

引言 INTRODUCTION

We will begin a new study on the book of James. I call this series “Workable Faith.” To James, Christian faith is not just about believing in God in the church. It is also about living out what we believe in daily life. It is a short book of five chapters. I encourage everyone to read it in your personal devotion. Bible scholars generally agree that this author James was a brother of Jesus in the family. James later became a key leader in the first Jerusalem church. The opening verse gives us some background about this letter. The recipients were Jewish Christians. They were scattered to various places, quite likely due to religious persecution. Their faith was under trial for a few reasons. First, Jewish peers thought that those Christians betrayed their traditional belief and founded a new religion. They claimed Jesus to be God. Second, the Romans mistreated Christians because they did not honor the Ceasars as gods. They worshipped Jesus. Third, they were bombarded by false teachings. Some were mixtures of Christian faiths and pagan religions. In comparison, Christians believe that Jesus is the only true God and the only way to salvation. Our world is very different now. What does not change is that we will face trials. Some people mistakenly think that there will be no more trouble since God loves them. God does not protect us in a bubble like some parents shield their children from any difficulty. But even if some kids grew up in a church, graduated from Christian schools, eventually they must cope with the fallen world. Believers young and old must secure their foundation in the Word of God. They are like greenhouse plants that must develop deep roots in order to survive the summer heat. God never assures us an easy ride to heaven. But He promises not to leave us nor forsake us no matter what challenges we have to tackle. We have two choices when our faith is under trials: we can either give up on God or we can give in to Him.

解釋 EXPLANATION

1. 試煉的目的 Purposes of Trials

James starts off by telling us the purposes of trials. He mentions a short-term purpose of trials in verse 3. They will produce steadfastness in us. Another translation for steadfastness is patience. We bear the discomfort because we look forward to a good result. Students complete course requirements before they can graduate. Most employees work five days a week to make a living. We often push ourselves even harder to pursue certain goals. You quit fried chicken and go to the gym because you want to get a healthier body. People discipline themselves as they work toward the targets. Likewise, we overcome trials hoping to build a stronger faith. Also, spiritual growth is similar to physical growth. Some kids struggle with math in elementary school. But those calculations will become a piece of cake when they are in middle school. Similarly, smaller trials will prepare us for bigger ones. The good news is that God knows how much we can bear. Look at the promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13 – **No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.** Temptation and trial are the same word in Greek. We will talk more about that in our next lesson. God’s purpose is not to break us down but to build us up. Our faith will grow as He gradually turns up

the heat. It is like you are able to lift 100 pounds after you develop enough muscle strength by pushing 50 pounds. Trials are for our benefit. Besides a short-term purpose, there are also two long-term purposes of trials. James tells us in verse 4 we can be “perfect” and “complete” through trials. The word perfect can mean perfection. But a general nuance is to achieve the intended functions. Then the word complete describes a state of wholeness. We can use the term “mature” to sum up the meanings of the two words. A mature young person can make independent decisions. By the same token, a mature Christian can make choices that please God. No one likes to deal with hardship. But there is no short-cut to spiritual maturity. The Bible knowledge you learn in normal times will equip you for future trials. It is easy to believe in God when we are in good times. We may even feel that we can live without Him! We will reexamine our faith when we are pushed out of the comfort zone. We may wonder: Is God real? Does He truly care about me? Where is He when I am hurting? God hopes to build a stronger character in us through trials. He wants us to prevail by relying on Him. Therefore, rather than asking God: Why me? Why this? Why now? We can pray: Lord, what can I learn from this experience?

