

SENIOR ADULTS

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

TM

FALL 2013 | PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE
RONNIE FLOYD | GENERAL EDITOR



PRESSURE POINTS
WHEN RELATIONSHIPS COLLIDE

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This Personal Study Guide is designed for senior adults ages 70 and up. We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter, and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review LifeWay's doctrinal guideline, please visit www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

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ERIC GEIGER
Vice President, Church Resources

RONNIE FLOYD
General Editor

DAVID FRANCIS
Managing Editor

JEFFREY HOLDER
Content Editor

PHILIP NATION
Director, Adult Ministry Publishing

FAITH WHATLEY
Director, Adult Ministry

Send questions/comments to:
Content Editor
*Bible Studies for Life: Senior Adults
Personal Study Guide*
One LifeWay Plaza
Nashville, Tennessee, 37234-0175
or make comments on the Web at
www.lifeway.com.



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PRESSURE POINTS



Pressure—It's everywhere.

- ▶ Coaches and players are under pressure: “Win or else!”
- ▶ Business leaders face the pressure to make a profit.
- ▶ Teenagers feel the pressure to follow their peers.
- ▶ Seniors endure the pressure of declining health, loneliness, and stretching retirement income for an indefinite period of time.

Doctors prescribe medication like never before to help stressed people deal with the pressure of life.

Pressure is nothing new. James, the half brother of Jesus, wrote to Jewish Christians in the first century who faced intense pressure. They had been dispersed because of persecution, and they faced increasing pressure to let faith live only in their heads instead of being lived out in their lives. They faced the pressure to wilt in times of trial and the pressure to compromise when facing temptation. They faced the pressure to cave in to prejudicial preference when welcoming people in their gatherings and to let their tongues wag out of control. They faced the pressure to demand their own way and the pressure to retaliate when mistreated and done wrong.

James beckoned these early believers to let the pressure push them deeper in their journey with Jesus. And through James, the Holy Spirit invites you to open your life to the truth of God's Word and learn how to deal positively with the pressure points of life. Pressure doesn't have to dismantle your faith. Let pressure lead you to experience the presence and power of God like never before.



“Pressure Points” was developed and written by Dr. Chip Henderson, Senior Pastor at Pinelake Church in Brandon, Mississippi. A graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Chip has been married for 21 years to Christy, and they have three children. He is an avid hunter, runner, and triathlete.

Chip is the co-creator of the *L3 Journal* and the author of the young adult study *Samson: A Life Well Wasted* (LifeWay).

Chip's hope is that as you engage in this study, you will learn to handle life's pressures in a biblical way.

SESSION 1

THE PRESSURE OF TRIALS



*What pressures squeeze the joy
out of life?*

Joyful trust in God will get you through any trial.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Life is filled with problems.

- ▶ I got a call from a friend whose wife was diagnosed with cancer. These are people of faith and faithfulness, yet their lives are rocked by the news.
- ▶ A friend of mine has been married less than a year, and his wife just announced to him that she is leaving him.
- ▶ A young dad is devastated because he is losing his job. Meanwhile, his wife is expecting a baby in a couple of months.
- ▶ A mom requested prayer for her teenage daughter who has been seriously sick for over a year, and yet the doctors can't pinpoint the problem.

My mama used to say, “When life gives you a lemon, just make lemonade”—but that’s a whole lot easier said than done. In James 1 we have a plan for overcoming trials through faith and perseverance, turning them into the sweet lemonade of joy.

THE PASSAGE

James 1:1-4

James 1:1-2

1 James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ: To the 12 tribes in the Dispersion. Greetings.

2 Consider it a great joy, my brothers, whenever you experience various trials,

KEY WORDS: **Slave** (v. 1)—This humble title signifies ownership by, absolute obligation to, and readiness to obey a master.

Trials (v. 2)—“Trials” are difficulties and afflictions that can strengthen our faith and prove its genuineness as in 1 Peter 1:6-7.

One problem with encountering trials is that you often don’t expect them. You may fall into a situation or circumstance that was unforeseen, and it surrounds you. James wrote that trials are inevitable. It’s not *if* you encounter them, but *when* you encounter them. It’s just a matter of time. So, no Christian should presume that life is going to be problem free.

Trials are varied, and they come in all shapes and sizes:

- ▶ **Temptation**—An enticement to sin, whether it’s to click on an inappropriate web site, to say a mean word, or to harbor a hatred. (We will dig into this more in the next session.)
- ▶ **Sickness**—Sometimes it’s not your sickness, but the sickness of another person.
- ▶ **Persecution**—Believers should expect to suffer for Christ.
- ▶ **Trouble**—It could be any adversity, affliction, or circumstance sent by God—or allowed by Him—to test or prove your faith, holiness, or character. Such troubles may manifest themselves as financial hardship, bad news, difficult people, challenging circumstances, troubled relationships, broken down cars, layoffs, or even just loud dogs living next door.

