

Who did you want to be like when you grew up? Who did you want to be like when you grew up? I was talking to Tristan and Steph earlier, and Steph said Delta Goodrum was her person, which, you know, Australian icon.

And then Tristan said Pumbaa from The Lion King. So, you know, how's that going for her? When I was a kid, I wanted to be like Christian Hussoi.

Christian Hussoi was a, is, a Japanese American skateboarder. As a kid, I was into skateboarding, and he's a Christian, he's a skateboarder, he's awesome. I had a poster of his on my wall signed by Christian Hussoi right above my bed.

I wanted to be like Christian Hussoi. And then I kind of got out of skateboarding and I got into music, and I wanted to be like John Mayer when I grew up. So I played guitar all the time because I want to be like John Mayer.

And then I kind of, well, I'm still into guitar, but I got into basketball. And then I wanted to be like Steph Curry when I grew up. I keep changing my answer, depending on what I'm into at the time.

But for us, disciples of Jesus, our ultimate answer to that question is Him, right? We want to be like Him when we grow up. We want to be like Jesus.

The biblical word for this is telos. Telos is end. It means goal, target, the setting of your compass.

We want to be like our telos, Jesus. We want to grow up to be like Him. How do we do that?

That is what the Letter of James is all about. James wrote his letter in order that we might become like Jesus when we grow up. So as we come to the Book of James this morning, that's our question.

How do we become like Jesus when we grow up? How do we become like our telos? Before we jump in, a little bit of context.

We are in the middle of our two-year Christ in Scripture project. Lord willing, we're going to spend one week in every single book of the Bible, seeing how that book points us to the person of Jesus and his life, death, resurrection and ascension.

We've broken the two-year project up into eight sermon series. We looked at the Gospels, the Torah, and now we're in a series called the General Epistles. There are 21 letters in the New Testament.

Thirteen of them are attributed to Paul, and we're going to look at those thirteen together. And the other eight are what scholars call the General Epistles. James 1, Peter 2, Peter 1, John 2, John 3, John Jude, and Hebrews.

So we looked at Hebrews last week, and this morning we're in Christ in James.

CONTEXT OF JAMES

Before we answer the question that we're here to answer, a couple of introductory thoughts about James. One verse one. Who is James?

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. The James who wrote this letter is the brother of Jesus. This is not James who was one of the 12 apostles, not the son of Zebedee, the brother of John.

This is James, the brother of Jesus. The Gospels tell us that James and his other brothers did not believe in Jesus during the days of his ministry on earth.

It was only after Jesus rose again that he appeared to his own brother James, and James became a believer. Later in his life, James who wrote this letter became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. He's a significant pillar of the early church.

Next week, we're going to look at the Letter of Jude. Jude was another brother of Jesus. So in these two weeks, we're looking at two letters written by two brothers of Jesus.

Jack told me an interesting fact that is it in the whole New Testament? James and Jude share the most vocabulary in common with each other out of any books in the New Testament. They're brothers.

Isn't that nice? These two brothers speak the same way. Who does James write to?

Verse 1b, to the 12 tribes scattered among the nations. Greetings, literally in the diaspora. This is the people of God, not just Jews, but now Gentiles as well, scattered throughout the known world.

These are the people that James writes to. Interestingly, he refers to these people 19 times as brothers and sisters. He's writing to his brother.

He has received from his brother, Jesus, what it means to grow up to be like him. And now James writes to his brothers and sisters in Christ, in order that we too might be like Jesus when we grow up. Who is James?

Brother of Jesus. Who does he write to? His brothers and sisters in Christ.

And thirdly, why does he write? The crucial hint is that James has repeated one particular word seven times, the number of completion, seven times throughout the Letter of James. And that word is telos, that end, the goal.

James writes his letter in order that we might become like Jesus when we grow up. So as we seek Christ in James, Christ is our telos. He is the one that we want to be like.

Let me pray as we come to that question. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are present here.

