

James: Endure to Mature – James 1:2-27

Sunday 13 September 2020

Before You Begin

Our hope is that this is a resource that will help us to engage meaningfully with God's word and invite us into a sense of worship, despite being unable to meet face-to-face. Use it in a way that feels comfortable and helpful to you.

A table of contents has been added to give you a sense of what will follow and allow you to move more easily through the worship elements.

Prepare

Have your Bible close by and some food and drink prepared for communion. It doesn't have to be bread and grape juice; it could be whatever is available (tea and a biscuit) to use in this symbolic time.

Get into a 'Sacred' Space

Be intentional. Sit somewhere. Have some visual representation of God (perhaps a small cross, your Bible, a symbol or image) or you might play some reflective music. Start with a few moments of silence and deep breathing.

Consider your environment

What will work for you in the space you have? If you have others in your house (housemates/family), consider sharing this time with them, each reading or participating as appropriate. You might simply reflect individually, in your own time and space. Afterwards, you might connect with others through technology to share your reflections, or an encouragement, with them.



What's Inside

On a computer, you can click these links

Call to Worship

Song: Desert Song

Song: Faithful Now

Personal Testimony

Bible Reading: James 1:2-27 (NIV)

Message

Questions for reflection & discussion

Communion

Prayer

Connect cards online

Call to Worship

Matthew Moore

Hi everyone,

I'm here to offer you a huge Ringwood Church of Christ welcome to you as you engage in this week's worship resources. Today we're starting on a four-week series entitled "James". It's using readings and themes from the book of James, which is a book that's abounding with practical and down-to-earth Godly wisdom and encouragement, to live faithful and fruitful everyday lives, even in the midst of trials and persecutions. These words speak directly to us today, offering hope and encouragement, reminding us to endure, to be patient, to keep perspective and even to grow through trials. To seek Godly and not worldly wisdom, to love everyone equally and unconditionally and to care for and strengthen the community of faith.

As we continue to go through this unique time in history, facing issues and circumstances that six months ago weren't even imaginable, and as we look forward to a day when these things are behind us, I pray that today's worship, and also over the next few weeks, will help you to reflect, to recalibrate and to be refreshed. Penny will be bringing us our message today and it's entitled "Endure to mature". And we'll also hear an inspiring personal testimony on perseverance, endurance and resilience from Paul Reid.

We invite you to join with us today as we worship together.

Song: Desert Song

This is my prayer in the desert
When all that's within me feels dry
This is my prayer in my hunger and need
My God is the God who provides

This is my prayer in the fire
In weakness or trial or pain
There is a faith proved of more worth than gold
So refine me Lord through the flame

I will bring praise
I will bring praise
No weapon formed against me shall remain
I will rejoice
I will declare
God is my victory and He is here

This is my prayer in the battle
When triumph is still on its way
I am a conqueror and co-heir with Christ
So firm on His promise I'll stand

All of my life in ev'ry season
You are still God
I have a reason to sing
I have a reason to worship
(REPEAT)

This is my prayer in the harvest
When favour and providence flow
I know I'm filled to be emptied again
The seed I've received I will sow

CCLI Song # 5060793
Brooke Ligertwood
© 2008 Sony/ATV Music Publishing Australia (Admin. by Sony/ATV Music Publishing)
CCLI Licence # 30581

Song: Faithful Now

I am holding on to faith
'Cause I know You'll make a way
And I don't always understand
And I don't always get to see
But I will believe it
I will believe it

You make mountains move
You make giants fall
And You use songs of praise
To shake prison walls
And I will speak to my fear
I will preach to my doubt
That You were faithful then
You'll be faithful now

I am standing on Your Word
I'm calling heaven down to earth
And You will fight my enemies
And this will end in victory
And I will believe it
Yes I will believe it

And I know that I know You never fail
Yes I know that I know You never will

CCLI Song # 7137533
Eddie Hoagland | Hank Bentley | Jonathan Smith | Mia Fieldes
© All Essential Music (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC)
Be Essential Songs (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC)
HBC Worship Music (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC)
Hickory Bill Doc (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC)

Jingram Music Publishing (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC)
So Essential Tunes (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC)
Upside Down Under (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC)
Capitol CMG Amplifier (Admin. by SHOUT! Music Publishing Australia)
Every Square Inch (Admin. by SHOUT! Music Publishing Australia)
CCLI Licence # 30581

Personal Story

Paul Reid



Endless flashing lights merge to create a blinking-red glow, silhouetted against a darkened-blue sky. Riders arrange and rearrange, constant streams of people with bikes, moving, shifting, restraining, nervous. The pulsing and flashing reveals the everyday machinations of cycling life; intricate lines of bikes being walked – hopeful – to starting points, riders stretching, massaging, attempting to warm chilled muscles; heat through friction. Amidst the chill there is a tangible buzz of excitement, like a series of spontaneously materialising sparks threatening to spread and light up the darkness. The sounds reinforce this moment, clack-clack of cleats on concrete, clicking of helmets, the murmur of conversation. But it is cold, I'm shivering. I can't work out if that's because of the chill or nerves. It is here; the moment, the day, the culmination of the weeks of training. For this. *Peaks Challenge Falls Creek*.

