

# STRETCH

My Faith, Lord

JUANITA PURCELL

Quotations on pages 12 and 26 are from *From the Father's Heart* by Charles Slagle. © 1989 by Charles Slagle. Used by permission of Destiny Image Publishers. All rights reserved.

Quotation on page 32 is from *Winning Words for Daily Living* by Charles U. Wagner. © 1989 by Kregel Publications. Used by permission of Kregel Publications. All rights reserved.

Quotations on pages 52 and 71 are from *Thru the Bible* with J. Vernon McGee by J. Vernon McGee. Used by permission of Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers. All rights reserved.

Quotations on pages 25 and 26 and 80 are from *Loneliness* by Elisabeth Elliot. © 1988 by Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers. Used by permission of Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers. All rights reserved.

Quotations on pages 14, 35, 46, 57, and 60 are from *Timeless Insights*. © 1990, 1991 by Walk Thru the Bible Ministries, Atlanta, GA. Used by permission.

Quotation on page 47 is from *I Surrender* by Patrick M. Morley. © 1990 by Wolgemuth & Hyatt, Publishers, Inc. Used by permission of Wolgemuth & Hyatt, Publishers, Inc. All rights reserved.

*Stretch My Faith, Lord*

© 1992 Regular Baptist Press • Arlington Heights, Illinois

[www.RegularBaptistPress.org](http://www.RegularBaptistPress.org) • 1-800-727-4440

Printed in U. S. A. All rights reserved.

RBP5207 • ISBN: 978-0-87227-174-6

Thirteenth printing—2017

All rights reserved. Except as permitted under U.S. Copyright Law, no part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

# *A SPECIAL THANKS*

To J. O., my husband, pastor, and best friend, who gave helpful comments, corrections, and words of encouragement as I wrote each chapter.

Also to Betty Keefe, a faithful friend, who helped me critique the book. Her insight and comments from a woman's perspective added some special touches.

# CONTENTS

Preface . . . . .	7
Introduction. . . . .	8
LESSON 1	Trial: The Way to Growth . . . . .9
LESSON 2	Don't Give Up; Persevere . . . . .17
LESSON 3	Temptations Will Come; Expect Them . . . . .23
LESSON 4	Is Your Faith Real or Phony? . . . . .31
LESSON 5	Do You Play Favorites? . . . . .38
LESSON 6	Faith Demands Evidence . . . . .44
LESSON 7	Caution: Tongues out of Control . . . . .50
LESSON 8	Do You Pass the Tongue Test? . . . . .56
LESSON 9	Causes and Cures for Quarrels . . . . .63
LESSON 10	Examine Yourself, Not Others . . . . .70
LESSON 11	Stretched Faith Patiently Waits . . . . .77
LESSON 12	A Final Look at Afflictions. . . . .84
Leader's Guide . . . . .	91

# *PREFACE*

James is a practical book. It was written to give us a picture of what a mature, balanced, grown-up Christian should be like. James is a glowing collection of truths, arguments, questions, probings, and challenges. It invades every area of our lives and explores every area of our personalities.

In five short chapters James leaps from one subject to another without apology. He touches topics from trials to the tongue, from the use of money to patience, from Bible reading to criticism, from temptation to prayer.

My faith has been stretched as I have dug into the book of James to prepare these lessons. I believe the truths that have challenged me will stretch your faith as well.

# INTRODUCTION

As we begin our adventure in the book of James, we need to know a few things at the outset: Who wrote the book? When was it written? To whom was it written? Why was it written?

## ***Who wrote the book?***

James is the writer of the book. But which James?

James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John?

James, the son of Alphaeus?

James, the father of Judas the disciple?

James, the half brother of Jesus Christ?

The writer does not identify himself in any way other than “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1).

James, the half brother of Jesus Christ, is the most likely writer.

James lived in the same home as Jesus (Matthew 13:55), but he did not believe Jesus was the Savior (John 7:5). Jesus appeared to James after the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:5–7). This was the turning point in James’s life; he believed that Jesus truly is the Savior. He shared this with his brothers and later became the leader of the church in Jerusalem (Galatians 2:9).

## ***When was it written?***

Bible scholars date the writing of the book about A.D. 45–50. This makes it one of the earliest New Testament epistles.

## ***To whom was it written?***

James directly addresses “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad,” and he also calls them “brethren.” He is writing to Jews (twelve tribes) and fellow believers (brethren).

## ***Why was it written?***

At the time James wrote this book, Rome was the capital of the world. Claudius, the emperor, despised the Jews and persecuted them. Many were homeless; families were separated; Jews were experiencing great misery and suffering. The result? The Jews began to scatter and live a lie.

James wrote to encourage his brethren to stand firm in the midst of their trials. He also reminded them that their trials would help produce spiritual maturity in their lives. He went on to exhort the brethren to live godly lives and told them how they could accomplish such living. He drew a vivid picture of what a Christian is like in his speech, actions, feelings, and possessions. James will stretch our faith to its outer limits.

LESSON 1

# Trials: The Way to Growth

JAMES 1:1–4

---

*“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers [various] temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience” (James 1:2, 3).*

The book of James is a letter about the Christian life. Every chapter has valuable lessons, but we will profit from them only as we apply the truths to our lives. As we begin each lesson, let us make sure we are not just hearing the words but that we are *doing* what we hear and learn. “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (James 1:22).

As we begin this lesson, will you pray this prayer with me? “Lord, when all kinds of trials come rushing into my life, help me not to question Your love. Help me remember that You are ‘too good to be unkind and too wise to make a mistake.’ Keep me from confusion, O Lord, for the honor of Your name. Amen.”

