

FALL 2022

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JAMES

LIVING OUT
YOUR FAITH

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**HOW TO BUILD
YOUR LIFE ON
GOD'S WORD**

STUDY 1 JAMES: LIVING OUT YOUR

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FAITH

HOW THIS STUDY FITS YOUR DISCIPLESHIP PLAN

Serve God and Others.

Faith is not something that applies only to what we believe. Even as James pointed out (Jas. 2:14-26), our faith is evident in what we do in all aspects of life. Our lives are to

be lives of service, and it is through such service that we put our faith on display.



A BIBLE STUDY FROM JAMES ABOUT HOW TO LIVE OUT FAITH

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Think of a time you had faith in a situation. You turned that situation over to God and felt tremendous peace that He was in control and that everything would turn out in your favor. When we talk about faith, we often talk about having faith in, or believing God for something. Consequently, we apply faith to a situation and trust God with it.

The challenge for many believers, however, is knowing how not to limit our faith. When we have a difficult situation or scenario, we give only that part of ourselves to God. Yes, we get the victory, and we thank God for it. But we continue to live our lives with so many other parts unsubmitted to the Lord. Therefore, we experience a limited victory, conquering a situation while still struggling in every other area of our lives. But God wants all of us. He is calling us to live out our faith in all things. He wants our faith to be on display for the world to see.

Many believers are off to a good start, because of Hebrews 11:1, which states, “Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen.” This verse informs our prayers, and we use it habitually as we pray for God to work out various trials and meet various needs. But there is so much more to the exercise of faith in our lives. Look back a few verses to Hebrews 10:39 and see faith as an all-encompassing charge: “But we are not those who draw back and are destroyed, but those who have faith and are saved.” Here, we are invited to see the impact of faith on our entire lives.

In this six-week Bible study from the Book of James we will explore just that—how to live out our faith in all things. As we walk through these sessions, we will be encouraged to apply faith to every aspect of our lives so we can walk victoriously according to the will of God.

SESSION 1

FAITH ON DISPLAY IN HARD TIMES

THE POINT:
GOD USES TRIALS TO MATURE YOUR FAITH.

JAMES 1:1-12

¹ James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ: To the twelve tribes dispersed abroad. Greetings. ² Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.

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⁵ Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God — who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly — and it will be given to him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord, ⁸ being double-minded and unstable in all his ways.

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⁹ Let the brother of humble circumstances boast in his exaltation, ¹⁰ but let the rich boast in his humiliation because he will pass away like a flower of the field. ¹¹ For the sun rises and, together with the scorching wind, dries up the grass; its flower falls off, and its beautiful appearance perishes. In the same way, the rich person will wither away while pursuing his activities.

¹² **Blessed is the one who endures trials, because when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.**

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MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

The twelve tribes (v. 1)— Though dispersed throughout the world, this expression referred to Jewish Christians. The term represented true Israel reestablished through the completed work of Christ.

Whenever you . . . trials (v. 2)— This phrase assumes that trials

are a normal part of the Christian life. In fact, trials are a given for a faithful disciple (2 Tim. 3:12).

Blessed (v. 12)—This word reflects the understanding that a person who walks in the paths set by the Lord sees his plight in terms of the eschatological hope that awaits him.

WHAT ARE THE SPIRITUAL BENEFITS OF FAITH IN TRIALS?

Hank Aaron played professional baseball at a time of discrimination and racism, yet he persevered. He was told to “suffer quietly” as fans threw rocks and mocked black players by wearing mops on their heads. In 1973, before breaking Babe Ruth’s home run record, Hank Aaron received over 930,000 pieces of mail that included an abundance of hate mail and death threats requiring FBI investigation.¹

Hank Aaron’s faith was on display as he proclaimed his dependence on God’s wisdom and strength. When asked about setting the new home run record, he responded that he trusted God’s will.² Despite hatred and violence, Aaron embraced the joy of baseball and broke Babe Ruth’s home run record in Atlanta on April 8, 1974.

It’s difficult even to think of joy in trying moments such as those Hank Aaron experienced, yet James wrote that believers should consider trials joyous. He was not teaching that the trials themselves are joyous, but that we can live with joy even as we go through difficult moments.

