

January 13/14, 2024

“Faith & Trials”

Pastor Aaron Buer



Beyond the
Weekend

SPEND DAILY TIME WITH GOD AS YOU READ, THINK, PRAY + ACT.

2024 Challenge: Finding Jesus in the Old Testament

JANUARY: Read Luke to see how the author points back to the Old Testament

Day 1 James 1:1-18 | Make it Real

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.
James 1:1

This week we begin a new series on the book (or letter) of James. James is the brother of Jesus who wrote profoundly on faith. Yet at one point, James—along with the rest of Jesus’s family—thinks that Jesus is crazy: “When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, “He is out of his mind” ([Mark 3:21](#)).

What changed? How does James go from doubtful skeptic and antagonist to whole-hearted believer? Though James’s transformation likely took time, one key event is the clincher for James’s faith in Jesus: the resurrection. James sees the resurrected Jesus ([1 Corinthians 15:7](#)). James likely sees his brother tortured, crucified and laid in a tomb outside Jerusalem. Yet he also sees his brother risen from the grave. It must have been transformational to see Jesus alive and well.

James’s faith was real because it was rooted in truth—the truth of who Jesus is and what he accomplished through his life, death, burial, and resurrection. As James’s faith was real, so ours can be as well. Through James’s letter, we will explore what it means to have a real (and growing) faith.

TODAY: One of the catalysts to a growing faith is sharing life with a small group. A small group can challenge and encourage you to grow. Lean into your group and encourage each other to grow during this series. If you are not in a group, now is a great time to join one. New groups start soon, including short-term groups that will discuss this sermon series. Learn more and register [HERE](#) for a group that fits your season of life.

JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: Read [Luke 10](#). Highlight anything that refers to the Old Testament and how Jesus fulfills it.

Day 2 James 1:2 | It’s Normal

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds. James 1:2

James’s readers face persecution and have left their homeland. They know a thing or two about hardship and suffering. Yet, James reminds his readers that trials are normal. In fact, when facing a trial, believers can be confident that God is mightily at work. So, James counsels his readers to “Consider it pure joy,” whenever they face trials ([James 1:2](#)).

We will face trials throughout our lives. A helpful discipline for us to develop is to slow down and assess our thinking whenever they come. We can either 1) remember that trials are normal and God is always good or 2) we can doubt God’s goodness and be surprised by trials. This does not mean that we need to invite or even go looking for them, but it does mean that when trials come, we can welcome them as a means for our mighty and gracious God to shape our character to look more like Jesus.

There are all kinds of trials in life—some smaller and others monumental. Regardless of the scope of the trial, basic truths remain the same: God is good and trials are normal. This might be a good anthem to repeat anytime we face an unexpected or especially bothersome trial. No matter the hardship, “God is good and trials are normal.”

TODAY: One way to remain grounded during trials is to call Scripture to mind. Memorize [James 1:2-3](#). Write it on a notecard or in your mobile device and review it throughout the day. When life gets hard, use this passage to remind yourself that “God is good and trials are normal.”

JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: Read [Luke 11](#). Highlight anything that refers to the Old Testament and how Jesus fulfills it. Look up any Old Testament cross references included in this chapter.

Day 3 James 1:2-4 | Growth

Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. James 1:4

By definition, trials are hard and uncomfortable. But believers can trust that God is at work through trials to renovate their hearts. James counsels his readers to rejoice in the face of trials “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” ([James 1:3-4](#)).

The testing of our faith produces perseverance, which is the ability to endure in the face of difficulty. In other words, God uses trials we face to strengthen the muscles of our faith. Though trials do not guarantee growth, they are a component for our growth in Christ. God’s aim in our lives is more than our comforts or conveniences. He is after our hearts. God uses the trials we encounter to renovate our hearts and form our character to become more like Jesus.

TODAY: Think back through a time of growth in your life. Journal about the seasons where your faith grew the most and what led to that growth. Then thank God for how he has used trials to make you more like Jesus. Listen to the Beyond the Weekend Podcast [HERE](#) to dig deeper into this passage with Senior Pastor Aaron Buer and other staff members.

JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: Read [Luke 12](#). Highlight anything that refers to the Old Testament and how Jesus fulfills it. Note how Jesus talks about his return and the title he uses for himself. Consider what Old Testament passage this points back to.

Day 4 James 1:5-8 | Trust

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. James 1:5

James writes to a group of believers who are battered and bruised by persecution. They know the bitter sting of trials. Yet, James wants them to know how to survive trials AND thrive during them. The key step these believers have to take is toward God. Rather than turning inward or away from God, James challenges his readers to turn to God and ask God for help while navigating the hardships they are facing.

In the same way, we face a choice whenever we encounter trials. We can either turn away from God in bitter self-reliance, or we can turn toward him in humble dependence. The God-ward turn James encourages is made by asking God for wisdom on how to navigate our trials. We ask God for help in knowing and doing the right thing even when—especially when—times are hard. Such a God-ward turn of trust is essential if we are going to thrive and grow in the face of trials.

TODAY: Pray and ask God to help you to live wisely while dealing with whatever trial you are facing. “God, please help me know what it means to live in your wisdom while dealing with _____. I need your help and trust you to lead me in this situation. Thank you for your wisdom and help. Amen.”

JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: Read [Luke 13](#). Highlight anything that refers to the Old Testament and how Jesus fulfills it.

Day 5 Matthew 26:26-28 | Communion

Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” Matthew 26:26-28

Moments before his arrest, Jesus gathers his disciples for one more meal together. During the meal, he gives them instructions on what we now refer to as “Communion” or “The Lord’s Supper.” Communion is a practice of the local church to remember Christ’s death, repent of our sins and rejoice in what Jesus has accomplished. These three R’s can be helpful for framing what communion is all about:

Remembering. Through eating the bread and drinking the cup—which are symbols of Christ’s broken body and shed blood—we remember the sacrifice that he made on our behalf. By remembering, we are grounded again in the truths of God’s love and our salvation in Christ.

Repenting. The Bible instructs believers to “examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup” ([1 Corinthians 11:28](#)). Communion presents an opportunity for believers to confess sin and ready their hearts before taking the bread and cup. This instruction also reminds us that communion is reserved for those who follow Jesus.

Rejoicing. Participating in communion is supposed to feel like a celebration. We serve a risen Savior! We rejoice in his victory as we remember his defeat of the grave. As we share the bread and cup, we “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” ([1 Corinthians 11:26](#)). He has risen and is coming back to usher his people into the life that will never end.

TODAY: Join the Ada Bible Worship Team as they sing “[Broken Vessels](#).” As you worship, thank God for his love and how we see him “laying yourself down, raising up the broken to life.”

JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: Read [Luke 14](#). Highlight anything that refers to the Old Testament and how Jesus fulfills it. Note how Jesus talks about the Sabbath and look up the Old Testament cross references in this section.