

## Introduction

I've been here for about 17 months now. Have you figured me out yet? I've preached 60 sermons here. And you're thinking "He always has 3 points, and every point starts with the same letter."

Ja?  
*Jein.*

Today, for example—*ja*—we have 3 points. But under each point there's 3 subpoints, so, *nein*—9 points!

And *one* of the sub-points starts with the wrong letter.

What else?

Maybe you've seen the little sign hanging on the door of my study: "Quiet Please." So you think "Andy likes silence and solitude." Maybe you even think "he likes books more than people."

Ja?  
*Jein.*

I like books! But I really like people, too! Especially when I need to write a sermon. "Come on in! Let's chat! How can I pray for you?"

In this series, we are "On the Way with Saint James." Like the pilgrims who walk through Switzerland and France and Spain. As we take our pilgrimage with Saint James through the Christian life, there are a lot of *Jeins*:

Is being a Christian about *our* faithfulness to God, or about our faith *in Jesus*? Is listening more important than doing? Is our relationship with God more important than our relationship with others?

*Jein.*

On the way, we are sometimes alone with the Lord for many kilometers. But often we are walking alongside fellow pilgrims.

James is here to tell us—as Sam showed us last week—that along the way, we are going to be tested and tried.

And guess what: The trials and tests in our lives *usually* involve people. Even if the trials and tests are a matter of *health*. With my insomnia, or my chronic pain, or my side effects from chemo, or my depression—how am I going to love people along the way?

Or it seems like your trial is joblessness or overwork; too few people or too many; childlessness or parenting; your tough singleness or your tough marriage. But the real test is this: Can you, *despite all this, love and serve the people around you?*

So, for today ...

Trials reveal what we're like. And James identifies 3 things about us apart from God's grace.

But James thinks these trials are good for us. And there are 3 gifts we need from God within the trials.

When we get these gifts from God, they'll change us. James shows us 3 things we'll become by grace.

What we're like. What God gives. What we become.

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### 1. **What We're Like**

James says “watch out, because—when you go through trials—you're likely to be haughty, half-hearted, and hellish.”

#### 1. **Haughty**

First, Haughty. Look at Chapter 3, verse 14. We're likely to become bitter. Envious. We meet an obstacle on the path and we think only of ourselves: *this is in my way, and I've got somewhere important to go!*

Verse 16: This envy and selfish ambition—these attitudes of our hearts: proud, haughty attitudes—are just the beginning of all kinds of more obvious words and actions. Words and actions that make a mess of our lives and spread ugliness and evil from our hearts into the experience of our fellow pilgrims.

The sun gets hot. We *complain*, and it spoils the joy of the conversations along the path. The people singing their pilgrim songs around us sing out of tune, and so we put on our noise-canceling headphones—not because we need some solitude but because we have *contempt* for our fellow pilgrims.

If there's one thing the whole Bible is teaching us about ourselves, it's that we—from Adam and Eve to Andy and Ellie—we think too much of ourselves, and we think about ourselves too much. Especially during trials. We will be *haughty*. And it will get ugly.

## 2. Half-hearted

The second thing—when things are tough on the trail: we get half-hearted. Look at chapter 1, verse 5. You're experiencing a test, and you know you should pray. But, verse 6, you approach God with the same annoyed feeling you have about the pilgrims singing out of tune. "Ugh. God. Are you *really* good? Do you *really* have a crown of life for my head, if I persevere in love for you and for my neighbor? Do you *really* want to help me pass this test?"

And it's not that we can't pray this prayer. We should say whatever we are feeling and thinking, because God already knows anyway.

The problem is not that we have doubts. The problem is that we are half-hearted, or as James says in verse 8, we are *double-minded*. The Lord wants us to be totally committed. Our minds or our emotions might struggle with this or that truth. But—during our trials and struggles, do our hearts belong completely to the Lord? Are we single-minded, whole-hearted, determined to follow him because we know he is good? He wants hearts and minds that say "I believe. Help my unbelief. Lord, to whom should we go? You alone have the words of eternal life!"

But we respond to our trials by saying "I knew it. You're no good. Are you going to give me what I need, or not?" We are half-hearted.

## 3. Hellish

Haughty, half-hearted, and—do you see what James says in chapter 3 verse 15?

*Hellish*. Earthly, unspiritual, demonic!

When trials come, we use strategies that focus on *I, me, my, mine*. We are being *mere animals*. We're not walking with the Spirit. We're unspiritual. We're not being real humans.