We know you're present in all places, but we take a moment now to pause and ask that your spirit, the spirit of truth, would illuminate the words of scripture before us, that you would speak to us, that you would be so gracious as to form us in the

image of your son through these words. May they not be words on a page, but may they come alive for us and transform us. We want to be like Jesus and we ask for your help. In Jesus' name, amen.

1 — TEST YOUR FAITH

How to be like Jesus when you grow up. Number one, test your faith. James 1 verse 2.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. Firstly, test your faith. James says that when our faith is tested, it is part of what God uses to make us more like Jesus.

Now, these tests that we're referring to is not like a written examination. That might make you like Jesus, but that's not what James is talking about. He says trials of many kinds.

The trials that James has in mind is suffering and illness and persecution and shipwreck and poverty and misunderstanding. Trials of many kinds. James says that God uses those things to make us more like Jesus.

You know, Jesus never promised an easy life. In fact, he promised the opposite. He said, in this world, you will have trouble.

You will experience trials. But the promise is that God uses those trials to make us more like Jesus. The word trials here is a Greek word which elsewhere in the Bible gets translated test and temptation.

One word, trials, gets translated test and temptation. Now, those are very different things. They test and a temptation.

So, in Genesis 22, God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son, 22 verse 1. Sometime later, God tested, that's the same word, tested Abraham. He said to him, Abraham, here I am, he replied.

Then God said, take your son, your only son whom you love, Isaac, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain, I will show you. Test.

And then in Matthew 4, Jesus was led into the spirit to be tempted by the devil. After fasting 40 days and 40 nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, if you are the son of God, tell these stones to become bread.

Tested by God and tempted by the devil is the same word that here James uses to say, consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds.

Which raises the very important question, is this trial that I am experiencing a test from God or a temptation from the devil? And what is the difference between these two things? What we experience as a trial could be a test or a temptation.

The difference between the two is the purpose behind the trial. God desires to use these trials to test us for good, to build our faith. But the enemy, the devil, desires to twist this trial to tempt us toward evil.

So to illustrate, think of the story of Cain and Abel. Abel brought a good offering to God, and Cain didn't. And then we read in this, Genesis 4, verse 6.

The Lord said to Cain, why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?

But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you, but you must rule over it. So clearly, Cain is under a trial.

This is an intense trialing moment that he's experiencing. But behind the trial, God desires to use this trial as a test for Cain to build his faith, to rule over sin, that Cain's faith would be built up.

But at the same time, the same trial, the enemy, the devil is tempting Cain to fall prey to sin, that his faith would be destroyed. One trial, one situation. And God's purpose is to use it for good, and the enemy's purpose is to use it for bad.

The Bible is full of situations like this. God desires to test his people for good, to develop strength, like a muscle, muscle that gets torn apart but comes back stronger.

God wants to strengthen our faith through trials, but the enemy tempts us towards evil. How do you know the difference between the two? In the trial that we're experiencing, how can you tell which is which?

Because think about Abraham sacrificing Isaac and Jesus in the wilderness. Just take the words on their own. God said, sacrifice your son.

And the devil said, turn these stones into bread. So on account of the words alone, which one do you think is coming from the devil and which one is from God?

And yet the story shows us that it was God who said, sacrifice your son to use that for good, and the enemy said to turn these stones into bread.

And so how do we tell the difference between the voice of God and the voice of the enemy in the trials that we walk through?

Well, James tells us in verse 5, if any of you lacks wisdom, wisdom you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

James has learned that to distinguish between the voice of God and the voice of the devil, you need wisdom to pass the test, and to be tested for good and not tempted for evil.

That's why Paul in a similar train of logic says that, no temptation has overtaken you, but when you are tempted, there will always be a way out. We are not bound to fall prey to temptation, but God always gives us a way. Remember, Jesus prayed.

Jesus taught us to pray, Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Lead us not into temptation. It's the same word.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. I think Jesus is inviting us to believe that we can't stand the test. We're going to fall prey to the test.

So don't lead us into a situation where we would be tempted. But if we find ourselves in a trial, God is able to deliver us from the evil one and to use all things for good. James has learned that trials happen, suffering happens in life.