A Stronger Faith // James 1:1-4

After a brief introduction, James got straight to the point. He called his readers and us to face our “various trials” with “great joy.” To be a joyful Christian is not an option; in fact, to “consider it a great joy” is an imperative command. Happiness and joy are easy when things are pleasant and going our way, but joy is not our first reaction in difficulties. The natural tendency is to respond to trials with fear, anger, or anxiety.

As he did thirteen other times in this letter, James referred to his readers as “my brothers and sisters.” That’s important to remember as we consider this unusual command. The world sees no joy in trying times, but for those who follow Christ, we are not alone; we have fellowship with other believers. In Christ, we can have joy. Joy is a supernatural response, empowered by God, who “is compassionate and merciful” (Jas. 5:11). Out of a genuine concern, James wanted us to think about our trials in a uniquely Christian way: not complaining or grumbling, but with “great joy.”



THE POINT: GOD USES TRIALS TO MATURE YOUR FAITH.

When James spoke of “the testing of [our] faith,” he used a word that appears in the New Testament only here and one other place. Peter also used the word to compare believers’ various trials with a refiner’s fire, which burns away impurities (1 Pet. 1:6-7). Difficult days function to refine our faith. Trials purify a believer’s faith.

The refining activity is not so much so that people will move from unbelieving to believing. James assumed his audience was comprised of believers, which is one reason he referred to them as “my brothers and sisters.” The refining activity moves faith from an idea to an action. Trials expose where our behavior falls short of what we believe, allowing us to make adjustments to live out our faith.

Through trials, believers gain the ability to endure hardships. We become steadfast. Trials can strengthen our faith just as exposure to wind strengthens trees. Scientists constructed “biosphere 2,” a miniature version of earth. While trees grew more quickly in the biosphere, they fell under their own weight before they could completely mature. Without the resistance of wind, they did not develop adequate strength. Just as wind makes a tree stronger, giving it the strength to hold up its own weight, trials also strengthen believers, giving us the ability to bear up under the weight of life.

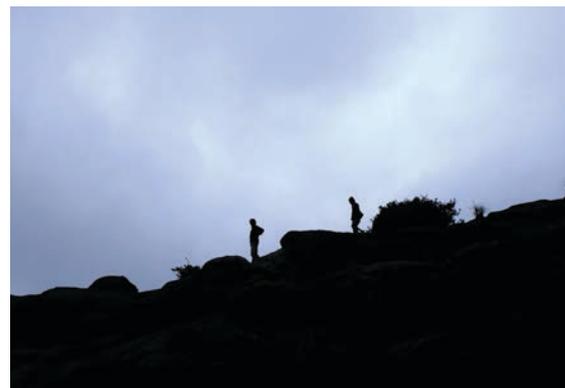
WHAT ARE SOME SPIRITUAL BENEFITS WE STAND TO GAIN FROM EXPERIENCING TRIALS?

The testing of our faith works effectively to accomplish something specific. God’s ultimate goal in testing is that our faith becomes “mature and complete.” Through the trials we experience, He is developing “endurance”—staying power. It is God’s work of developing our spiritual muscles and resolve to stand firm. We therefore become unswerving from His purpose even during the greatest trials and sufferings, and our faith will then lack nothing.

Superior Wisdom // James 1:5-8

Steadfastness and perseverance are needed, but they are not enough. We also need wisdom.

Trials lead some to think that their suffering is punishment for wrongdoing. Sometimes friends add to this impression



DIGGING DEEPER THE DIASPORA

The Diaspora refers to the “spreading out” of the Jewish people from Palestine throughout the world as they were captured and resettled over several hundred years. It was a time of deep trouble and trials for the Israelites. Assyria captured the Northern Kingdom in 722 b.c., and relocated the Israelites to Assyria (2 Kings 17:6). In 586 b.c., the Southern Kingdom was taken by the Babylonians and many people of Judah were taken to Babylon (2 Kings 25:8-12). Wars continued to scatter Jewish people and by New Testament times, Jews lived both inside and outside of Palestine. While the circumstances were not ideal, God used the scattering of the Jews to spread the gospel throughout the world.

