

James 1:1-18

Week 1 - Trials And Testing

Learning Objectives

- Gain a basic understanding of the context of James's letter.
- Create a healthy biblical foundation and understanding of trials and testing.
- Reflect on how we view God's role in our trials and testing.

Pray for your time together as a group.

? Tell the group about a difficult goal you set and achieved. How did having the end in mind from the beginning help you achieve that goal? How would not knowing the desired outcome have affected your ability to persevere?

Possible Answer: I had a goal to run a marathon. There's no way I would have run that far without knowing I'd eventually finish the race with my friend. I made a goal to write a novel allowing me to endure hard days where words didn't come easily.

Optional Transition: Trials and testing create difficulty and struggle in our lives. In this study, we will be discussing how having a proper perspective on trials and testing can help us through those tough times.

Read Out Loud: James 1:1 (NIV)

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

? In verse one, James describes himself as a "servant" of God. The word servant can be translated to "bondslave," meaning one who gives himself up to another. What would be a helpful next step for you to remind yourself that you are a servant of God?

Possible Answer: Prayer for different areas of my life, reading the Word, seeking accountability with other believers. Memorize Scripture that speaks to this.

Background Of James

The book of James was most likely among the first books of the New Testament to be written (42-56 AD). It is considered to be a universal epistle, meaning it wasn't written to a specific church or person. Based on the greeting, it seems the book was written to Jews who had become Christians and were scattered to places outside of Jerusalem (the hub of the Jewish community). Although authorship isn't completely certain, most scholars believe the author to be James, the biological brother of Jesus, who later went on to become a prominent leader in the messianic Jewish church in Jerusalem.

Further Reading:

Thru The Bible Commentary Series: James, J. Vernon McGee

The New International Commentary Of The New Testament: The Letter Of James, Scot McKnight

Read Out Loud: James 1:2-4 (NIV)

²Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

? What is your initial reaction to these verses?

Possible Answer: It kind of sucks! Of course I don't want to learn lessons by enduring difficulties. There has to be a better/easier way to learn! I've been here! God has taught me so much through trials.

Read Out Loud: Let's start by taking a look at the very first word of this verse. James uses the verb "consider," which implies thoughtfulness beyond simply seeing something for what it is. In his commentary on James, J. Vernon McGee writes, "To 'consider' trials as an occasion of joy involves an act of faith, for instead of looking *at* the trial, [we are] instead encouraged to look *through* the trial to its potential outcome."

Optional Transition: In Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans, he also discusses trials and their possible benefit to followers of Christ. Let's take a look at that passage.

Read Out Loud: Romans 5:2-5 (NIV):

²And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

? How does knowing the Lord uses trials to shape and refine faith change a Christian's outlook on facing future trials?

Possible Answer: Gives me a sense of hope. It helps me know that I don't have to face it alone. Even when it's hard, it gives me a sense of strength to face it. Reminds me that this is shaping me to be more like Christ.

Trials → Perseverance → Maturity

? In what ways do you seek to become more mature in your faith?

Possible Answer: Learning more about the Bible...head knowledge. I'd prefer this to trials. Having discussions with other followers of Christ. Prayer.

? Why is it tempting to disregard trials as a means of gaining spiritual maturity?

Possible Answer: It is easy to get lost in our current situations; trials are hard and we can be tempted to believe God doesn't allow us to experience hard times.

Mature or Immature?

Read Out Loud: James 1:5-8 (NIV)

⁵ 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. ⁸ Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

If we knew what God knows, we would ask exactly for what He gives.
--Tim Keller (Twitter, 1.20.14)

? Verses 2-8 contrast a mature and immature response to trials. Take a look back at the verses and fill out the chart below as a group.

	Our Focus During Trials	Our Emotional State Amidst Trials	How We Approach God Amidst Trials	Desired Outcome Of Trials
Mature	<i>The outcome of maturity, what God is doing through the trials</i>	<i>Steady, focused on the Lord</i>	<i>Boldly, without wavering, no doubt</i>	<i>Maturity, wisdom</i>
Immature	<i>Ending the trial, fixing things, ourselves, self-preservation</i>	<i>Chaotic, going from here to there. Double minded.</i>	<i>Ignore Him, get angry at Him, wavering, full of doubt</i>	<i>For it to be done quickly with very little damage</i>

? What is your typical (or initial) response to trials? Do you believe God is for you (on your team) during trials? How can you reorient your heart and mind in times of trials?
Possible Answer: Get me out! I don't want to face this! Didn't I just experience a trial?! It depends. It's hard to trust/believe when facing a trial. Try and believe by seeking Him in His Word and prayer. Not allowing fear and worry to overcome me when facing a difficult situation.

Testing will either drive you to the Lord or it will drive you away from Him. So many Christians become bitter. My friend, it is not going to be a pleasant experience to come someday into the presence of Christ if you have let the very thing your heavenly Father was using to develop your character and bring you into a loving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ make you bitter.
--Through the Bible Commentary Series, James, J Vernon McGee, Pg. 24-25

Money As An Example

Read Out Loud: James 1:9-18 (NIV)

⁹ Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. ¹⁰ But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. ¹⁶ Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. ¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

? How can money be a type of trial? How is money a trial in your life?

Possible Answer: Having too much money can make us overly dependent on it to save us. We have faith in wealth rather than faith in God. Money can become a false God or idol.

? Looking back at verses 13-14, who or what are you quick to blame when you are tempted or fall into sin?

Possible Answer: Other people. God. Situations/experience we are in.

? According to verses 13-15, is temptation sin? How does sin come about?

Possible Answer: Temptation is not sin, but it is a starting place. We are enticed and led astray. When we give in to earthly desires it leads to sin. Sin eventually leads to (spiritual separation from God) death.

? In what ways do we lie or deceive ourselves when we are tempted by evil or actively sinning?

Possible Answer: Quick to justify our actions. Seek others who will approve of what we’re doing. Ignore/suppress conviction we may experience.

? Verse 17 tells us that God gives us all good things—even in trials! If we look back to verse 5, we read that the Lord is willing to generously give us wisdom when we ask Him. How has God’s wisdom been a gift to you in the past when you’ve faced a testing or trial?

Possible Answer: Wisdom! Answers may vary.

For Discussion And Accountability

? Are you going through a trial that you can share with the group? How can your group come alongside you in this trial? What should you be believing God for right now in the midst of trials?