2. 試煉的禱告 Prayer in Trials

God has purposes in our trials. Difficulties should draw us closer to Him instead of pushing us away from Him. James suggests one prayer in verse 5 that we should utter in trials. He asks us to pray for wisdom. Wisdom is the insight to understand God’s will. It helps us examine trials from God’s view, so as to discern why God allows them to happen. Asking for wisdom is the one prayer God will not deny. In fact, God will gladly give us wisdom generously. He will never say to us: “How come it’s you again?” God welcomes us to approach Him like a father welcomes his children to ask him for help. Therefore, we must pray with humility. We say to God: “Lord, I don’t know. Please help me understand.” We pray for wisdom in trials so that we know how to react in a way that pleases God. If we do not pray, then more than likely we will look for a quick solution or we will rely on inputs from people. Unfortunately, some Christians like to play the role of God. I used to know a pastor’s wife who contracted cancer. Someone told her that she must have some unrepented sins. God gave her the disease as a form of discipline. Have we not heard a similar comment in the Bible? Job’s friends said the same thing! The logic is that God will bless people with a good life if they are obedient. Therefore, problems are God’s punishment for our sins. Will such advice help anyone? I doubt it. Believers who are under trials need compassion. Do not pretend to be a detective or an expert. Just pray with them. Pray that God will give them wisdom to go through the hard time. God promises to be with us even when we suffer. The apostle Paul once shared his thorn in the flesh experience. He did not specify the nature of the issue. Some Bible scholars suggest that it could be some chronic illness. Paul asked God three times to remove the trouble, but the Lord did not answer accordingly. Instead, God gave Paul something better. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12:9 – **But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.** God promised to sustain Paul by His grace. In the end, Paul’s faith increased and did not decrease. The weakness did not become an obstacle to his ministries. Rather, he used the experience as a tool for sharing the gospel. God did not take away Paul’s problem. But He gave the apostle wisdom to know why He did not provide a solution. God wants to use the trials you are facing for His glory as well. Therefore, do not just pray for an answer. Pray for wisdom too. God will give you enough grace

to go through the tough time. When people see the joy in you, they will conclude that either you are a fool to believe in a God who does not seem to help you, or the God you believe is real.

3. 試煉的視野 Perspective in Trials

James tells us the purposes of trials and he teaches us the prayer in trials. Next, he reminds us the perspective we should have in trials. These tests make us realize that life can be short and unpredictable. James relates financial richness with spiritual richness in verses 9 and 10. Financially poor believers should not look down on themselves, because they are rich in God's eye. Jesus Christ saves them from sin and restores their status as children of God. Financially rich Christians should not take pride in their money either. All that they have is temporary. Even the length of their lives may be uncertain like wildflowers. Those plants wither under the sun no matter how beautiful they are. Christians who are rich should identify with Jesus instead, who was despised by the world for our sake. God does not hate the rich because wealth is a blessing from Him. The problem is not how much we have, but how much we love what we have. James confronts the rich members in the church later in his letter because they show bias toward the poorer members. Money can give us a sense of security. But we can easily take pride in our money and forget to thank God for it. You work hard to earn the money that God sets aside for you. Jeremiah 9:23-24 is a good reminder: **23 Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord."** If there is anything believers can take pride in, it is the fact that God chose them. He takes the initiative to save them. That eternal relationship is the most precious gift money cannot buy and it will never depreciate. Trials can reveal what we cherish the most. It is like exposing the core of an onion when layers of scales are peeled off. It happens when we suffer financial loss, are laid off at work or contract a serious disease. Sometimes we get rid of things that are no longer useful. Many of us have relocated before. Moving causes a bigger headache when you have lived at an address for some time. You are shocked to see how much stuff you have collected. There may be baby clothes and toys belonged to your kids, old documents and things you do not even remember you own. You laugh at yourself that those bundle of treasures in the past are now burden and trash. One day all believers will move one last time. All that we accumulate in the world will become unimportant compared to the glory in heaven. We should be thankful and content while we are still in this earthly life. Then our faith will not be shaken even when trials come.

