

How A Christian Should Handle Stress
Message 1 of the Series "Losing My Religion"
James 1:1-12

Intro:

Today we're starting a new series entitled, "Losing My Religion" and I want to give you a warning right up front. Ready?

Warning: Religious people will be offended by this series. Religious people are going to be offended by the message today. Because we're going to try to convince you to lose your religion.

The root of the word "religion" is traced to the Latin ***religare*** (re: back, and ligare: to bind), so that the term is associated with "being bound."

ILL: (Have chains and wrap them around my body.) I am currently stuck in these chains. As religion means "being bound," I want you to think of what it is like to be consumed with bondage. You feel constrained. You feel unsure of how to be able to move. In short, being in bondage is not a good thing.

(Remove chains.) When you lose your religion, you remove the bondage. This does not mean you lose God, or leave your relationship with Him. What it does mean is that you quit **dwelling** upon the cultural rules and made-up expectations of a Christian, and instead start looking at what the Bible has to say about an intimate, godly relationship with Jesus.

We're going to learn in this series that religion is really man's attempt to please God by adhering to rules and regulations, but that's not what God is after at all. And so – warning – religious people will be offended.

Throughout this series, we will march verse-by-verse through the book of James.

Intro of James

James is the most practical NT epistle. This letter remains as relevant today as this morning's Knox News Sentinel. Why? Because the 13 themes James addresses are timeless. He calls us to live out our relationship with Christ.

What is the first thing you do when you open up a letter? I read the name of the person who signed it at the bottom. In ancient times, they'd sign their name at the top of the letter.

James 1:1a

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Although James and the other brothers of our Lord did not believe in Christ during His earthly ministry (John 7:1-5), we know that sometime after the resurrection, Jesus appeared to James and he became a believer in his half-brother. Paul, in **1 Corinthians 15:7**, contended that Christ...
Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

James grew to such stature in the faith that he became the undisputed leader of the Jerusalem Church and the moderator of the Jerusalem counsel (Acts 15). Paul referred to James in Galatians 2:9 as a pillar of the church.

A. A Praying Man

James was historically known as a man of prayer, and earned the nickname, "Camel Knees" for the calluses on his knees from the multitudinous hours spent on his knees in prayer before God.

B. A Humble Servant

You might expect an author with his background to represent himself as “the brother of Jesus” or “leader of the church in Jerusalem”, but his humility led him to introduce himself as “James, a servant.” The word “servant” is the Greek word *Doulos*.

A *doulos* is a slave who had completed his term of service and could have been set free from his master’s control. However, after considering his other options, a *doulos* chooses he is better off with his master. He chose the one who first chose him.

His earlobe was placed against a doorpost and pierced to signify his new standing. This mark is called *Stigmata*. In **Galatians 6:17**, Paul used the word, *stigmata* when he said, **From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.**

C. A Regional Communicator

Who did James address his letter to? **James 1:1b**
To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.

James wrote his letter to Christian Jews outside of Palestine. These people left their homes and their property. However, he was writing to us, too, because all Christians are “dispersed.” We are living as exiles from our eternal Heavenly home.

The burden of James’ message is found in **James 1:22**, **But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.**

James was urging people to not be religious, but to live out their relationship with Christ by being *doers*.

If you were here at church last Sunday, you heard me preach a message entitled, “Don’t Worry About

It.” Today’s message, “Religulous Stress” deals with something that comes as a result of being worried: stress.

People label stress as the blasting cap that activates problems such as: heart trouble, hypertension, cancer, headaches, relational strains, divorces, etc.

Stress has become the scapegoat of modern man.

The truth is that stress can be one of life’s greatest assets. James 1:1-12 teaches us that stress can transition from foe to friend.

Read James 1:1-12

I. Predictability of Stress (vv. 1-2)

James 1:2

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,

It doesn’t say *if* you meet trials. It says *when* you meet trials. The point is, stress is predictable – inevitable, inescapable, unavoidable.

James said we should consider it pure joy when we face “trials” of various kinds. We never grow immune to trials in life.

Throughout the Bible, people had trials in life:

Moses: After the parting of the Red Sea, cloud by day & pillar of fire by night, manifestation of manna by morning, and then the children of Israel tried his patience. **He struck the rock instead of speaking to it.**

David: Shepherd, Psalmist, King, and man after God's own heart. His greatest trials came after he was on the throne of Israel.

Simon Peter: The big fisherman. He was courageous throughout so much of his life, but the night before Christ's death, he cowered by the fire outside Caiaphas' house.

James said we should count it pure joy when we "face" trials of various kinds. Your KJV says, "fall into" trials of various kinds. The word for this, *periptō*, is only used three times in the NT. It's also found in **Luke 10:30a**

Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers,

He rounded a corner – and suddenly WHAM! We "face" or "fall into" trials of many kinds.

The Bible teaches that stress is inevitable. The Apostle Paul went through stress and trials.

Acts 20:19

serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews;

II. Paradox of Stress (vv. 2-4)

James said to consider it "joy" when we face trials. Most of us consider trials to be a taste of Hell, not a taste of joy.

Talk about a paradox! James' words seem diametrically opposed to the way we naturally look at difficulties.

ILL: Charity and I were in south Florida two weeks ago, and after we journeyed all the way down there,

we saw the weather reports that it was to storm heavily the next day. I kept looking at the weather, just hoping we could avoid the storms. Unfortunately it rained all day long. Do you know what, though? It gave us an excuse to go to an outlet mall, and Charity thought that was one of our most fun days there. It was a paradox of wanting to avoid the storm, then counting it a joy.

JOB: A perfect example of the paradox of stress is found in the story of Job. Just as James urged his readers to “consider” it pure joy, as in, look forward to the joy that will come, Job did the same thing.