235kms - 4,700 metres of climbing. Big question ... why?
Caveat - I'm not really an athlete.

So, that question again, why?



Back up a little - what is *Peaks Challenge*?

It is a bike ride that encourages ordinary people to push themselves physically and mentally, to rise to a very specific challenge. It starts at the top of Falls Creek in the Victorian Alps and heads down to Mount Beauty, then up and over Tawonga Gap. On to Harrietville and up to Mount Hotham, for me a climb that takes about 2 1/2 hrs. From there a quick rest stop at Dinner Plain and on to Omeo. From Omeo out to Anglers Rest then up the back of Falls Creek and back where it starts from. A total of 235kms. Oh, and there is a limit in terms of time - needs to be done within 13 hours or you have to retire gracefully. The ride takes place in the Labour Day long weekend in March. This was 2019 ...

So, why?

Hang on ... back track a little further ... how did I get the idea this was a good thing to do? I had a friend who suggested it - he said he thought I'd be good at it because I was "middle-aged and bloody stubborn". As it turns out, he was also the organiser of the event, so I suspect he may have had other motives ...

I guess at a deeper level, I considered the challenge something personal - just me - to see if I could do something physical that pushed me beyond my limits. I'm not really a driven person but I do like

a challenge and to see if I can do something different - I think I feel lucky to live in a very safe and secure world and to some degree this is a way of stretching myself. I felt as though at my age, at this moment, it was important to work on becoming physically fit as well and this was something to work toward. I didn't feel like I had anything to prove, although as I got closer, this need to prove something because I'd invested in the preparation and had taken others along with me became a stronger motivational aspect.



I felt that if I was going to do this thing then I was going to prepare myself properly for it with a well-planned training schedule. I started training in November of the previous year, riding 6 days a week and building my training schedule in terms of distances and approach. It was a lot of time, a lot of kilometres and plenty of hills. This impacted both Kaye and Maighdlin - Kaye was always my support, driving to places to pick me up and working out the training program. Maighdlin was more concerned that I was never home to cook her dinner!

So, why?



Fast forward to the actual event day. I was far more nervous than I should have been, but I wanted to do this thing - to prepare, to persist and finally make it. I began the ride and felt the preparation and training actually paid off. The first two of the three Peaks were very tough, but my training was serving me well. By the time I had reached Omeo, I was flagging. This is some 170 kms into the ride with 65kms to go. I reached the back of Falls, and was pretty weary - still turning pedals, but not a lot

of power in them. I rounded the corner up the first brutal slope - 800 metres at 12% incline - and saw a message painted on the road "Paul Reid – you've got this, son!" It had been added by the friend who'd talked me into the ride in the first place! I couldn't believe it! I flew up that first slope with a smile on my face. At this point, the weather and the chill closed in - 26 degrees in Omeo had turned to about 6 degrees out the back of Falls, this last 50 or so kilometres was with cold rain falling. This was where the motivation through training - having to go riding at odd times when you felt like staying inside, getting up at 5 o'clock in the morning for yet another ride - this is where preparation and practice became critical.



I made it!



I was aiming for 11 hours and managed to make it back to Falls in 10 hours 51 minutes! I got off the bike shaking uncontrollably, completely exhausted and physically and emotionally spent. But I felt so absolutely elated - isn't that a weird thing about humans? Something to remember the next time when things get tough ...

The training was crucial – the persistence and resilience required to get to the starting line is what I was drawing on during the Challenge but I didn't realise this until looking back later. I think that is something that Peaks taught me. And for me, this is like life - practicing things in the easy moments

for when things get really hard.

That was why.

I'm a Peaks finisher.

And have the jersey to prove it.



Bible Reading: James 1:2-27 (NIV)

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. 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. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wildflower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.

Blessed 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.

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.

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.

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.

Do not 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 intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Message

Penny Martin

There is a rich harvest of important learning that can come from the book of James. Things like endurance, resilience, deepening maturity, perspective, wisdom, patience, growth, empathy – to name just a few.