Persecution, illness, weakness, death, pain. Suffering happens. And I think he's observed that when suffering happens, it can do two things to us.

It can push us towards God or away from him. He says you have to know the voice of God in order that that trial might make you more like Jesus rather than the other thing. So what does this mean for us?

To start with a very trivial example, say you have a co-worker who you can't stand. It's a bit of a trial. It's a trial just to work next to them.

God desires to use that person to teach you love and grace. But the enemy desires to twist that, that you would lash out and become bitter. Or say you're suffering in a really difficult season right now.

God desires to use this trial to form maturity in you, to make you more like Jesus. But the enemy desires to make you despair and lose faith. We have to know the voice of God behind it.

So James concludes this first section of Chapter 1 by saying blessed is the one, flourishing is the one who perseveres under trial, because having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

2 — TRUST THE LORD

To be like Jesus when you grow up, test your faith. And secondly, trust the Lord. So James wants to form us into the image of Jesus, our telos, our goal.

And he says that the trials of life form us into the image of Jesus. We also have to learn how to trust the Lord. The second section of Chapter 1, which is the bit after what Fifi read for us.

James talks about the character of God. And I think he talks about the character of God in order that we might learn how to trust him. And in trusting God, we need to know who God is and who he's not.

And James kind of speaks on both directions. Firstly, James, on the negative side, speaks of who God is not. James 1 verse 13, When tempted, no one should say, God is tempting me, for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.

But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death.

James does not want to allow us to believe a false idea about who God is. And so he says clearly, God does not tempt towards evil.

If you're hearing a voice in a trialing situation that's leading towards evil, you can be absolutely sure God is not on the other side of that voice, that is the enemy talking. God does not tempt for evil.

James doesn't want to allow us to believe a false idea about God. And so if you experience the temptation toward evil, sorry that this is the evil side of the room, I flipped it from last time.

This is the test for good, this is the tempt for evil side. If we experience temptation toward evil, it's not God, it is our own desire which leads us in that direction. The root of all sin is a false idea about God.

Think in Genesis 3, what did the serpent say? Did God really say, the serpent planted the seed of the idea that maybe God isn't good, maybe God doesn't have your best interest at heart? And look at what happened.

The root of all sin is believing a false idea about who God is. This is why we do theology. This is why it's so crucial to know who God is not and who God is.

And that's what James turns to next in verse 16. Don't be deceived. Think of the serpent.

The serpent deceived them. Don't be deceived. My dear brothers and sisters, every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created. James wants us to hold firm to the truth of who God is, that good comes from God. You know that thing we say, God is good all the time?

All the time, God is good. James wants us to hold on to the truth of who God is and let go of the lies of who God is not. And he does this in order that we might trust the Lord, that we might become like Jesus when we grow up.

Jesus never doubted the goodness of God. There's never one story in the Gospel where Jesus believes that God was anything evil, that God that Jesus knew is only good.

Think of the Garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus exhibited the most intense surrender in the history of the world. Jesus prayed, not my will but yours be done.

The only way that that prayer is psychologically possible is if you believe that God wills our good in the end. That we can abandon outcomes to a good father, knowing that he brings good out of all things.

Now, the path that Jesus took from the Garden led to the cross, to the most horrendous, violent, torturous event in human history. But even on the cross, Jesus was not separated from the goodness of God, not separate from the love of God.

So, trust the Lord. This is what James tells us. Know that he is not evil, but he is good.

Good comes from God. My daughter Esther is six months old now, and she's not here. We're doing a, Courtney's doing a first aid course with her.

So we're going to start her young, which is good. She's six months old, and we've started playing peekaboo with her. You know, peekaboo, peekaboo.

And I was researching some of the neuroscience behind what peekaboo does to a baby. And I learned, because I'm interested in that stuff, I learned that children don't have object permanence. I mean babies.

And so for a baby, if they can't specifically see something before them, they forget that it exists. So when parents kind of intuitively play peekaboo with children like this, they're effectively saying, even when you can't see me, I'm still here.