How have challenging times resulted in blessings in your life?

by implying or outright accusing those going through various trials that they deserve the suffering they are experiencing. That is what happened to Job. Job had three friends who came to his side soon after they heard about his calamity “to sympathize with him and comfort him” (Job 2:11-13). But then they started talking. Job’s friends gave long speeches that blamed Job for his problems. According to his friends, Job’s suffering was his own fault. He deserved what he was getting (Job 4–25).

WHAT MIGHT KEEP US FROM APPROACHING GOD FOR HELP DURING A TRIAL?

During trials, we do not need worldly judgment; we need the wisdom of God, wisdom that He generously gives. Believers do not need to be hesitant; we can approach God boldly. When we approach Him, we can ask for wisdom with full assurance that He will provide it. God does not give His wisdom because we are either worthy or innocent. We can approach God, asking Him for wisdom because of God’s character. He is a generous giver of wisdom; He will not belittle those who need it.

God is also faithful. He will not keep wisdom from believers who ask with unwavering faith. Even people who believe in God can become paralyzed by a ceaseless, internal argument that makes them spiritually seasick. In one moment, they trust that God will respond to their request; in the next moment they do not. Tossed back and forth by the swelling waves, they have no solid footing. They believe God exists, but they do not trust Him to respond to their request.

God will respond, but only if their request is accompanied by a firm, unwavering confidence in God—a firm belief that God will supply wisdom. Those with wavering faith will not enjoy the fruit of God’s faithfulness. This wavering faith does not doubt the existence of God; it wavers because they doubt God’s faithfulness.



A Surer Victory // James 1:9-12

If you saw a well-dressed woman with several department store bags strolling past a homeless, unkempt man clothed in tattered, filthy clothes, who would you think was currently going through a trial? Appearances can be deceiving. A casual glance might not reveal something about their health conditions or what is happening spiritually in their lives. A deeper look reveals that both could be experiencing a wealth-related trial. One because he has no money, the other because she has too much. Poverty and riches can both be a trial.

Poverty is a trial for obvious reasons. People need clean water, nutritious food, adequate shelter, and warm clothing. Without basic needs being met, individuals endure suffering. If they do not have these things, they suffer. Yet James commanded the “brother of humble circumstances”— the poor believer—to “boast in his exaltation.” Their poverty is a constant reminder of their dependence upon God, providing them with nonstop opportunities to exercise their faith.

Wealth can also be a trial. James did not instruct the wealthy brother to boast in his wealth; instead, he should “boast in his humiliation.” Wealth has many outward, worldly advantages. For example, those with plenty of money most likely will never have to worry about

THE POINT: GOD USES TRIALS TO MATURE YOUR FAITH.

life's basic necessities. However, they can still have deep needs that money cannot meet, or their money may have created problems they never had before (5:1-6).

The wealthy make a dire mistake if they think their greatest resources are what they own. Those resources are temporary, at best. The wealthy are not to boast in what they have because their wealth will wither and pass away—just like the grass and flowers.

HOW DOES A VIEW OF ETERNITY CHANGE THE WAY YOU RESPOND TO TRIALS?

The wealthy also need the grace of God. Only as they realize their great need will they be led to seek and find eternal riches in Christ. For that reason, the wealthy can and should boast in their “humiliation.”

The ultimate reason for both the poor and the wealthy believer to celebrate is not found in this life, but in the life to come. The trials we face in this life are temporary—they will not last forever. Just as wealth fades into eternity, so do our problems. But faith endures.

DID YOU KNOW?

Although he was the half-brother of Jesus and had risen to lead the church in Jerusalem, James offered only scant details about his identity. He claimed only to be “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (Jas. 1:1). James, along with Jesus's other brothers, did not believe in Jesus during His earthly ministry but apparently came to faith when Jesus appeared to him after His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7). By identifying as a servant (the term also can be translated “slave”), James subjected himself to the role of a bondservant to God. He willingly suffered great adversity for his faith. As a leader in the church, he was severely persecuted. Reportedly, James was murdered as a martyr by the Pharisees, who stoned him to death. Yet he lives for the One in whom he believed.

What would it take for you to have faith to stand strong in the face of severe adversity?