This new series that we are exploring for the next few weeks is an invitation to explore the book of James through the lens of pressing in. James is a deeply confronting, encouraging and practical book and my prayer is that throughout the weeks ahead we will both individually and communally be equipped in our formation toward spiritual maturity and perspective; toward consistency; toward wisdom; and toward an abiding sense of hopeful community solidarity.

Today James is a challenging read especially for those of us who want some sort of compromise. When James says at the outset of his writing here in James Chapter 1, consider our various trials as ‘nothing but joy’ (vs 2) this forces us into a choice. Normally one associates suffering and trials with evil and a normal human response is to avoid such things – James, however, challenges a faith that is free from trials and insists that faith matures and deepens as we endure.

I’m not a massive motorsport fan but I married someone with a little bit of petrol running through his veins and I’ve realised that he could happily sit for hours watching car racing. Endurance racing is a form of motorsport racing which is meant to test the durability of equipment and endurance of participants. Some of you will be familiar with the *Bathurst 1000* – probably the most famous endurance motor race in Australia. Held annually this race is just over 1000km in distance (161 laps). The racing often takes a huge toll on drivers and vehicles alike.

Another passion of many people each year is to watch the *Tour de France*. The most prestigious and difficult endurance cycling event running over a three-week period and covering some 3,600 km (mainly in France). It is one of the supreme tests of athletic endurance. I don't know about you but we quite enjoy sitting up and watching the race late into the night right now – it is fascinating to see how the riders physically and mentally endure the various stages.

These examples serve to highlight something important about the concept of endurance. It's a test. How far can you go? How long can you last? How much stamina do you have? How mentally strong are you? How good is your equipment – your tyres, your engines? In the end of each of these examples – winners can cover themselves in a torrent of champagne and hold high a trophy that says WINNER! I endured and I won!

Enduring to win a cool trophy, or bragging rights, or money is one thing. It's an end point but the interesting thing about the concept of biblical endurance is that it's not talking about a seasonal event that will finish and it's actually not only about the prize at the end. In the bible the concept of endurance is peppered throughout the teachings of Jesus and Paul as well as here in James – in fact it is a core part of discipleship. Discipleship is about following – the ongoing, every day, moment by moment, season in and season out, for better or worse choosing to walk in the way of Jesus. To endure.

Concepts like, “deny yourself and take up your cross daily” (Luke 9:23); words like, “blessed are you when you are persecuted” (Matt 5:10); inspirational verses like, “forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on” (Phil 3:13) are all evidence (among many more) of the importance of the idea of pressing in and enduring in discipleship.

“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. 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 1:2-5)

These words are a direct challenge to each of us today – and every day. Rather than approaching these words as an event or a season we need to ‘endure’ through, we would do well to understand that this idea is about a lifestyle of discipleship.

Everyday each of us wakes up with two choices. Endure or quit. Every weekday parents in Melbourne are waking up thinking can I endure another day of remote learning? Every day in the month of September I am waking up thinking hmm ... do I just keep enduring my water or should I quit Safe Water September and grab a coffee. Every day I wake up and choose to keep on going – all of us do.

Choosing to endure (which for many of us is not necessarily a cognitive choice – it's more of a reflex action) actually leads us towards something ... no, not a big trophy or champagne. James says that there is a 'crown of life' for those who have stood the test ... (James 1:12) and isn't it interesting what this might be. I have many times just read this as when we finish on this earth and all go to heaven – that's where the crowns are handed out to those who stuck it out, but that's not what James is saying. What is the crown of life?

A more likely explanation is that this crown is "of life" in the same sense that other crowns are "of gold." In that case, the reward for endurance is a more abundant life here and now, on this side of eternity, which would match well with Jesus' own words regarding the effect of faith on our quality of life (John 10:10).

All of these things, according to James leads followers toward maturity. I always hesitate to say that I am mature – I feel like we are progressing always towards maturity, celebrating moments of awareness and recognition and impact along the journey.

The results of enduring are always growth, always deepening in our ability to be resilient, to empathise, to deflect knee-jerk reactions and press for more intentionality in our relationships and our decisions - in other words maturing in our faith.

“Maturity. It doesn't always come with age, in fact it is deeper than age. It's about the way you see and understand things. The way you consider others. The way you communicate. The way you react. The things you value. The things you entertain. The way you represent yourself and others as an adult. Everyone grows old, but not everyone is growing up.” (Unknown)

Questions for reflection & discussion

1. Name some of the things you feel like you are enduring right now and celebrate the good choices and positive fruit that is emerging.
2. What might it look like to embrace endurance as a spiritual daily discipline (rather than a reaction to a season)?

Communion

Matthew Moore

Have some food and drink prepared for this time. If you're able, join us at 11am Sunday through Zoom to share in communion together at rngwd.com/communion or via Facebook live rngwd.com/fbv.