Object permanence, object permanence. And I was reflecting that we have a similar thing with God. We grown ups, we forget that God exists the moment a trial hits.

When God is obviously acting in our life, of course God is real. But we have these moments where we lose the object permanence. We become what you might call functional atheists.

When we enter a situation, we act like there is no good and loving father who reigns over all things. We become functional atheists.

Interestingly, you could kind of say that maybe an atheist becomes a functional theist in suffering because you have no one to pray to if there's no God.

When suffering happens to us, sometimes it drives us away from God and other times it drives us to reach out to the God that must be out there.

And so this thing, this idea of building object permanence is what James is talking about, to trust the Lord, even when you can't see him, he is still there, even when you can't see his goodness, he is the one who brings good out of all situations.

Not that he plays games, he doesn't peek-a-boo with us, but he's teaching us to trust him. Paul says in Romans 8, who shall separate us from the love of Christ, shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword.

Note that these are all things which very much could separate us from believing that God is good. If you're experiencing that, you're wondering if God is real after all.

But he goes on, I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future nor any powers, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that

is in Christ Jesus our Lord. He is constant and he is love. He brings good out of all situations. So a helpful prayer for us to pray is, Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.

Because when the trial comes, we lose object permanence. We become functional atheists. James invites us to trust the Lord.

3 — TRY HIS WORD

How to be like Jesus when you grow up. Number one, test your faith. Number two, trust the Lord.

Number three, try his word. James is writing his letter in order that we, brothers and sisters in Christ of James, might be like his biological brother, that we might be formed to be like Jesus. And the first way that that happens is through trials.

And secondly, through trusting the Lord. But the third thing that James comes to in chapter one is the idea of trying his word. Not just reading it, reading and applying it, trying the word of God.

Verse 19, my dear brothers and sisters, take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

I think James is talking about inputs and outputs, about the stuff that we take into our mind, into our body, and then the stuff that comes out of our body. He says, curtail your outputs. He says, be slow to speak and slow to become angry.

If you're a really mature Christian, this is not true, but most of us can't be trusted to use our anger well or to use our words well. We have to curtail our outputs. That's what it means to try his word.

We often say around here that spiritual maturity is lengthening the time between prompt and response. So number one example I always go to is you get cut off in traffic.

The flesh in us is quick to speak, quick to become angry, quick to share some choice words with this person. Maybe you maneuver your way in traffic so that you can pull up beside them just to see who it is.

And have you ever experienced you pull up next to them and it's like a mom with like 18 kids in the car, and they're all crying and she's crying, and she's just having such a bad day, and you're filled with grace?

Or somebody says something you disagree with. The flesh is quick to give you my opinion, quick to become angry. But the invitation of God in those moments is to pause, pray a very quick prayer, God help me right now.

Not to say the first thing that's on my mind, but to say, hey, what do you mean by that? I promise you, that will be the gateway to a much better conversation than being quick to speak and quick to become angry.

James is saying, slow down, curb your outputs, and secondly, curate your inputs. He says, be quick to listen. He says, humbly accept the word planted in you.

Do you remember the parable of the sower? Matthew 13, Jesus tells a parable about a farmer that sowed seed, and the seed we're later told is the word of God, the message about the kingdom.

Four different types of soil, three of them don't last, but one of them does. And he says, the difference between the three and the one that does is the one that bore fruit 30, 60, 100 times what was sown.

They heard the word and understood it, integrated it, applied it. And so we have to be receiving the word of God and then applying it. And that's what James says in verse 22.

Don't merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word, but does not do what it says, is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror.

And after looking at himself goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

But whoever looks intensely into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it, not forgetting what they've heard, but doing it, they will be blessed in what they do.

James knows that to be like Jesus when we grow up, we have to try his word, not only hear it, not only read it, apply it, integrate it, let it become the shape of our lives. And when we apply it, we realize the truth of Psalm 1.

Psalm 1 says, blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord. That person will flourish.

