

James 1:1-18

Week 1 - Trials And Testing

? 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?

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?

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. ⁴Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

? What is your initial reaction to these verses?

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.

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

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

Trials → Perseverance → Maturity

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

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

Mature or Immature?

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				
Immature				

? 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?

Money As An Example

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.

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*

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

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

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

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

? 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?

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?