4. 試煉的獎賞 Prize after Trials

God puts us in a training course through trials. He hopes that we can grow toward maturity in the process. Ultimately, God preserves a prize after we have overcome trials. James calls that prize "the crown of life" in verse 12. When we hear "crown" we may think of a golden ring with gemstones that kings and queens wear. The Greek word for crown is *stephanos*, from which we derive the name Stephan. People in the Roman world did not think of a shiny halo when they heard the word "crown." Rather, they pictured a wreath athletes won in sport competitions. You may wonder: what is the point for God to give us a crown of leaves? The focus is not on the cost of it, but its value. Consider the awards you display in your home. A paper certificate is only

worth a few cents. A metal trophy costs less than fifty dollars to make. You may not earn anything if you sell those items at a pawn shop. But they mean a lot to you because you worked hard to earn them. You proudly share your stories when friends ask you the background behind them. The value of a prize lies in the pride that comes with it. Paul also talks about crown in 1 Corinthians 9:25 – **Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.** All contestants in a race want to win the first-place, even when the prize is just a ring of leaves. How much more should Christians strive toward the finish-line to win a crown that will never fade away! But you are not competing with fellow believers for things like how many times you read the Bible, how much money you offer or how many people you save for Jesus. We are fighting against our laziness not to live a productive life for the Lord. It is the complacency to think that we can take it easy since we are saved. Some believers say they are satisfied to sit on a stool at the corner of heaven. We will be wasting the rest of our redeemed life if we have that mentality. The good news is that the prize is not only for one winner, but for all who are faithful to God. Paul says in 2 Timothy 4:7-8 as he looked back at his life: **7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.** Every Christian who eagerly waits for Jesus' return will receive a crown of life. It is a prize as much as a recognition of our effort. It will be like an award a company gives to every retired employee, whether it is a janitor or a manager. They are appreciated for their small and big contributions. Likewise, God will give each believer a crown. We do not know how it will look like. It will be a prize worth waiting for, since God will only give us the best things.

結論 CONCLUSION

We have two choices when our faith is under trials: we can either give up on God or we can give in to Him. If those tests come to us randomly, then we suffer for no reason. We will groan and harbor resentment and bitterness in our hearts. As an alternative, we can bite our tongue and deal with them like a cool dude. But James tells us that God uses trials to shape us. Someone said people are like tea-bags. You do not know what they are made of unless you put them in hot water. Our responses to trials reveal whether we trust ourselves, depend on our resources or we truly rely on God. The Lord uses trials to perfect us like gold being refined in a furnace. The fire will burn away all the impurities. The result will be fine gold. No one will volunteer to receive trials. We should not resist those tests either if God has a meaning for us.

引言 INTRODUCTION

我們今天開始來學習雅各書。我稱這個系列為「行得通的信心」。對雅各來說，基督信仰不只是在教會裡相信神。我們在日常生活中也必須實踐信仰。這是一封簡短的書信，只有五章。我鼓勵大家在個人靈修的時候閱讀它。聖經學者普遍認為作者雅各是耶穌的弟弟。雅各後來成為耶路撒冷第一所教會的主要領袖。第一節經文提供了一些背景。收信人是一群猶太基督徒。他們很可能是由於宗教迫害而分散到各地。由於幾個原因，他們的信心受到試煉。首先，猶太人認為那些基督徒背叛了傳統信仰並創立了新的宗教。他們聲稱耶穌是神。其次，羅馬人苦待基督徒，因為他們不尊崇凱撒為神。他們敬拜耶穌。第三，他們受到假教導的影響。有些異端是基督信仰和異教的混合。比較之下，基督徒相信耶穌是唯一的真神，也是唯一的得救途徑。今天的世界與當時很不同。但不變的事實是我們也會面對試煉。有些人錯誤地認為，既然神愛我們，便會一帆風順了。神不會像一些父母保護孩子免受任何困難。神沒有把我們放在一個防護盾後面。但縱使有些孩子在教會長大，從基督徒學校畢業，最終他們也必須面對墮落的世界。任何年齡的信徒都必須在神的話語上打好根基。他們就像溫室的植物，必須深深扎根才能抵抗炎熱的夏天。神從來沒有保證我們會輕鬆到達天堂。但祂承諾，無論我們要面對什麼挑戰，祂都不會離棄我們，也不會撇下我們。當我們的信心受到試煉時，我們有兩個選擇：放棄神，或是順服神。