And James says this is *demonic*. The spirits who are in open rebellion against God's Spirit want *us* to be unspiritual so that we will never bear the Fruit of the Spirit.

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This is what we're like. This is who we are. Trials come, and this is exactly how we'll act—haughty, half-hearted, hellish—if God doesn't give us a whole lot of help.

## 2. What God Gives

But James has good news! God *gives*.  
What does God give? Guess how many things? 3!

### 1. God gives Grace *generously*

First, God gives *grace generously*. Look at Chapter 1, verse 5. We realize we don't know how to make it through a trial along the way. We turn to God. We ask for help, sincerely. And he gives grace.

This is the opposite of our half-heartedness. We are likely to grumble and blame God for everything that's actually our fault. But when God gives grace during our trials, he gives without finding fault! Without blaming us. Without charging us with this and that wrongdoing. "Simply, without reservation or hesitation" (P Davids). *God gives grace ... generously*.

What else does God give? *God gives growth*.

### 2. God gives Growth

The Christian life is *growth in grace*.

Look at chapter 3, verse 13. James says that along the way, God gives grace generously so that God can give growth. Visible growth. Growth that the people around us can see in our actions and hear in our words. Growth in grace is not passing a theology test. It's not becoming "successful." The growth God gives along the way, James says, will be evident in a *good life*.

And look at verse 17. When God gives grace for growth, our lives will be *full* of fruit. We'll be people who, verse 18, at the end of our lives, will have a harvest of goodness.

### 3. God gives ... *God*.

How is James so confident that God will generously give grace and growth? Because James has seen God *give God*. How can we be so sure that (1:5) God will give us wisdom and grace to pass through our trials?

Because God has passed through our trials himself, for us, in Jesus.

How can I trust that God will give *generously*?

Because he did not withhold from us even his only Son! How can he *not* with Jesus give us all good things?

How can we believe that when he comes to us to help us in our trials, that he's not coming to blame us for the problems we've gotten ourselves into?

Because God came to us in Christ Jesus not to judge and condemn us, but so that through his gift of love, his gift of himself, we might be saved!

God gives grace generously. God gives growth. And we can be sure of it because God gives *God*.

And friends, your experience of a test or trial along the way is *so much different* once you've really experienced God giving *God*. Without knowing, deep in your heart, that God has given God, and that God still gives God, you'll be blown and tossed by the wind; you'll be double-minded, half-hearted, and as unstable as a little raft in a stormy sea (1:6-8).

But when you experience God's generous gift of *God* in Jesus, you'll know that in every trial, you can ask for and count on generous grace and gradual growth until there's a great and glorious harvest of goodness in your life. And when it's all done, you'll say "it was all the God of generous grace."

### **3. What We Become**

So, in the midst of tests along the way, Saint James has shown us what we're like on our own, what God gives, and then finally, he shows us what we become.

#### **1. Whole-hearted**

Instead of being half-hearted and double-minded (1:6-8), we become whole-hearted people. Not hole-hearted, but whole-hearted.

We learn instinctively to ask for help in every trial, knowing that our generous and giving God will bring us through and bring us home. We move along the pilgrim trail, through rough weather, through mud and mosquitos and aches, no longer hiding half of our our hearts from God and our fellow pilgrims.

And this makes us, secondly, *humble*.

#### **2. Humble**

Instead of haughty, we have the habit of humility. People want to walk alongside of us not because we're cool or successful or good looking, but because we've learned (3:13) "the wisdom of humility". Instead of the *disorder* that comes from all that

selfishness and pride of our former way of life, we've become simple women and men whose lives are ordered by the pure, peaceable, love of God and people.

### 3. Hopeful

And finally, as whole-hearted, humble people, we'll be attractive pilgrimage partners—maybe even pilgrimage guides—because above all, we'll be *hopeful*. We know that we're not at our destination. But we know that we'll get there by grace. And we know that when we're there, we'll finally be the people we were made to be by grace.

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Friends: does God love you because Jesus gave his life for you, or did Jesus give his life for you because God loved you? Does God care about your growth and your fruit, or does he care about *you*? Are our trials good or bad?

You know the answer. *Jein*.

But here's a final question:

Is God so committed to you that—through all your trials—he will keep giving himself to you, so that you will become a person who unreservedly gives yourself to Jesus, and whole-heartedly gives yourself to the people around you?

James has been down this path. And his answer is *Ja*. Yes. In Jesus Christ. Like all of God's promises.