LIVE IT

How will the maturity you've gained from trials guide your life?

After crossing the Jordan, the Lord instructed each Israelite tribe to take a rock from the river to build a monument. This would be a reminder of how God stopped the river and delivered them safely on the other side (Joshua 4). Look back at past trials in your life and consider how God used them to mature your faith. After looking back, identify a current trial that you are experiencing and walk through the following steps.

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- **Pray for strength.** In your trials, cry out to God for help. “Seek the Lord while he may be found; call to him while he is near” (Isa. 55:6).
- **Ask for help.** If you are experiencing difficult trials, reach out to a friend, Bible study leader, or pastor and ask for help to carry your burden (Gal. 6:2).
- **Look for ministry opportunities in your pain.** Find a way to use your pain to benefit others. Can you share your testimony, join a ministry, or provide a service to others?

DAILY READINGS

1. MORE PRECIOUS THAN GOLD // 1 PETER 1:5-9

Trials are tests that either God has allowed or ordained. They challenge our faith, challenge our trust, and even challenge our theology. In trials, whether mental, emotional, physical, or spiritual, we learn humility. Our self-sufficiency crumbles. We come face to face with our own inadequacy as we reach the end of ourselves. Unwelcome news? Not for believers! For, according to God's Word, our trials are God's appointed method of strengthening, stretching, and deepening our faith in Him.

Our faith, which is more precious than gold, is refined by trials and purified by tests.

2. TAKE COURAGE // ROMANS 15:13

Jesus pulls no punches when He said, "In this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33). Trouble comes in varying degrees and hues. It can be the everyday strain of life, a rebellious child, a job loss, a marital challenge, or worse. Hard times chisel away at our faith, causing us to shrink back in our relationship with the Lord, robbing us of our courage. But Jesus also said, "Take courage." How do we take courage? We take courage by continuing to feed on God's Word. This courage is not something we have to conjure up on our own. It is the Holy Spirit's work in us. God's Word renews our hope.

Our hope is not tied to circumstances but tied to our heavenly Father, the God of hope.

3. GOT MILK? // ROMANS 10:17

Do you remember the "Got Milk?" ad campaign? With the introduction of new juices, fruit drinks, iced teas, coffee drinks, bottled waters, and soft drinks the milk industry was struggling financially. Americans were drinking less milk every year. Although milk had long been an important source of essential nutrients for a healthy body, it was no longer appealing. As believers, when we are in the throes of a trial, God's Word can lose its appeal. But

God's Word is our "milk." It provides the essential spiritual nutrients we need to strengthen us in battle, to mature us in our faith. The Word builds us up, grows us up, and fuels us up.

In God's Word we find the faith we need to trust Him in troubling times.

4. MARKED BY LOVE // JOHN 13:34-35

Our relationships matter in the kingdom of God. But, just as a perfect church does not exist, neither does a perfect relationship. We bring our emotional baggage to every relationship. Unforgiveness, impractical expectations, and pride are often the root cause of conflict. In John 13, Jesus prepares the disciples for His departure by issuing a new commandment. "Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are to love one another." It is not a brand-new commandment, but a fresh look at an old one. Here Jesus elevates kingdom love to His standard, not ours. His standard is one of service and self-sacrifice.

Jesus marks us as His disciples by His standard of love.

5. WHO ME? // LUKE 11:45-12:3

A hypocrite is someone who criticizes or condemns someone else for doing the very thing they themselves do. Simply put, it is when our walk doesn't match our talk. Although no one wants to admit their hypocrisy, our culture is infested with it. Social media spurs verbal assaults, disparaging remarks, condemning comments, and unfair judgments 24/7. It may seem innocent enough, but hypocrisy is like a festering wound which gets worse and spreads when left untreated. We must pray for the Holy Spirit's conviction concerning our own hypocritical words and attitudes. We must also pray that our hypocrisy does not cause a saint to stumble or an unbeliever to turn from obedience to Christ.

We must guard against hypocrisy by being firmly rooted in God and His Word.