解釋 EXPLANATION

1. 試煉的目的 Purposes of Trials

雅各首先告訴我們試煉的目的。他在第 3 節中提到了試煉的一個短期目的，是要產生忍耐。當期待美好的結果時，我們願意忍耐。學生在畢業前必須完成課程要求。大多數上班族為生活每週工作五天。我們甚至會強逼自己更努力以達到某些目標。你戒掉炸雞，去健身房，因為你想擁有更健康的身體。人們在朝著目標奮鬥時會約束自己。同樣，我們克服試煉，是希望建立信心。此外，屬靈成長和身體成長相似。有些孩子在小學時覺得數學很難。但到了中學的時候，有些計算就變成很容易。同樣，小的試煉幫助我們迎接更大的試煉。好消息是神知道我們能承受多少。請看哥林多前書 10:13 的應許：**你們所遇見的試探，無非是人所能受的。神是信實的，必不叫你們受試探過於所能受的；在受試探的時候，總要給你們開一條出路，叫你們能忍受得住。**試探和試煉在希臘文中是同一個字。我們將在下一課中詳細討論這一點。神的目的不是要打倒我們，而是要建立我們。當祂逐漸提高困難時，我

們的信心就會增長。就好像你舉 50 磅的重量鍛鍊肌肉後，你就能舉起 100 磅一樣。試煉是為了我們的益處。除了短期目的之外，試煉還有兩個長期目的。雅各在第 4 節告訴我們，透過試煉，我們可以變得「成完」和「完備」。「成完」可以理解為完美。但一般的意思是指達到該有的功用。然後「完備」描述健康的狀態。我們可以用「成熟」這個字來概括這兩個字的意思。一個成熟的年輕人可以做出獨立的決定。同樣，一個成熟的基督徒可以做出討神喜悅的選擇。沒有人喜歡面對困難。但是靈命成熟沒有捷徑。你平時學到的聖經知識會幫助你接受將來的試煉。當我們在順境時，很容易相信神。我們甚至覺得沒有神我們也能活得很好！當我們面對困難時，我們會重新檢驗我們的信仰。我們也許會想：神是真實的嗎？祂真的關心我嗎？當我受傷時祂在哪裡？神希望透過試煉建立我們的品格。祂期望我們倚靠祂得勝。因此，與其問神：為什麼是我？為什麼我會碰到這件事情？為什麼是現在發生？我們可以禱告：主啊，我能從這次經驗中學到什麼？

