

# God Never Lets a Good Crisis Go to Waste

Pastor Morgan Murray

West Valley Presbyterian Church

## James 1:1-4

1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion:

Greetings.

2 Count it all joy, my [sisters and] brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

## Introduction

Posted on Twitter: What the dumbest thing you did when you were a kid?

And another user responded: Wished I was an adult.

Adulthood is hard, but it's been especially hard lately.

One of the least favorite parts of being a kid was the pop quiz – especially at the beginning of school. It revealed what I knew, what I thought I should know, and how much I obviously didn't know.

The Pandemic has as felt like [God's Pop Quiz](#) to determine if we could really pull together, put the needs of others first, and love our neighbors as ourselves.

But Pop Quizzes can also be a way that God says: You are ready to learn new things, to take on new challenges, to grow up.

This morning we are going to ask for God's help to reframe the current moment as a crisis that is nevertheless an incredible opportunity.

Parenthetically, people have been asking me is, "Do you think Jesus is about to return?" I'm going to explain why I believe there definitely WON'T be a rapture anytime soon - at least not here in the United States.

Who is the letter addressed to? "The Twelve Tribes of the Dispersion"

- People in shock after the stoning of Stephen
- People in fear for their lives
- People who have no idea what to do now in the face of the chaos and the unknown

How James' audience is just like us

- Life for them felt like it was going from bad to worse
- Under incredible stress, they were clearly feeling what we feel are feeling now.
- The crisis they were facing had been generations in the making
- Even though they were now separated from one another geographically, they were still One community in Christ.

But James' audience is very different from us.

- They were the tiniest of minorities, while nearly 70% of Americans identify themselves as Christian, and 25% as Evangelical.  
(<https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>)
- They were at odds with the power structures of their day, while we have enjoyed a position of privilege.
- James can say to them, "Your suffering is not caused by your sin." But any honest assessment of our national crises requires us to acknowledge that we are reaping what we and previous generations have sown.

Nevertheless, *James is the teacher we need right now.*

Who is James?

- The younger brother of Jesus who calls him Lord
- One of the founding leaders of the Jerusalem community
- A man of such extraordinary character and profound moral earnestness that he later became known as James the Just.
- He was likely the wisest, most trusted person they knew.
- Think about the wisest person you know or knew. *What are they saying right about the times we are in, or what do you think they would have said?*

What James does for his readers

- From his position as a trusted leader who has grown in wisdom and spiritual authority, James knows this little band of Jesus followers – the ones he calls “The Twelve Tribes of the Dispersion” – the new Israel established by the Messiah Jesus himself – need clear guidance.
- In this short, intense letter James will give practical and urgent direction.
- But even more valuable than advice, James gives perspective. He provides a critically important reframe of the situation.

**Count it all joy... when you meet trials of various kinds...**

James starts with a word of greeting that means “joy” and then makes it emphatic in verse two. “Joy to you who have had are now separated and dispersed! Yes, I meant joy!” This is very different from mere happiness. It is a deeper claim to the experience of God’s goodness that is even more evident in difficult times.

If this sounds like the way Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount, that is not an accident. As Jesus would tell his listeners, “Blessed are you who if you feel spiritually impoverished, and/or

in grief about the way things are, and/or starving for justice and right relationships,” so James essentially saying, “What our Lord said then is still true now...”

**Blessed are you when people... say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad... (Matthew 5:11-12)**

We are ready for such a reframe. We are ready to acknowledge

- None of this is happening by unhappy accident
- None of this is outside God’s sovereign power and purposeful love
- None of this will be wasted when it comes to the Lord’s single-minded concern for the church: To make us perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

In this reframe, James describes an experience that anyone who has gone through intense, painful experience has come to learn firsthand.

- Unprecedented trials are opportunities for unprecedented growth.
- Prolonged trials endow us with the endurance – resilience for the long haul.

So what cause for joy is there? That...

**[T]he testing of your faith produces steadfastness...**

**[so] that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.**

In other words, This is all going to help us grow up.