LEADER GUIDE

STUDY 1 JAMES:

LIVING OUT YOUR FAITH

INTRODUCTION

We are quite good at compartmentalizing different areas of life: work, family, leisure, politics, and religion. However, we are not to separate faith from any other area of life. Our faith should speak into our work, family, leisure, and politics. Our faith and relationship with Christ should be the one “box” in life into which everything else is placed. The practical

Book of James helps us to see how we are to live out our faith in Christ in every area of life. In other words, if we say we live by faith, a life of faith should be revealed through behavior that lines up with the Word of God.

Writer Bio

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wrote the Leader pages for this study. She is an urban missionary in the San Francisco Bay Area for an association of 200 churches with her husband, Port. Since 2007, she has served in management at one of the SF Bay’s largest Christian homeless shelters, and since 2015 has been a Lifeway writer and leadership trainer. Marshelle and her husband have five children, and in 2020 added a

BEFORE YOU TEACH

Read for Deeper Understanding

Though we may have read Bible verses before, memorized, and even studied them, because the Word of God is living, it can speak to us in new ways each time. Before teaching this session, set aside time to pray and ask God to provide a deeper understanding of the text. Specifically pray the Lord will use you as His instrument to speak life and new truths to those you lead.

Review the Entire Study

Spend time reviewing all of the passages for each session in this study. If time allows, read the entire Book of James to become familiar with the context. Also reviewing the session points, commentary provided, and key words can bring a greater depth to your time of preparation and the entire study.

LOOK BACK

To assess where participants are in their Bible study, review the last study. Ask volunteers to briefly share one principle from the last study “How to Love Your Neighbor” that challenged them to grow in their relationship with the Lord.

TEACHING PLAN

INTRODUCTION

SHARE: Recount to learners a quote by Augustine: “Trials come to prove and improve us.”

EXPLAIN: Share that if we believe God is in control of all things, we will discover that every trial has purpose in our lives. Often if we just focus on the challenge, its difficulty, or any suffering, we will miss the lesson God wants us to learn to deepen our faith. Even placing our focus on when the trial will be over can cause us to miss what God is doing during a season of testing.

TRANSITION: Read **The POINT: God uses trials to mature your faith.** and **The Question:**

What are the spiritual benefits of faith in trials? Ask participants to reflect on a trial they have recently experienced or are currently going through as they go through this study.

PACK ITEM: Focus attention on **Pack Item 1: “James: Living Out Your Faith”** poster to provide an overview of the study. Also distribute **Pack Item 2: “James: An Overview”** handout to provide a snapshot of the Book of James.

DIG INTO THE TEXT

A Stronger Faith // James 1:1-4

READ: Invite a volunteer to read James 1:1-2.

DIGGING DEEPER: Invite another volunteer to read “Digging Deeper (p. 13) to discuss the reason the twelve tribes were “dispersed abroad” (v. 1). Guide a discussion on the question included.

SHARE: Tell learners that to understand the context of verses 1-2, it is important to know more about the author, setting, and audience.

DID YOU KNOW?: Use “Did You Know?” and the commentary for verse 1 (p. 104) to explain James’s identity as Jesus’s half-brother. Highlight that James identifies himself as a servant of God and a servant of his brother Jesus which displays his submission to their authority.

GUIDE: Enlist three learners to read Psalm 16:11, Nehemiah 8:10, and Galatians 5:22 to define joy. Then invite a volunteer to read the paragraphs that begin “After a brief . . . and “As he did . . .” (p. 12). Ask, “Are happiness and joy the same thing? Why didn’t James write “Consider it all happiness”? Discuss the difference between the two focusing on happiness as a temporary emotion and joy as a state of well-being based on its source.

ASK: “How is James challenging believers to live a stronger faith?”

GUIDE: Use the commentary for verse 2 (p. 104) to answer this question in depth focusing on how trials come in various forms and what to do when they come.

THE POINT: GOD USES TRIALS TO MATURE YOUR FAITH.

READ: Invite a learner to read James 1:3-4

EMPHASIZE: Explain that God allows trials in a believer's life for a reason. Discuss some reasons by focusing on the content on the Learner pages (pp. 12-13) for this section.

ASK: "What are some common trials and difficulties we might experience in today's world?"

Superior Wisdom // James 1:5-8

READ: Invite a learner to read James 1:5-8.