To understand and enjoy this first lesson, read the introduction to this study (p. 8).

## **Introduction**

*Read James 1:1.*

1. How does James identify himself?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Who was raised in the same home with James? Read Matthew 13:55 and 56.

3. James didn't identify himself as the brother of Jesus or as the leader of the church at Jerusalem. What does this tell you about him?

James used the word “servant” (*doulos*) to prove to us his attitude of devotion and service to Christ. *Doulos* means “a bondsman,” like the one pictured in Exodus 21:1–6. This bond-slave loves and gladly serves his master for life.

4. If you were related to a famous or well-known person, what would you be tempted to do?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Why do we “name-drop”?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. James's brothers and sisters in Christ were going through “fiery trials” (1 Peter 4:12). Read James 1:1 again. Describe some of the trials you think they may have faced.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. What had God predicted would happen to the Jews? Read Leviticus 26:33 and Deuteronomy 28:37.



---

*“Do you feel like a member of the scattered tribes of Israel as you look back upon other days when your family circle was unbroken and loved ones were near? Then listen to James’ first word: Rejoice! You are a servant of God. You belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. God has written a love letter to you. He sends greetings to you. It is He who tells you to rejoice.”<sup>1</sup>*

---

**If we are to grow, we need to have the right attitude in our trials.**

*Read James 1:2.*

8. We know the book of James was written to believers, so that means it is also for us today. Verse 2 seems to present an unreasonable request. What is it?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. How do we usually respond when God allows trials in our lives?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. What wrong evaluation of ourselves do we display when we ask, “Why is this happening to me?”

---

*“If we value comfort more than character, then trials will upset us. If we value the material and physical more than the spiritual, we will not be able to ‘count it all joy.’ If we live only for the present and forget the future, then trials will make us bitter, not better.”<sup>2</sup>*

---

The key word in “count it all joy” is “count.” It is a financial term, and it means “to evaluate.”

11. Change “count” to “evaluate,” and rewrite James 1:2 in your own words.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
12. How do the promises in these verses make it possible to “count it all joy” in difficult circumstances?

Philippians 4:13

Isaiah 40:31

Isaiah 26:3

---

*“Son . . . your present situation is not as difficult as it appears—not if you can see your smallness and My greatness in it. . . . The glory of My power shines brightest in the absence of human help.”<sup>3</sup>*

---

13. (a) What word in James 1:2 and Isaiah 43:2 implies that all believers will at sometime or another go through trials?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- (b) What trial have you gone through lately?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- (c) Evaluate the trial. What has it done, or is it doing, in your life?

14. What could the words “fall into” indicate?

**If we are to grow, our faith must be tested.**

*Read James 1:3 and 4.*

15. If you have access to Bible resource material (such as *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*), look up the following words and write a more complete definition of each one.

divers (James 1:2)

temptations (James 1:2)

trying (James 1:3)

worketh (James 1:3)

patience (James 1:3, 4)

perfect (James 1:4)

entire (James 1:4)

16. Reread the definitions of the words you looked up and write James 1:2–4 in your own words.

---

*“God is thinking of perfecting people for glory rather than protecting people from unpleasantness. In fact, He may use the injustice and the unpleasantness as a lesson to lead us further in our relationship with Him.”<sup>4</sup>*

---

17. Many times we are confused when trials come, and we don’t know what God is doing in our lives. What does verse 3 say we can know for sure when trials come?

18. What would happen to our faith if it were never tested?

---

*“The brilliance of gold twice refined, then crafted into exquisite jewelry, is breathtaking indeed. But from the comfort of the jewelry store, no one recalls the heat and pressure, stamping and shaping at the hand of the goldsmith that made it possible. Are you living in the crucible? Then take heart! Something beautiful is about to happen at the hands of your Creator.”<sup>5</sup>*

---

19. When patience has finished its “perfect work,” what kind of Christians should we be?
20. (a) Does “wanting [lacking] nothing” in verse 4 relate to material or spiritual things?
- (b) What does this verse mean?



### *From My Heart*

---

Have you ever noticed how the Lord often tests us to see if we’re practicing what we’re preaching? The week I started this book, the Lord sent a test that seemed to be the capstone of three years of trials. Needless to say, I was discouraged. I was disappointed and felt like quitting. I was tired and near the point of exhaustion. Late into the night I questioned the Lord and felt so sorry for myself. Then just as if the Lord turned on a light, the darkness and questioning left, and I remembered the lesson I had written on James 1:1–4. As I lay there in bed, this poem began to develop in my mind.

Lord, will these pains and trials never end?  
Just when I think it’s over, another You send.  
You know my heart—how it hurts so bad;  
I’m trying to smile, but I feel so sad.  
What from these trials do You want me to know?  
Oh, I remember; You want me to grow.  
Yes, more like Jesus You want me to be;  
That’s the plan You have in mind for me.  
So keep on chipping and banging away;  
Don’t stop till You’re finished, no matter what I say.

---

*From Your Heart*

Reflecting over this lesson, have you come to the realization that your trials are custom-made by God to help you grow spiritually? What is God trying to teach you in your present trial?

#### Notes

1. S. Maxwell Coder, *Faith That Works* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, n.d.), p. 4.
2. Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Mature* (Wheaton, Ill.: SP Publications, 1978), p. 23.
3. Charles Slagle, *From the Father's Heart* (Shippensburg, Pa.: Destiny Image Publishers, 1989), p. 84.
4. Stuart Briscoe, *What Works When Life Doesn't* (Wheaton, Ill.: SP Publications, 1976), p. 136.
5. *Timeless Insights* (Atlanta: Thru the Bible Ministries), August 1990.