

Sermon Summary | Sunday 11th January 2026 | James 1.1-8

The letter opens with a searching but merciful call to spiritual maturity. A church may be genuinely lovely — friendly, welcoming, and supportive — and yet still be in spiritual danger if warmth becomes casualness, encouragement becomes lack of challenge, and busyness replaces deep obedience. James writes like a pastor who loves his readers too much to leave them unchanged. He is not crushing bruised reeds, but waking sleepy disciples and calling them from comfortable Christianity into costly discipleship.

First, James reminds us of his identity: “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” The word “servant” is not a polite religious label. It means belonging to another. James is saying, “I do not belong to myself anymore.” And the same is true of all Christians. He writes to believers scattered in the Dispersion, people following Jesus under pressure rather than in settled ease. Before he gives them commands, he reminds them who they are. Christian discipleship does not begin with “try harder,” but with belonging to Jesus.

This is crucial. If we try to become serious, sacrificial disciples without first knowing we belong to Christ, we will become either proud or crushed. But James begins with grace: belong, therefore obey. Identity before activity. Obedience is fruit, not the price of acceptance. Sacrifice is gratitude, not payment. This challenges a consumer approach to church, where we treat church as a provider of spiritual goods — preaching, friendship, community, support — and hesitate when discipleship becomes costly. James says we are not customers, but servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian life is not something that fits around our real life; it is the life we have been given under Christ’s reign.

Second, James speaks about our experience: “Count it all joy... when you meet trials of various kinds.” This does not mean trials are pleasant, or that suffering people should pretend to be fine. “Count it” means make a gospel judgment about hardship. Interpret trials through what you know of God. Joy is not a smile pasted onto sorrow, but a settled confidence that God is not wasting this.

James explains that trials test faith, tested faith produces steadfastness, and steadfastness over time produces maturity: being “perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” God has an agenda in hardship — not always the agenda we would choose, but a good one. We often pray, “Lord, make it easier,” while God works to make us stronger. We pray for pressure to be removed, while God produces steadfastness through it.

This must be heard carefully. James is not presenting a cold God who watches suffering from a distance. He is speaking of a wise Father who refuses to let suffering be meaningless. Trials include deep pain — illness, grief, anxiety, family strain, disappointment — but also the ordinary pressures of costly obedience: serving when tired, giving when it pinches, opening our homes when we would rather protect our time, staying faithful in difficult relationships, or bringing sin into the light. James calls us not to waste trials through distraction, cynicism, withdrawal, or self-protection, but to let steadfastness have its full effect. God is not merely making us comfortable. He is making us whole.

Third, James gives us our help: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God.” Wisdom is not merely information. It is the skill of living faithfully under pressure — knowing what obedience looks like on a Monday morning, in a hard conversation, or in a costly decision. James tells us to ask God, who gives generously and without reproach. God is not weary of our need. He does not shame us for lacking wisdom.

But James also warns against double-mindedness. He is not condemning sincere questions or seasons of struggle. He is addressing divided allegiance: Jesus plus comfort, Jesus plus control,

Jesus plus reputation. We cannot ask God for wisdom to obey while clinging to the idol that makes obedience impossible. Double-mindedness is exhausting. Single-hearted faith is steadier and freer.

The centre of this passage is Jesus. He is not only the Lord we serve, but the Saviour who served us first. He faced the greatest trial — sin, death, and judgment — and did not shrink back. He was not double-minded, but single-hearted for our salvation. So James is not calling us to manufacture steadfastness from nothing. The grace that forgives us is the grace that forms us. Because we belong to Jesus, we can face trials with purpose, ask God for wisdom with confidence, repent of double-mindedness with hope, and take the next faithful step.

Questions for personal reflection

1. Where am I treating discipleship as something that must fit around my life, rather than recognising that my whole life belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ?
2. Where is my faith being tested at the moment, and what would the next steady, single-hearted step of obedience look like there?