EXPLAIN: Share that James gives instructions regarding inevitable trials. Read 1 Corinthians 10:13 and share that God's faithfulness enables believers to stand and have a way out of whatever situations they face. What is most important is our confidence in God when facing trials.

DISCUSS: Use the commentary for verse 5 (p. 105) to explain that though James shares the command to have joy in trials, he also encourages seeking God's wisdom. We should know that though some trials come from our own choices, all come because God uses them to mature our faith.

GUIDE: Share that the way to receive godly wisdom is by first acknowledging your need and then by asking God for it. He is our only source of true wisdom. Lead a discussion, asking: "From whom or what do you usually seek wisdom in trials? Does your source of wisdom line up with James's instructions?"

READ: Read the brief statement: "Steadfastness and perseverance . . ." (p. 13) twice. Once with regular cadence and the second time with emphasis on the words "and," "but," "not," "also," "need," and "wisdom." Guide learners to reflect on this thought.

DISCUSS: Invite a learner to read the paragraph that begins, "During trials . . ." (p. 14) to discuss God's generosity. Discuss the following: "How should we ask God for wisdom?" Invite a learner to re-read verses 6-8, and ask, "What might hold us back from approaching God during a trial?" Emphasize that our request for wisdom should always be based on God's character not ours.

GUIDE: Use the commentary for verses 7-8 (p. 105) to describe what James says believers become if they do not seek godly wisdom with unwavering faith. Share that the acquisition of wisdom is another way God uses trials to strengthen our faith.

A Surer Victory // James 1:9-12

READ: Invite a learner to read James 1:9-11.

GUIDE: Invite discussion, asking: "Who is James referring to in these verses, believers or unbelievers?" Remind learners that James's original audience was believers. These verses reveal believers may experience trials in any manner of life, and when they do, God expects them to still seek and submit to Him.

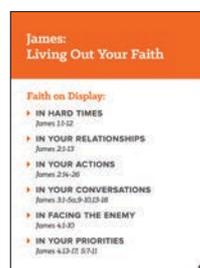
EMPHASIZE: Point out that believers need to avoid judging anyone going through trials like Job's friends did as well as assuming any who are well-off will not go through trials.

GUIDE: Invite two learners to read the paragraphs that begin "Poverty is a trial . . ." and "Wealth can also . . ." (p. 14). Then use the commentary (p. 105) to explain that no one is exempt from trials because all believers, whether rich or poor, need to mature in their faith.

READ: Invite a participant to read James 1:12.

ASK: "What does James say is awaiting ones who withstand the test of trials?"

GUIDE: Use the commentary (p. 105) to expound on this answer. Refer to "Live It" (p. 15) to share practical ways for believers to mature their faith.



PACK ITEM 1



PACK ITEM 2

CLOSE THE SESSION

OBJECT LESSON: Use the “Object Lesson” on this page to challenge learners. Remind them that God allows hard times to mature our faith. Our goal when trials come is to count it as joy for opportunities for our faith to be deepened and be assured that God provides the wisdom needed when we ask Him with unwavering faith.

PRAY: Close in prayer, praising God for being an ever-present help in times of trials. Thank Him that we can endure trials because He promises to always be with us and carry us through.

OBJECT LESSON

GUIDE: Instruct participants to notice the chair they are sitting in.

ASK: “Did you have any concerns when you sat down that the chair would support you?”

EXPLAIN: Most times we confidently take seats without even having a second thought. At night we lay down to sleep rarely concerned about our bed collapsing. Is our faith in God as confident? Though God proves Himself to be faithful in every aspect of our lives, we must admit, we do not always trust Him as we should.

CHALLENGE: This week we studied verses challenging us to choose joy in trials and to mature in faith through endurance. Additionally, we need to ask God with unwavering faith to provide wisdom needed. Each time you sit down this week, ask for and see yourself sitting confidently in faith and godly wisdom.



