

Coram Deo  
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura  
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi  
Deo Volente  
Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church  
By the Rev. Capt. Dr. John S. Niles MSM CD

# “Pressure Point- Battle Within”

**Sermon Series on Book of James: “Pressure Points”**

**January 14, 2024**

*James 1:1-12*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j1gfIKP5QAs>

I have a quote by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861) for you.

“...Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang west,

And I smiled to think God’s greatness flowed around our incompleteness, —  
Round our restlessness, his rest.”

“To think God’s greatness flowed around our incompleteness-Round our restlessness, his rest.”

At the start of his Epistle, James, the brother of Jesus, shared this curious idea about faith, that even as a battle wages within us, and outside us, as Elizabeth Barrett Browning said, God’s greatness flows around our incompleteness, and round our restlessness, is his rest.

This battle within is between what we want and what our faith wants. So he is encouraging us to let faith do its work in us. Of course, we as individuals, move towards convenience, familiarity and comfort – yet those things often go against what we need especially in the face of hard times.

“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings” (James 1:1). This letter was written during a time of persecution that included Stephen’s sermon and stoning, Saul’s rise (Acts 6:6–8:4), and Nero’s violence and murder of Christians.

Today, look at the world around us and see the previous global pandemic, an economic crisis, and the ongoing civil unrest that has made many people feel disconnected from each other and their faith. And into that, James delivered this message to those who were disconnected from each other and their faith: “For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:3-4).

## I

Regardless of our situation, James points out that we have we have **two things to do—count and ask**. *“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds”* (James 1:2).

When James uses the word “count” he means for us to calculate or reckon . . . to think about trials not from a human perspective but from God’s perspective. Not with doubt, but by faith. Through James, God offered us the mind of Christ!

When we look through the lens of the human perspective we don’t count it all joy. Instead, we grumble on Facebook and Instagram. Our tests we experience don’t seem to produce growth; instead, they typically produce groaning and complaining.

When we look at things through the lens of faith, the global pandemic, economic crisis, civil unrest become for us a time to make use of the experience that we have gone through and are going through, if we allow it, to develop and grow and prepare.

We would never want a global pandemic or an economic crisis but when we look at it in faith and live by faith; just look at what was accomplished in and through it.

Just look at Stouffville United in the midst of that trial, technology was introduced and leadership rose to the challenge, and visions of the Stain Glass Center were developed because you lived by faith, not by doubt.

And so, we then can count it all joy – “for all things work together for good for those who love the Lord and are called according to his purpose.” Not all things are good. But because “God’s greatness, flows around our incompleteness, round our restlessness, his rest” we know that as James said, “if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. (James 1:5-11)

We have seen it, but it is so very easy to fall back into doubting, fall back into fearing that even though God gave us guidance to make our way through that time; somehow we waver in our belief and allow doubt to creep in that he won’t come through this time. James knew that.

Doubting, in this context, is when what we want disagrees with what faith wants. Doubt (diakrinomenos), in this context, means wavering and vacillating. Our God finds no joy in the “double-minded” (dipsychos), which in this passage literally means “two souled.”

## II

Regardless of our situation, James points out that we have we have two things to do—count and ask. And we have **two things to be - tested and blessed**

*“For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. . . . Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him...”* (James 1:3, 12).

Silversmiths test silver to purify it. James was using a word common to that profession. Silversmiths would ignite the fire, and when the silver reached a certain temperature, the impurities would rise to the top. The silversmith would repeat this process—this testing—until he could see his reflection in the silver, and then he would know it was ready. God follows a similar process with us, his children. He uses the fire like situations all around us and observes whether we’re ready. And as the heat is turned up he looks and sees his own image in us.

Tested became synonymous with proven. The silversmith and God both desire to see their reflection.

Testing gives way to blessing *“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.”* (James 1:12)

### III

Regardless of our situation, James points out that we have two things to do—count and ask. And we have two things to be - tested and blessed. And finally, we have **two things to understand - sight and insight.**

Scripture can become for us truth not just that we see; but also truth *by which* we see. It is not just sight but insight that is offered.

*“For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits...”* James 1:11-12

You are but dust and to the dust you will return. But it is then that creativity meets creation. Sight and insight bless.

A few years ago New York Times reviewed a book by Martin Reese the astronomer Royal at the University of Cambridge. In other words, the guy is no slouch. It spoke about the Universe and what he wanted to say about it was that the Universe was finely tuned. So finally tuned that if it was out by any degree it all would come apart.

When I think of fine tuning I think of the Radio.

Remember when you last looked for a station on the radio....and there was cracking sound and as you got closer to a channel you began to hear something but no everything and until you get it just right and then, behold Beethoven flooded the room with splendour - even though you were originally looking for the Beetles.

And this Martin Rees said that this Universe was so finely tuned that if the atom was a little bit heavier or lighter or gravity were a little be less or more we wouldn't be here. And all of the planets and stars are in their place across the vastness of the universe and if they were not we would not - exist.

And those many millions of years it took to bring it all into being allowed us to be brought into existence, and is part of the stuff of which we are made. And he said what I've been saying for years that we are literally made of stardust.

Listen Rees said “we are literally the ashes of long dead stars.”

You are stardust - You are such stuff as dreams are made on -Shakespeare said

Or as Nikita Gill Said

“We have calcium in our bones,  
iron in our veins, carbon in our souls,  
and nitrogen in our brains.  
93 percent stardust, with souls made of flames,  
we are all just stars  
that have people names.”

You think about that.