Job 23:10

But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.

JOSEPH: Joseph also considered – thought ahead. When revealing his identity to his brothers after many years of hurt he said, **Genesis 50:20** As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

Did Joseph consider it pure joy to be in prison? No. But he knew God’s hand was in his circumstances, and he thought ahead.

JESUS: Jesus looked beyond His suffering.

Hebrews 12:2

looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the **joy that was set before him** endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Did Jesus count Calvary a joy? No! But thinking ahead, He thought past Calvary and therefore He bore up under the stress of the cross.

Have you considered it joy to be in the midst of a stressful situation? James wasn't saying we have joy in the midst of our trials, in a *sadomasochistic* sense. We have joy in what lies ahead.

Every trial can become a God-given opportunity for growing into the likeness of Christ.

Oswald Chambers

"Every humiliation, everything that tries and vexes us, is God's way of cutting a deeper channel in us through which the life of Christ can flow."

Stress does not have to be our foe; it could be our friend.

III. Purpose of Stress (vv. 3-8)

A. It Produces Purity

James 1:3

for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

The word for *testing*, **DOKIMION** can also be translated as "purging." The word contains a picture of a precious metal being heated until it is liquid and its impurities rise to the top and are scraped off. Only pure metal is left.

James is teaching that STRESS tests our faith, and our trials are for a purpose. Often, trials are a refining fire testing us to see if we will rise to the top.

B. It Produces Perseverance

James wanted us to know of trials producing steadfastness. Steadfastness evokes a picture of

someone under pressure who stands his ground instead of escaping.

Note what is being tested here. Us? No. Our faith! James was talking about the testing of our faith.

Hebrews 1:16

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

Perhaps you are going through stress and trials in your life. Remember, the stress of trials is purposeful. It can produce purity and perseverance in your life. God is perfecting you, and you will come out stronger and sturdier than ever.

C. It Produces Perfection

James 1:4

And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Why must perseverance finish it's work? So that you may be mature. The word "mature" means "to carry work to its end."

ILL: How many people in this room are on the verge of graduating with a degree some time soon? Me, too! Along the way, we may fail a few tests, get a few facts incorrect on a paper, or on a quiz, but that is all incidental to finishing the course and walking across the stage to receive your diploma on graduation day.

In the school of trials, we may fail a few tests along the way and confuse a few facts. But all along the way, God is making us ready, maturing and completing us for that day when we will walk across the Heavenly stage to receive our spiritual diplomas.

Our goal in Christian living is spiritual maturity.

D. It Produces Prayer

James 1:5

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

Notice it points out the importance of wisdom, not necessarily for one lacking knowledge, but one lacking wisdom.

People going through trials need wisdom more than anything else. Forget about the self-help section and seek the Spiritual help section.

ILL: Think about this. We live in this most prolific day and age of all time. We've got computers, satellite TV & Radio. Despite the increasing knowledge, wisdom is decreasing. Suicide is at an all-time high. Morals are decreasing. Divorce claims more than half of those who enter the covenant relationship.

What's interesting is that God is not hoarding wisdom. Au contraire. God is giving it away. We just need to ask for it.

When King Solomon was about to take the throne, God said in **1 Kings 3:5** At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, "Ask what I shall give you."

Remember what Solomon answered?

1 Kings 3:9

Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?"

Solomon asked for wisdom!

Psalm 118:8

It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man.

IV. Profit of Stress (vv. 9-12)

George Sweeting

"A Christian is like a tea bag. He is not worth much until he has been through some hot water."

A. The Person with Poverty (v. 9)

James 1:9

Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation,

The word *lowly* here is in reference to socioeconomic status. It comes from *tapeinos*. It means who is poor and powerless.

SAUL: I can't help but think of King Saul in

1 Samuel 9:21

Saul answered, "Am I not a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel? And is not my clan the humblest of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then have you spoken to me in this way?"

An impoverished person must look beyond physical circumstances and abide in spiritual values. Paul did, and he wrote in **Philippians 3:20** But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

B. The Person with Plenty (vv. 10-11)

The church family in Jerusalem that James oversaw included not only people in poverty, but also people with plenty...wealthy people. These people included: **Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and Barnabus.**

James 1:10-11

10and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. **11**For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

Don't take pride in your possessions, but in your possessor.

Jesus reminds us that **Luke 12:15b** for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

No matter if you have much or little, you should realize the ground is level at the cross. What that means is that the Gospel has a leveling effect.

In Jericho, Jesus and His disciples met two men on the same day. One was impoverished and the other had plenty. To Bartimaeus, the poverty-stricken blind beggar on the roadside, the disciples said in **Mark 10:49** (KJV) "Rise." To Zacchaeus, the wealthy tax collector who had climbed the sycamore tree, Jesus said in **Luke 19:5**, "Come down." Do you see the parallel to James 1:9-10?

C. The Person with Pressure (v. 12)

James 1:12

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive

the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

The man or woman who stands firm and is steadfast will receive a crown of life. God has a special reward for patient sufferers. In the end, stress is certainly profitable.

Conclusion:

As the end of our passage teaches us of the victory in Heaven after enduring stressful struggles in life, I can't help but think of the word **VICTORY**. Victory implies a struggle.

Consider the struggle of a butterfly to emerge from its cocoon. Once there was a little boy who found a cocoon attached to a small branch of a tree. He took the branch home and kept it securely in his room. When spring came, the butterfly began to struggle to escape from its prison. Wanting to help, the boy found a pair of small scissors and made a slight incision in the cocoon. Soon the butterfly emerged in all of its radiant beauty. But it never flew! Having escaped all the struggle to emerge from the cocoon, the muscles of its wings never developed. The boy's good intentions robbed the butterfly of its power to soar.

Yes, **James 1:4**

And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.