COMMENTARY

JAMES 1:1-4

Verses 1-2. James wrote to encourage **the twelve tribes** scattered around the world. Many lived in Greek cultures compelling them to compare new ways of living with what they had experienced under the direct influence of James’s teaching. They would experience **various trials**. James used a vivid word meaning “multi-colored” or “variegated.” Believers could expect all kinds of challenges in life. Trials could come because of their commitment to Christ or from the seductive temptations of life. With **whenever**, James warned about the inevitable nature of these trials. James instructed believers **to consider it a great joy**. The past tense of *consider*, signifies the joy would come after the trial. Trial would never be joyful experiences. But living through trials can lead to growth in faith, resulting in an occasion for genuine rejoicing.

Verse 3. The reason they should consider it a great joy to experience various trials was that the testing of their faith would produce the virtue of **endurance**. The idea behind “testing” referred to something being put in the crucible of the refiner’s fire (Prov. 27:21)—only the genuine substance would survive the process. Going through a crucible of suffering will refine away the dross so that what remains might become pure and valuable before God.

Verse 4. James pushed his readers further so that endurance might **have its full effect**. His use of the present imperative (let endurance *have*) literally means, “let it keep on having.” In other words, a believer’s spiritual growth has no end; development is to continue throughout life, trial after trial. Trials provide the spiritual muscle-building experiences necessary for growing so believers may be **mature and complete**. His words should stir believers to envision themselves in the state of complete maturity, devoid of that which mars the wholeness of fellowship with God.

JAMES 1:5-8

Verse 5. In moments of trials or temptations, we should ask God for **wisdom**. Wisdom means the grasping of facts that enables us to cope with trials and temptations. The one who lacks wisdom would not know how to handle problems. James urged them to ask God (present imperative meaning, “keep on asking”) for the wisdom they lacked. Only God’s wisdom would help them understand how to use the circumstances of life for their good and His glory. To all who ask for wisdom, God will give it **generously and ungrudgingly**.

Verse 6. James warned that we must **ask in faith without doubting**. Remaining faithful to God stands at the heart of the issue. This should not be understood as asserting prayers will never be answered where any degree of doubt exists. We are prone to wonder—and doubt! God will respond to our prayers when our lives reflect a consistency of faith in Him. The wavering person is like **the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind**. Doubt—the opposite of faith and trust in God—leaves one exposed to life’s random assaults. The surging sea graphically illustrates the excruciating instability of a life torn between loving God and loving the world.

Verses 7-8. One who sloshes back and forth in persistent doubt nullifies his prayer and **should not expect to receive anything from the Lord**. The doubting believer totally misunderstands the Father and has no grasp about the relationship between faith and prayer. James pinned two more descriptors on that person. First, James called him **double-minded**, literally “two souled,” not completely aligned with God but holding out for ulterior motives. This leads to being **unstable in all his ways**. Disloyalty to God results in a complete failure in character and conduct, leaving one’s whole behavior unstable and unreliable.

JAMES 1:9-12

Verses 9-10. James contrasted **the brother of humble circumstances** and **the rich**. Both poor and rich should **boast** in their status before

God. James first addressed believers at the lower end of the socioeconomic scale, relatively poor and powerless. James encouraged them to boast **in his exaltation**. In other words, take pride that as followers of Christ they belong to the heavenly realm and have great worth to God. James encouraged the rich not to take pride in their possessions but rather in their identification with Christ and His people. All believers **will pass away like a flower of the field**, regardless of socioeconomic standing.

Verse 11. James intensified the folly of trusting in wealth by pointing to a familiar phenomenon in Palestine. **Scorching wind** describes the blistering east wind called the *sirocco* that blows constantly, usually for three or four days, during the spring and fall transitions. The intense heat dries up grass and causes flowers to fall away. Similarly, the pursuits of those who trust wealth will eventually wither away. While James may have been referring to the loss of wealth, he more likely intended the judgment day for the one who trusted wealth rather than the Lord.

Verse 12. James returned to the topic of **trials**. He promised we are **blessed** when we endure trials because we have **stood the test**. The word *test* comes from metallurgy, referring to the process through which metals become purified and stronger by fire. Those who meet the conditions of faith will receive **the crown of life**. *Crown* often conveys to us a gem-studded headpiece worn by royalty, but James’s word alluded to the laurel wreath given to victors in athletic contests. Coupled with the idea of this reward, *life* indicated the reward might begin in this life but pointed into eternity.