What keeps you from reacting joyfully when the pressure of life seems overwhelming?

QUESTION #2

The Bible is full of people who were dealt hard hands in life, but through faith and perseverance they made sweet lemonade. Joseph, Ruth, David, Jeremiah, Hannah, Moses, Joshua, Caleb, Jesus—the list is long. But all these turned defeat into victory, trial into triumph, and moved from victims to victors.

No matter what shape or form they take, you can triumph over trials. You don't have to descend into depression or fall apart in anger or distress.

"If we live only for the present and forget the future, then trials will make us bitter, not better!"

—WARREN W. WIERSBE

God says you can overcome. How do you do that?

The first phrase in verse 2 is, "Consider it a great joy." This is God's desired outcome for you. *Joy* may not be your first attitude. When you fall into a pit unexpectedly, your instinct is to react emotionally. You are hurt, startled, mad, and in pain. Joy may not be your initial reaction, but it is to be your ultimate attitude.

How does joy become your ultimate attitude? "Consider it" so (v. 2). The word is an imperative, which means it is a command. Don't rely on your inner feelings or emotions; instead, give due consideration to the external grounds. Weigh the facts, not the feelings. This is a careful and deliberate decision. The word

consider comes from a root that means “to lead, to bring, or to carry.” It is the concept of evaluating and then leading your mind, attitude, and actions a certain way based on the evaluation.

What emotions did you feel during your most recent trial?

QUESTION #3

DIGGING DEEPER



The author of the Book of James.

James is named as the author in 1:1. A number of New Testament personalities were named James, but only three are candidates for the authorship of this book. James the son of Zebedee died in A.D. 44, too early to have been the author. No tradition names James the son of Alphaeus (Mark 3:18) as the author. This leaves James the brother of Jesus, also called James the Just (Mark 6:3; Acts 1:14; 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; 1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 2:9,12), as the most likely candidate.

This James is identified as the brother of Jesus in Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3; and Galatians 1:19. Though he was not a follower of Christ during His earthly ministry (John 7:3-5), a post-resurrection appearance convinced James that Jesus is indeed the

Christ (Acts 1:14; 1 Cor. 15:7). James later led the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:9,12), exercising great influence there (Acts 1:14; 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; 1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 2:9,12).

James was probably written between A.D. 48 and 52, though nothing in the epistle suggests a more precise date. James's death in A.D. 62 or 66 means the epistle was written before this time. If Mark was written around A.D. 65 and time is allowed for the events of Acts 15 and 21 to have occurred between Paul's first and second missionary journeys, a date between A.D. 48 and 52 seems likely.

—R. Gregg Watson, “James: Circumstances of Writing,” in *HCSB Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), 2134.

James 1:3

3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

How do you “consider it a great joy” (v. 2) in the middle of a trial? You do it by knowing what God will do as a result of the trial. The testing of faith is for approval. The root concept is that you are tested for the purpose of being accepted, received, and welcomed.

What is being tested is your faith. This isn’t a test of your personal strength or wisdom, but it is a test of your faith in the strength and wisdom of God to see you through. As our physical muscles must be exercised to make them stronger, so our faith is a muscle that must be exercised in order to gain strength. The less you use faith, the easier it is to lose faith and allow fear and doubt to become more entrenched in your life.

Testing results in something. God never arbitrarily tests you for no reason. Testing of your faith always prepares and works effectively to accomplish something very specific. God’s goal in testing you is to develop your “endurance” (v. 3). He is developing in you staying power. The word *endure* means “to remain under.” We sometimes call it perseverance, faithfulness, or steadfastness, but it is God’s work of developing your spiritual muscle and resolve to stand firm. You become unswervingly loyal to His deliberate purpose even in the midst of the greatest trials and sufferings. In his commentary on James, Kurt Richardson wrote:



James had an underlying confidence that believers would pass their testings. In every confrontation in service, the believer should see a basis for joy in trials in that they are acquiring the perseverance necessary for greater service and also are proving that they belong to God.

God intends for [trials] to result in a mature and complete faith; perseverance is faith's first product. Perseverance, though essential to faith, is not infused immediately in a moment of conversion. Only through great ardor and the stumbling pursuit of the goal laid before it and only through sustained service in spite of opposition does perseverance come.

—Kurt A. Richardson, *James*, vol. 36 of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 61, 62.