2. 試煉的禱告 Prayer in Trials

神在我們的試煉中有祂的目的。困難應該讓我們更接近祂，而不是使我們遠離祂。雅各在第 5 節建議我們在試煉中應該發出的禱告。他要求我們祈求智慧。智慧就是明白神旨意的洞察力。它幫助我們從神的角度來看試煉，從而明白祂為何允許事情的發生。祈求智慧是神不會拒絕的禱告。事實上，神樂意且慷慨地賜給我們智慧。祂永遠不會對我們說：「怎麼又是你？」神歡迎我們接近祂，就像父親喜歡孩子向他尋求幫助一樣。因此，我們禱告時必須謙卑。我們對神說：「主啊，我不知道。請祢幫助我了解。」我們希望在試煉中獲得智慧，使我們知道如何以討神喜悅的方式來回應。如果我們不禱告，那麼我們很可能會尋求快速解決方案，或者我們會聽從別人的意見。很可惜，有些基督徒喜歡扮演神的角色。我以前認識一位師母，她得了癌症。有人告訴她，她一定是有什麼還沒有認的罪。神給她這個疾病作為懲罰。我們在聖經中豈不是聽過類似的評論嗎？約伯的朋友就是這樣說的！他們的邏輯是，順服神的人就會得到祂的祝福。因此，困難就是神對我們犯罪的管教。這樣的說法能給人任何幫助嗎？可能不會。在試煉中的信徒需要得到憐憫。因此不要充當偵探或專家。你應該做的是和受苦的人一起禱告。求神賜給他們智慧，讓他們度過難關。就算我們受苦，神也應許與我們同在。使徒保羅曾經分享他身上一根刺的經歷。他沒有具體說明那到底是什麼。一些聖經學者認為它可能是某種慢性疾病。保羅三次求神挪去那個問題，但是主沒有答應。但是神給了保羅更寶貴的東西。保羅在哥林多後書 12:9 中說：他對我說：「我的恩典夠你用的，因為我的能力是在人的軟弱上顯得完全。」所以，我更喜歡誇自己的軟弱，好叫基督的能力覆庇我。神應許以祂的恩典扶持保羅。最終，保羅的信心不但沒有減少，反而增加了。這個軟弱並沒有成為他事工的障礙。相反，保羅使用這個經歷作傳福音的工具。神並沒有解決保羅的問題。但祂賜給保羅智慧，讓他明白為什麼神沒有解決他的困難。神也希望使用你所面對的試煉來榮耀祂。因此，不要只是祈求答案，也要祈求智慧。神

會給你足夠的恩典來度過難關。當人們看到你的喜樂時，他們會得出結論：要不然你是個傻瓜，相信一個沒有幫助你的神，要不然你所相信的神是真實的。

3. 試煉的視野 Perspective in Trials

雅各告訴我們試煉的目的，並教導我們在試煉中的禱告。接下來，他提醒我們在試煉中該有的視野。考驗讓我們明白生命是短暫而且不可預測的。雅各在第 9 節和第 10 節中把經濟上的富裕與靈裡的富足聯繫起來。貧窮的信徒不應該自卑，因為他們在神眼中是富足的。耶穌基督將他們從罪中拯救出來，並恢復他們作為神兒女的地位。富有的基督徒也不應該誇耀自己的金錢。他們所擁有的一切都是短暫的。就連生命的長短也可能像野花一樣不確定。無論那些植物有多漂亮，它們在太陽下都會枯萎。富有的基督徒應該認同耶穌，因為祂為了我們的緣故而被世人輕看。神不恨有錢人，因為財富是祂的祝福。問題不在於我們擁有多少，而在於我們有多愛我們所擁有的。雅各後來在信中責備教會中富裕的信徒，因為他們看不起一些貧窮的成員。金錢可以給我們安全感。但我們很容易對自己的金錢感到自豪，而忘記感謝神。你努力工作是要賺取神為你預留的金錢。耶利米書 9:23-24 是一個很好的提醒：**23 耶和華如此說：「智慧人不要因他的智慧誇口，勇士不要因他的勇力誇口，財主不要因他的財物誇口。24 誇口的卻因他有聰明，認識我是耶和華，又知道我喜悅在世上施行慈愛、公平，和公義，以此誇口。這是耶和華說的。」**如果信徒有什麼值得驕傲的話，那就是神揀選了他們。祂主動來拯救他們。這份永恆的關係是金錢買不到最珍貴的禮物，而且永遠不會貶值。試煉可以顯示我們最珍惜的東西。就像剝掉一層一層的洋蔥，最後露出核心一樣。當我們遭受經濟損失、失業或嚴重疾病時，才知道什麼是最重要的事情。有時我們會丟掉沒有用的東西。許多人以前都搬過家。當你在某個地方住了一段時間後，搬家會讓你覺得特別頭痛。你會驚訝自己竟然收集了那麼多東西。可能包括小孩的嬰兒衣服和玩具、舊文件以及你甚至不記得自己擁有的東西。你會感到可笑，以前的那些寶物現在變成了負擔和垃圾。有一天，所有信徒都會最後一次搬家。與天上的榮耀相比，我們在世上所累積的一切都變得微不足道。當我們還在世上生活時，我們應該心存感謝和知足。這樣，縱然臨到試煉，我們的信心也不會動搖。