- Grow up spiritually
- Grow up emotionally
- Grow up individually into great Christlikeness.
- Grow up corporately, “in all things... into him who is our Head, that is Christ.” (Eph 4:1:15)

## The Call:

**Trials produce maturity IF we look in the mirror and look out the window.**

### 1. We look in the mirror for self-examination.

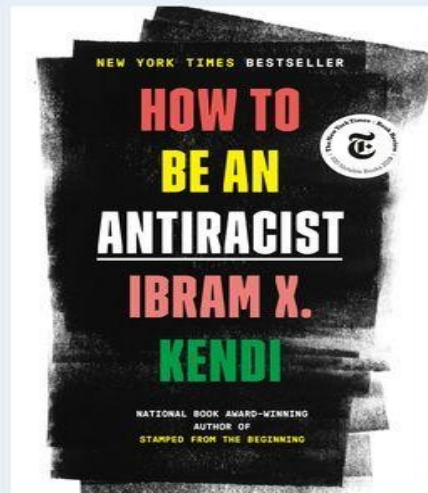
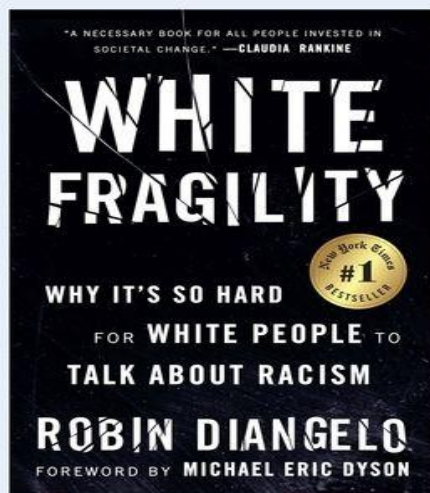
- Examine, take stock of the how the current situation has revealed your needed areas for growth in Christlikeness.
- Answer for yourself: What is the Lord calling me to do now in light of what I've heard?
- Journal this week on these prompts
- This is what the last three months have revealed to me about where I put my trust:
- Here are the weak points of "blind spots" in my life that have been exposed.

### 2. We look out the window for teachers to help us.

This headline from the Wall Street Journal:

*Readers Flock to Books about Race Relations: Books about the history of racism, diversity and race relations are soaring to the top of bestsellers' lists, a sign of growing interest in racial issues amid nationwide protests against police brutality.*

We are ready to acknowledge that we don't know what we don't know, we can't see what we can't see, and we need help if we going to be of help.



This is the time to learn the pain of other people's stories.

The conversation about race must continue for months and years to come. But here's a place I want you start now. Go to our website and follow the link to an amazing conversation between Mark Labberton the president of Fuller Theological Seminary and Andre Henry - A gifted scholar and musician who describes his experience of systemic racism in the church.

<https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/andre-henry-on-systemic-racism/>

*Why do I think we won't be seeing the rapture anytime soon?*

**Because *God never lets a good crisis go to waste.***

God will not let miss this opportunity to grow us up as Christians and as the church. We are ready - indeed well past ready - to put away a childish and self-centered faith that is concerned only with our personal relationship with the Savior while ignoring the suffering of our black sisters and brothers, the sickness of racism in our nation, and the ecological ruin of our planet. (If you feel that I'm stretching things a bit by mentioning the environment, remember: The Australian wildfires happened this year - 12.6 million hectares, appx 1/3 the size of California.)

Later in the letter James will help us see that salvation is not an escape hatch through which we escape the pain of life into an eternal pain free life, but is instead a crucible in which we are forged into Christ-likeness. The Gospel is not a way *out*, it is a way *through*.

23 year old poet Leslie Dwight captures the spirit of James the Just's gospel in her poem that has gone viral in recent weeks, "What is 2020 isn't cancelled?"

**Leslie Dwight**

What if 2020 isn't cancelled?

What if 2020 is the year we've been waiting for?  
A year so uncomfortable, so painful, so scary, so raw—  
That it finally forces us to grow.  
A year so loud, finally awakening us  
from our ignorant slumber.  
A year we finally accept the need for change.  
Declare change. Work for change. Become the change.  
A year we finally band together, instead of  
pushing each other further apart.

2020 isn't cancelled, but rather  
the most important year of all.

<https://www.today.com/news/what-if-2020-isn-t-canceled-inspiring-poem-message-change-t183397>

## **Morgan Murray**

Transitional Pastor

West Valley Presbyterian Church

6191 Bollinger Road

Cupertino, CA 95014

408/252.1365 x111

wvpc.org