If you are unable to join us, then please use the following reflection to take communion in your own way today and after, consider who you can call to have a chat as you would on a Sunday morning after a church service.

A Reflection on Perspective

A group of us discussed ways to keep a common thread for communion each week throughout this "James" series. We decided to take a word consistent with the theme and use it as a focus for preparation. "Perspective" is the word for this week.

Perspective ... and I wondered ... which way should I look at that?

But in all seriousness, a change in perspective can have a profound impact on changing our mindset. If we take a step back and look at the bigger picture, things change. It may not change our circumstances, but it changes our outlook, our attitudes, and our actions.

The Bible is filled with examples of struggles, hardships, and lament that are turned upside down as people consider God's perspectives, rather than their own.

Perspective is everything - especially when we compare God's perspective to human perspective.

Isa 55:8-9 says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Psalm 42 says, "Why my soul are you so downcast, put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God."

The Prophet Habakkuk - wrestling with injustice, violence and threat of cruel invasion - cries out for God to act swiftly against wicked people. Yet through prayer and reflection, perspective changes. He sees the terrible end for the wicked, and actually prays for them, "Lord, in wrath remember mercy." His understanding of difficult times changes too, turning into these beautiful words:

"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour." (Hab 3:17-18)

And Jesus ... whether we understand Jesus from God's perspective, or human perspective, is the most important perspective of all. Perhaps a better way of stating this is whether we see Jesus through the eyes of faith, or through the eyes of an unbeliever.

Unbelief dismisses and even ridicules, whilst faith understands the perspective of:

- A God who created the world, and enters it as a helpless baby
- A king who is lowly and rides to victory on a donkey
- A priest who eats with tax collectors and sinners
- A king who serves
- A saviour who dies a cruel death

It's not that human perspective is necessarily wrong, it is real; but by pausing and reflecting, our human perspective can be transformed into a Godly perspective.

Even Jesus, in his humanity, agonised over his path in the garden of Gethsemane. Yet through that agonising, came this:

“For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”. (Heb 12:2)

Last week we heard Kaye and Phil share this powerful view on perspective:

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Cor 1:18)

“For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.” (1 Cor 1:25)

As we prepare to take communion together, scattered as we are, and with our various elements that remind us of Jesus body and blood given for us. Let us pray together:

Lord, help us to turn our thoughts away from any distractions, and turn our eyes to You. Help us to see the world through Your eyes and have Your perspective. Help us to be a people that turns the world upside down for You.

Help us to trust You in times of difficulty, to grow in faith and hope;

To know forgiveness in Your blood shed on the cross, and life in Your resurrection.

Amen

Prayer

Matthew Moore

Heavenly Father Our Lord and God,
We want to take this time to come into your presence,
To spend time with You and simply say we love You.

Father our hearts are longing for things to be different,
There is so much going on – and so much not going on ...
That we just want to stop, and refocus,
To be reminded
Of Your good and faithfulness toward us,
To know Your tenderness, and mercy, and grace,
To be strengthened in faith and hope,
And to be reminded that you are God - the Lord God Almighty -
Who wills that all things work together for the good of those who love You.

And Lord, You know our hearts, our minds, and bodies,
You know when we are hurting,
When we are unwell
When we are lonely, frustrated, angry, or losing direction.
But we put our trust in You, and seek Your face, that You would lead us by your Holy Spirit

Into paths of healing, and purpose
That You would help us to put on the mind of Christ.

And as we pray Lord, we bring our scattered Church before You,
Lord we miss being with each other,
Nevertheless Lord, we give thanks for all the ways that we can still connect,
And our prayer is that even now we will be shaped and formed,
Both for now, and for the time coming as landscapes change.
We pray for our leadership, and also for inspired decision-making on important issues on our near horizons.

We pray for the community around us - that they will know Your love through your people - and we pray for those whose businesses and employment is uncertain at this time. Help us to be a church that cares and provides as needs arise.

We pray for households – for patience, self-control, peace and kindness toward each other, and to ourselves as we each face our own battles.

We pray for governments at all levels, working tirelessly in unprecedented circumstances.

And we pray for the world - Lord God - raise up peaceful leaders of nations.

Move Lord God we pray, by the power of your Holy Spirit, in ways that seem big, and ways that seem small, but ways that move towards a time when Your people will see, “all things working together for the good of those who love You.”

In Jesus name,
Amen

Connect cards online

Click this link or enter it into your web browser rngwd.com/connect.

We love to know that you have been able to connect through worship today. Please click on the link (or enter it into your web browser) to our online connect cards letting us know which ways you have been able to worship, and if you want to let us know how we can praying with you.
Thank you!