

The background of the cover is a stylized, high-contrast illustration. It depicts a terraced landscape, possibly a series of terraced fields or a mountain slope, with a dense forest of tall, thin trees on the right side. In the distance, there are rolling mountains under a sky with scattered clouds. The overall style is reminiscent of a woodcut or a high-contrast digital filter applied to a photograph.

# the book of James

The Uncomfortable Process of  
Resurfacing the Believer's Soul

Herb Paynter

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God uses tests and trials like a carpenter uses sandpaper

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## This is a Test. It is Only a Test...

For those over the age of sixty, this phrase brings back vivid memories. Back in the days of black and white TVs and radio broadcasts, this phrase was preceded by a frightening shrill pulsed sound blaring out of radios and TVs. This was followed by an ominous test pattern that appeared on the screen, followed by a monotone voice solemnly instructing listeners that this interruption to current programming was a spontaneous test of the Emergency Broadcasting System and was intended to practice the critical instructions about a potential national emergency.

The book of James presents just such a description of the varied personal emergencies and problems that believers can expect to encounter in their lives. While there are certainly very real and even dire situations that we all will face at some point in our lives, James' treatise presents a very clear teaching of how God uses these situations to develop our faith.

As I am writing this study, the entire world is experiencing the first four weeks of the Corona virus global pandemic. Every day the worldwide number of persons infected, hospitalized, and even dying mounts at an alarming rate, in some countries overwhelming their entire medical systems. This worldwide pandemic is truly biblical in proportion, very scary to all humans and a very real test a believer's faith.

While some would question how God would allow something like this to happen, James makes it clear that God uses severe trials, not to punish, but to strengthen people's faith and their dependence upon Him.

In addition to the frightening health threat, the US stock market continues to lose its value, business are closed across the nation, people in every state are quarantined and

ordered to stay in their houses. The US economy is in peril with no known rescue on the horizon. The entire social fabric of society is being stretched beyond limits and the prospect of recovery looks very poor.

The question promotes speculation that this pandemic might be a precursor to the “end of the age” spoken of in the Bible. Whether it is or not, we simply don’t know. What we do know is that our belief and faith will be severely tested during this time. While this situation is certainly frightening, we must view even this seemingly impossible problem from a biblical perspective, and that is exactly what the book of James is about.

It is exactly now that we need clear instruction and leadership, not only in our government and culture, but from our spiritual leaders. While this exact problem is not addressed in the Bible, many other world-shaking events have been and there are solid lessons and examples to be learned by studying them.

One thing for certain... we can better comprehend what God intends for us to learn from this by gaining a clear view of “tests” from Scripture. The first thing we must accept is this... This is a test, it is only a test.

## *Introduction*

In times like these, do you have a problem with some of the platitudes in the Bible like "...goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life," when you know that whatever is following you around is anything but good!"

How about the one that says "all things work together for good to them that love God..." sincerely knowing that you love God, but can hardly say that all things in your life are working out good! Maybe you've questioned the verse that says "...my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory..." knowing that your life is like an out-of-control car on an abandoned road with an empty gas tank.

Scripture tells us that we are to be Christ's ambassadors. But how can we honestly tell others about our peace-filled Christian life when our own wheels are coming off? How can we tell others that the Lord will always meet their needs, when we feel like He isn't meeting ours? Isn't that called hypocrisy?

The book of James has powerful answers to all these questions. Put in its proper perspective, James delivers the winning battle plan for believers caught in the thick of life's most trying situations. His no-nonsense gut-level portrayal of faith that functions under fire is a discourse that needs to be studied for what it is... a serious real-time answer for soldiers in a heated battle of the spiritual war.

The book of James is not a discourse on personal salvation. Forcing the eternal destination issue into James' dissertation has always created serious doctrinal problems and even worse, completely destroyed his clear-cut and critical message. The book of James is a key treatise on advanced Christian living, and is a "must" survival manual for believers overwhelmed with personal adversity. Get ready for a fresh look at a much-misunderstood book.

## *Assumptions*

First, If we read the book of James as a single cohesive message rather than a series of theological snippets, the book will come into very clear focus, and apparent conflicts with Paul's "faith alone" message will disappear.

Second, recipients. James is writing exclusively to believers, and about mature believer issues. To James, all believers are in training for a higher calling. Paul's style of overt assurance of God's unqualified love and acceptance is conspicuously absent. James is presenting a serious directive to believers about mature issues.

Third, degree of difficulty. This is not the book for the spiritually immature. James delivers a postgraduate course in Christian living for well-grounded believers. James has no bedside manner whatsoever. But he speaks with the frankness and deliberateness of a surgeon performing exploratory surgery. His delivery is direct and his intent is to present the unflinching truth with candor and frankness.



# Chapter One

## ***James 1:1***

*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations:  
Greetings.*

This unique salutation has very significant meaning. This is the only book addressed to the "scattered tribes." This epistle is written to the Christian converts living amidst unbelieving Jews within the dispersed tribes of Israel. There were a great number of converted Jews located outside of Palestine. It can be assumed that as such, these believers lived with considerable persecution from their own countrymen.

Suffice it to say at this point, that James is addressing believers. Not once is there so much as an allusion to the eternal salvation work of Christ. He is addressing issues very relevant to the Christian's journey through this world using a very direct approach without the slightest hint of "feel good" sugar coating.

James is a survival manual and detailed "trip-tik" of the believers' endurance race through the spiritual wasteland of this world. The book of James is not an overview of life's cruise-control interstates, but rather a survival map that tracks much of life's roughest terrain. This James map details most of the washed out roads and dead-end streets, pot holes and road hazards that can be expected our journey, and he delivers all the precautions, preparations and provisions necessary for us to navigate our course and successfully run "the race set before us."

There are no two racecourses alike in the Christian life. Your course is not like anyone else's. God created each life individually, and as such, has created a unique path for each of us to follow. However, while we each have our own

obstacle courses to complete, there are overall survival guidelines and defensive techniques that all travelers will need to follow in order to finish their course and win their race.

Believers do not race against each other and should never use other believers as performance models. If the Lord wanted two Billy Grahams, he would have created two! But He didn't. We were each uniquely designed to be exactly who we are... individual vessels that He can utilize exactly as God designed us. Never forget... this lifetime is a battlefield. Each person has been uniquely designed, and equipped to flesh-out the role that God created for them in this life.

Remember also that this race is not a quick sprint. The Christian life is an endurance race. Victors' crowns go to those who complete the course. Along the way there will be many stumbles and many falls. The secret to winning a race is finishing, and that means getting back up, recomposing yourself, getting back "on course" and continuing on to the finish line. Speed is not the issue. Endurance is.