



## Designed for Growth

James 1:1-4

### Being Healthy

Recently I received the following meme:

Me: *(sobbing my heart out, my eyes are red, my nose is running)* “I can’t see you anymore... I’m not going to let you hurt me like this again.”

Personal Trainer: “It was a sit up. You did one sit up.”

I laughed when I read this meme because I immediately identified with what was taking place. Being healthy is important, but it often involves the hard work of healthy eating and regular exercise.

Recently our congregation began exploring the New Testament epistle of James, which is a powerful reminder that being healthy spiritually is also important and often involves hard work—the kind of hard work that is focused on taking the time to disengage from the busy demands and distractions of daily living and being willing to take your relationship with God seriously.

The book of James belongs to a series of letters known as the General Epistles. It can be described as a sturdy, compact letter that is hard-hitting, challenging, and intensely practical. Bringing timeless truths into our everyday lives, it can be read straight through in less than eight minutes. Yet it is often said of James that it is perfectly straight-forward yet powerfully significant.

### Consider it pure joy... (1:2)

When you explore the writings of James you notice that he describes his readers as “my brothers.” He does this on no fewer than eighteen occasions, virtually never addressing them in any other way. This tells us a great deal about James, who was an influential leader of the early Christian church, firmly established at the center of the church’s life in

Jerusalem (Acts 21:18; Galatians 2:9), yet he immediately identifies with every one of his anonymous readers by addressing them as family members.

The word “brother,” *adelphos* in the Greek language of the New Testament, indicates one born of the same womb. This is extremely significant when you consider who is doing the writing: James, the brother of Christ (Galatians 1:19), one born from the same womb as Jesus Himself.

What an encouragement that would be to receive a letter from the brother of Jesus. That is the kind of letter you are going to keep, perhaps even frame. Then read again, then re-read, and probably read again. Can you imagine the reaction of his initial readers? “James is thinking of us, writing to us! He cares for us.” What a blessing such a letter would be.

But though James is seeking to be a blessing to his readers, he is also a realist. When writing of life’s trials, he uses the word “whenever” and not “if.” James is telling us that anyone serious about growing in their faith will inevitably encounter trials (1:2).

The other key word and major emphasis in this opening section of James is “testing”: *Consider it pure joy... because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything (1:2-4).*

At first glance, what James is reminding us of seems not so much a paradox as an absurdity. How can we possibly rejoice in trials and testing? It is certainly not because we look upon the tests of life as being a source of joy in themselves; nor is James glibly suggesting that when faced with trials and temptations, we might as well grin and bear it.

James is encouraging his readers to look beyond the immediate circumstances of their trials and testing to the end result of what they are facing: when trials come, we can face them with joy if we think carefully about the results they can achieve.

### Perseverance must finish its work... (1:4)

*The testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete not lacking anything (1:3-4).* These are the words that unlock what James is teaching us.

Many years ago I worked briefly in a factory that made Rolls Royce engines for aircraft. I worked in an area called the “test beds,” a soundproof area where the engines would be comprehensively tested and run for hundreds of hours at a time. The test engineers operated on the basis that the metal could not be trusted until it had been thoroughly tested. James is highlighting this very practical principle for us. The true nature of faith is often strengthened, matured, and developed when it is tested. It is then that it proves to be genuine.

Testing and trials come in order to strengthen within us a deep intimate relationship with God, and such activities often take us to a deeper place in our walk with Him. The challenges of perseverance, fresh understanding, and growth remind us that the maturing process is never easy, but the results are always worth the effort. *The testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete not lacking anything (1:3-4).*

Spend some time with James this week. It will not be easy, but it will be healthy.

Watch Dr. Gibbons’ messages online at [FirstPresGreenville.org](http://FirstPresGreenville.org) (click the Media tab). His messages are also broadcast on WHNS-TV, Fox Carolina. each Sunday morning at 10:30.

