1, we find James describing a person who is trying to live in two different worlds. James has a name for such a person. A double minded person. A person who waves and waffles over every challenge, every decision, and every potential direction for their life. The way this person goes depends on the pressures felt at any given moment...

Let's talk for a little bit about this letter written by James.

The first question that might come to mind is which James wrote this letter. The New Testament mentions three men named James. There is James, the brother to John. James and John were the disciples of Jesus known the sons of thunder. Picking this James would be a good idea except for one thing. Herod killed this James before this letter was written.

Next there is James the less. "The less" literally, "the little" He is also known as the son of Alphaeus. Some scholars doubt that this was the author of our letter in question. For them, too many facts about his life and the words in the book simply don't match up. So let's look at the third James mentioned in the New Testament.

This would be James, the brother of Jesus. Now some are shocked to learn that Jesus had siblings. They think that Mary had no other children. But in fact she did have other children by Joseph. In Galatians Paul specifically mentions going to James, the brother of Jesus to report on his first mission trip.

Scholars have said that James the less couldn't have written this letter, but here's a fun fact. Both James the less and James the brother of Jesus are said to have been martyred in the same way. Death by stoning by Jews at the temple in Jerusalem.

That James the brother of Jesus wrote this letter is important because it gives credibility to the words recorded here. James was an important leader in the church in Jerusalem. He was one of the “Super Apostles” of the Church. In **Acts 4** he and Peter suffer persecution and opposition for healing a lame man. In **Acts 15** James is part of the discussion about including Gentile believers in the faith. James is the only apostle named as delivering the rules for these Gentile believers.

These important words, written by James were meant to be heard by both believers and non-believers all over the world. His target audience was Jews of the diaspora. (A fancy word for exiles) Over the course of ten sermons we will look at James’ powerful and practical words. Words teaming with wisdom and warning...Let’s begin.

Life is filled with trouble - Be glad even if you have a lot of it!

From James 1:2 My brothers and sisters, whenever you face various trials, consider it all joy.

This is Wisdom!?!?!?!? Is he nuts? Seriously. How can he suggest something so ludicrous. Consider it joy to face trials? Problems

But reluctantly, we have to admit it. James is wise. Yes, he offers a ludicrous statement, but it is one born out of James’ personal experiences. He’s lived the reality of the outcome of trials. He knows that trials lead to a new level of maturity.

Ok, we see where this is going. So what else does this little ray of sunshine have for us?

Verse 3-4 Because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance complete its work, so that you may be complete and whole, lacking in nothing.

The word used for joy here can also mean cheerful or gladness. Don’t mistake this for happiness. Happiness comes from external things. (A fast sports car, getting a promotion, the perfect spouse?) Joy and cheerfulness comes from inside. It involves an intentional DECISION about how you choose to conduct yourself as you walk through this grand adventure called life. Some people are just plain grumpy all the time and yet some are joy filled and joyful. That is a

decision they've made. (But in all fairness, there are times when life just dogpiles on you. A grumpy moment or two are understandable. It's the long-term decision to remain grumpy that's the problem.)

So why exactly does James want us to be EXCEEDINGLY glad EVEN when we have a lot of trouble? Get ready for James' stream of conscious progression of thought.

- Trouble tests faith
- The testing of faith produces endurance
- Endurance results in maturity

When things are going well, you are not as challenged to learn things about yourself or about God. Sorry to say, but that's the truth.

It's when we face troubles that our faith is tested. Makes us ask questions like. Am I strong? Can I withstand the winds of doubt and fear? What will I do when someone attacks my views about God and faith?

Trouble exposes the strength or weakness of our faith and when we successfully survive the trouble; pass the test; stand against the trial we gain a new kind of strength – We build endurance.

When I was a kid, I remember reading magazines like Highlights and Mad Magazine. As I would read, I would also come across ads. Especially ones that described how a scrawny kid got sand kicked in his face. If that scrawny kid would just order a kit, they could become muscle-bound. Full of strength and power. I was a scrawny and shy child. Now I never had sand kicked in my face, but I could have used times of muscles, strength and power. Alas, I never ordered a kit like that. I never became the Wonder Woman described in the ad.

It was a good thing. Because that kit never would have turned me into Wonder Woman. There is only one way to go from an immature skinny body to a mature, strong, and powerful one – you have to be willing to endure physical exercise. No pain – no gain.

But here is the problem:

It's easy to remember to be glad when you merely have sore muscles. It's not as easy to be glad when you are facing heart wrenching troubles!

How could anyone possibly be glad when there isn't enough money at the end of the month?

How could anyone be glad when they lose their job? Or what about the screaming kids and the lost car keys. I really don't remember being glad when we got a flat tire on the way back to Tucson from San Diego. (I was grateful that the Border Patrol guy saw it before I started on a 60-mile stretch with no turn arounds)

Can anyone really be glad when they learn that their best friend has inoperable brain cancer? It's not easy to be glad when you are facing trouble.

And this is where we turn to God.

Vs 5 If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you.

Who loves asking for help, raise your hands? Did you know that some people really struggle to ask for help? I've struggled with it myself. Telling myself that this problem isn't worth bothering someone about.

I remember once my Grandpa was going to drive from Des Moines to Cedar Rapids to see my mom and dad and I. He ended up spending all day driving around Cedar Rapids. By the time he found our house, he could only spend ½ hour with us before he needed to head back to Des Moines. What took him so long to find us? He wouldn't stop and ask for directions. (This was way before the days of cell phones!)

Is that the real reason why Moses spent 40 years in the wilderness, because he refused to stop and ask for directions?

I think there's another reason we are reluctant to ask for wisdom. It's because we're afraid of the answer God might give us.

But do you really believe that God wants you to be a loser? No...God wants us to win! God is on our side. It's like that cute cartoon with the little boy on it that says, "I know I'm somebody because God doesn't make no junk." God doesn't make losers.

Living by faith requires commitment. It requires Radical Commitment. This means stepping out where we cannot see.

Radical Commitment is the only way to become an Enduring Person of God

Vs 6 & 8 But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. <sup>7,8</sup> For the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord. (The KJV adds in vs 7, "Let not that man think he'll receive anything from the Lord.")

The doubters. They cannot make up their mind. They cannot be trusted. They cannot expect the Lord to give them anything.

Don't be a doubter! Don't be double-minded! Make up your mind!

By confidently asking for God's wisdom – you will be freed of fear and doubt.

By confidently asking for God's wisdom – you will find yourself at peace.

By confidently asking for God's wisdom – You'll find yourself like Solomon, receiving wisdom.

When we worry about trusting God, we run the risk of being someone who can't be expected to receive the best that God has to offer.

Radical Commitment is the only way to become an Enduring Person of God

Say this with me: Radical Commitment is the only way I can become an Enduring Person of God...

It's also the only way for a church to become an enduring church of God.

St. John's United Methodist Church. 137 years of welcoming, learning and working.

Believe me this church has seen trials in those 137 years. Wars, the Great Depression, the Doxol Explosion. But on the other side of these trials St. John's is still committed. Still striving to work hard in our three purpose areas

[Show purpose statement slide]

Welcoming: We welcome and affirm all people to experience the love of God.

No matter who you are or where you've been – you are welcome at St. Johns

Learning: Learn to follow the example of Jesus

As John Wesley taught, we believe that the Means of Grace are the way in which we Stay in Love with God. This includes the study of Scripture and prayer.

Working: Work to be a blessing to our community and the world.

Nana's Pantry, the clothing closet, vets' meals, football dinners. Just a few of the many ways St. John's reaches out to the community.

Nothing worthwhile comes easy...So let's be Glad, even if we have lots of trouble!