4. 試煉的獎賞 Prize after Trials

神讓我們接受試煉，彷彿是經過一場訓練。祂希望我們能夠在這個過程中邁向成熟。最終，在我們克服試煉後，神會為我們保留獎賞。雅各在第 12 節中稱這個獎賞為「生命的冠冕」。當我們聽到「冠冕」時，我們可能會想到皇帝和皇后戴的鑲有寶石的圓圈。希臘文的「冠冕」是“stephanos”，史蒂芬 (Stephen) 這個名字就是由它而來的。羅馬世界的人們聽到「冠冕」這個字時，他們想到的並不是閃亮的光環。他們乃是想到運動員在體育比賽中贏得的花圈。你可能會想：神給我們一個用

樹葉編的圈有什麼用呢？重點不是它的成本，而是它的價值。想一下你在家中展示的獎項。一張證書只值幾分錢。製作一個金屬獎盃的成本可能是幾十塊錢。如果你拿那些東西去當舖，你可能賺不到多少錢。但那些獎狀對你來說意義重大，因為是你辛苦得到的。當朋友問你如何贏得那些獎品之時，你會自豪地分享你的故事。獎項的價值在於那份驕傲的感覺。保羅在哥林多前書 9:25 中也談到冠冕：**凡較力爭勝的，諸事都有節制，他們不過是要得能壞的冠冕；我們卻是要得不能壞的冠冕。**所有運動員都希望贏得第一名，就算獎品只是一圈樹葉。基督徒更應該努力走向終點，目的是要贏取不能衰殘的冠冕！但你不是在與其他信徒競爭，比如你讀了多少遍聖經、你奉獻多少錢或是你帶領幾個人信耶穌。我們正在與自己的懶惰作鬥爭，使我們不願意為主過著積極的生活。那是一種自滿的想法，以為得救之後就可以放鬆。一些信徒說，他們寧願在天堂的角落坐個小板凳。如果我們有這種心態，就是浪費了我們的餘生。好消息是，這個獎品不只是給冠軍，而是屬於所有忠心的人。保羅在提摩太後書 4:7-8 回顧自己的一生時說：**7 那美好的仗我已經打過了，當跑的路我已經跑盡了，所信的道我已經守住了。8 從此以後，有公義的冠冕為我存留，就是按著公義審判的主到了那日要賜給我的；不但賜給我，也賜給凡愛慕他顯現的人。**每一個熱切等待耶穌再來的基督徒都會得到生命的冠冕。它是一個獎勵，也是對我們努力的認可。這就像公司給每位退休員工的禮物，無論是清潔工或是經理。他們因著大大小小的貢獻得到讚賞。神會給每個信徒一個冠冕。我們不知道它是什麼樣子。但它一定是個值得等待的獎賞，因為神只會給我們最好的東西。

結論 CONCLUSION

當我們的信心受到試煉時，我們有兩個選擇：放棄神，或是順服神。如果這些考驗是無緣無故發生的，那麼我們是白白受苦。我們心裡會嘆息、怨恨、藏有苦毒。我們也可以咬緊牙關，硬著頭皮去接受。但雅各告訴我們，神用試煉來塑造我們。有人說，人就像茶包。你不知道他們的裡面有什麼，除非你把他們放在熱水中。我們對試煉的回應反映出我們是相信自己、依靠我們的資源還是真正信靠神。主使用試煉使我們得以完全，就像爐中煉金一樣。火會燒掉所有的雜質，結果就是純金。沒有人會自願接受試煉。但如果神對我們的試煉有祂的心意，那麼我們也不該抗拒它們。