If you are being tested it means:

1. You are a child of God, and you have faith that can be tested.
2. You have a faith worth developing and refining.
3. God has a plan to strengthen you, prepare you, and ultimately welcome you.
4. You have the assurance of the presence of God, because when He refines you, He never abandons you.

Whatever the trial you may be facing, know that God is with you. Trust Him for the patience to endure the test knowing that He is working in all things for your good.

During your most recent trial, how did you see God walking with you?

QUESTION #4



James 1:4

4 But endurance must do its complete work, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.

KEY WORDS: **Mature and complete** (v. 4)—“Mature” may refer to relative maturity as compared with immaturity (Eph. 4:13) or to final perfection in the coming age (1 Cor. 13:10). “Complete” refers to entire or whole, with no unsoundness whatsoever.

We are to allow “endurance [to] do its complete work” in our lives (v. 4). This verse is a command believers must heed on an ongoing and constant basis. When we submit to the process of endurance and allow the shaping and strengthening of our faith, we reach the ultimate goal: maturity and completeness.

I have to consent to let endurance shape and mold my faith until its work is complete. I can resist the work of endurance in my life and fight against it. I can run from it and try to escape it in favor of a trial-free life. Or I can embrace the work of endurance in my life and become open, pliable, humble, and teachable.

Which is less painful? Both paths can be painful, but one brings about pointless pain and wasted grief. You go from God-inflicted pain that has a purpose to self-inflicted pain that amounts to heartache. But the pain endured through trials is both positive and progressive, moving you toward a happy and rewarding end.

You can avoid the “pain” of study, but in so doing you also avoid the blessing of continued spiritual growth.

You can avoid the “pain” of managing your retirement account, but in so doing you avoid being able to rest easier about your finances.

You can avoid the “pain” of physical conditioning, but in so doing you may also avoid being able to play with your grandkids as much as you would like.

The purpose of surrendering to God’s trials and the effect He is working to produce in you is that you become “mature and complete, lacking nothing” (v. 4). Meditate for a few moments on what these words mean:

- ▶ Mature: Having reached its end, complete, fully developed.
- ▶ Complete: Fully developed, running at full capacity with nothing unused.
- ▶ Lacking nothing: Nothing left out or left behind—nothing inferior. You are fully equipped and prepared.

Perhaps you have thought to yourself, *At my age, if I’m not complete by now, then I never will be.* Consider the example of two of the most famous senior adults in the Bible:

- ▶ It took 100 years to prepare Abraham to be Isaac’s father.
- ▶ It took Moses 80 years to be ready to lead.

God continues to work around your life so that He can work something in and through your life. His desire is that you be 100 percent complete in Him.

How have you been encouraged by the endurance of others during trials?

QUESTION #5

HERE COMES THE TRIAL:

*Your loved one has been
diagnosed with a serious
illness.*



1. Joy and trust in God could benefit me by:

.....

.....

.....

2. Joy and trust in God could benefit this loved one by:

.....

.....

.....

3. Joy and trust in God could benefit others by:

.....

.....

.....



LIVE IT OUT

What does God want you to do when trials come your way?

1. God wants you to choose a joyful attitude (v. 2). Identify at least one trial that regularly sours your life. Consider how a joyful attitude could help you deal with that trial in a more positive way.

2. God wants you to trust His loving heart (v. 3). What trial has God helped you endure? Consider talking with someone who is going through a similar trial. With godly sensitivity and wisdom, help that person understand how God helped you endure.

3. God wants you to yield a surrendered spirit (v. 4). You may have been enduring a particular trial for a long time, perhaps years. Enduring with joy is impossible in your own strength. Pray for God's enduring strength in Christ to surrender daily to what God wants to complete in your life.

God doesn't want to leave you incomplete. He continues working in you, even in your latter years, in every circumstance, both good and bad, to develop His character and power in you so that you may be mature and complete. The Lord wants you to be useful for His glory in your family, your church, and among those you relate to in your community on a regular basis. When you surrender your will to God's sovereign plan—even if you don't understand all the reasons why—the result can be amazing.

A lot of people stereotype senior adults as being sour on life. ***Go make some lemonade, and help turn that stereotype on its head.***

My Thoughts

My Group's Prayer Requests

Facing the Storm



Suddenly, our life took a frightening turn. I watched in horror as John slipped on black ice and fell on his back. He cried out in agony as I struggled to help him up. Disoriented and moaning, we staggered into the garage where he fell a second time, banging his head on the cement floor.

I screamed for help, but no one answered. When John awoke, I was kneeling over him, whispering, "Please don't die."



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