Psalm 19, I think Steph quoted it before, your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path. It is only in applying scripture that we receive the blessing of what it means to try his word.

Did you know the Sermon on the Mount starts, I have to, there's no Dallas Willard in this message though, that's good. The Sermon on the Mount starts and ends with the idea of practising Jesus' words.

In Matthew 5, Jesus says, whoever practises and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

And then in Matthew 7, Jesus says, whoever hears these words of mine and puts them into practise is like the wise man who built their house on the rock.

So Jesus' book ends the best, most famous, most transformative teaching given in the history of humankind with the idea of practise, not hearing these words and then in one ear and out the other, practising his words.

This is why I find it confusing when people say that the Sermon on the Mount is an impossible standard that is only designed to make us realise how far short we fall that we need the grace of God. It's like, have you read the Sermon on the Mount?

Jesus says, practise these commands. Now, to be driven towards the grace of God by the Sermon on the Mount is, of course, a good thing.

But we're not supposed to first be driven to the grace of God for forgiveness for falling short of the Sermon on the Mount. We should go to the grace of God in the first place to receive the power to live the Sermon on the Mount.

This is what it means to hear the Word of God and to apply it, that God in his mercy by the Spirit that dwells in us would change us as we receive, as we meditate on scripture, as we have an input from the Word of God. Try his word, James says.

That will make you more like Jesus. Speaking of Jesus, think about what he did in his temptation. We spoke about Jesus in the wilderness.

The only way that he avoided being tempted for evil and being tested for good was that he had scripture memorized. He pulled out the sword of the spirit, as Paul says in Ephesians 6. He quoted scripture.

Think about Jesus on the Emmaus road. He's talking with the disciples post resurrection. And Jesus is able to tell how the entire story of the Hebrew Bible points to him.

Jesus knew the micro details of scripture and the macro story. He had immersed himself in the Bible, in scripture. And that's how, well, that's how Jesus lived the life that he lived.

And that's the life that he invites us to. How to be like Jesus when you grow up. Test your faith.

The testing of faith produces perseverance. And God is ready to give wisdom for us, in order that these tests, these trials might make us more like Jesus, and not push us away from him. Secondly, to become like Jesus when you grow up, trust the Lord.

Trust that he is not evil. Evil does not come from God. Good comes from God.

Allow God to build your object permanence, to build your faith. And finally, try his word. Try it.

Jesus said, if you believe my words and put it into practice, you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. Try his word, and you'll become like Jesus when you grow up. So Christ in James, who is he?

Who is Christ in James? How does James point us to the person of Jesus? I think James says that Jesus is our telos.

He's the one that we want to be like when we grow up. He's the goal. He's the standard.

Not John Mayer, not Steph Curry, not Christian Hussoui. Jesus. He's the one that we want to be like.

So let's pray now. And I mean, as we pray, I'm conscious that the Holy Spirit needs to do a work to apply this scripture to our hearts, to your life. I'm a 25 year old Caucasian male married with a six month old daughter.

What this means, applied to me, might mean something different than applied to you. So I'm going to pray now for the Spirit to make us more like the image of Jesus from his words. Let me pray and then we'll worship.

Lord Jesus, we think that you are everything. You are good and kind and gracious and worthy of all praise. And we want to be like you.

We thank you for your word that you spoke for scripture, that you inspired by your spirit.

We thank you that we can read it in a language that we understand, but our desperate need right now is that your spirit would make your words come alive in our lives in the particular shape of our days and weeks and months.

We desire to be formed into your image. Lord, I pray for my brothers and sisters who are experiencing a trial right now.

Pray that you would give them wisdom to hear your voice, beckoning them towards yourself, to hold on in order that you might make them mature and complete.

Lord, for all of us who are wrestling with who you really are and we're doubting your goodness, would you pour your love into our hearts? Lord, develop our faith that we may know that you are good all the time.

And Lord, as we finish our time in the Word this morning, would you apply that to our lives to make us more like you? In Jesus' name, Amen.