

A. Trials and Temptations (2-4)

It's not _____ trials come to us but _____ they come.

How does James encourage his readers to _____ to trials?

So, what can we hope to _____ by facing our trials actively?

1. _____

2. _____ Faith

3. _____

4. _____

B. Seeking _____ (5-8)**C. Trials _____ Everyone (9-11)****D. A _____ for Trials (12)**

Homework

- **Read James 1:12-18.**
- **Read Max Lucado's "Lesson 2: Enduring Temptation"** (pp 11-22).
- **Reflect on these questions posed by Lucado.**
 1. Why does James say the person who endures under trials is blessed?
 2. How does God reward those who are faithful to him?
 3. Why is it easy to blame God as the source of temptation?
 4. How does James explain the true source of temptations?
 5. What are the results of continually giving in to sin?
 6. How does James say that God rescued you from evil desires?
 7. In what ways is God like the merciful bishop in the classic story *Les Misérables*?
 8. Is temptation itself a *sin*? How are the two related?
 9. How has God's grace changed you when you have fallen prey to temptation?
 10. How does knowing God is good encourage you to fight against sin in your life?
 11. How has the testimony of other believers helped you in your struggle against sin?
 12. What are some ways you can depend more on God for the strength to overcome sin?
- **Bonus Journaling Question:** How has God set you free from sin and temptation?

Introduction

1. James is an appropriate book for our day. It sounds strangely contemporary as it deals with issues of trials and temptations, wisdom, and wealth that come with being a Christian today.
2. However, sometimes the teachings of James don't seem to make sense at first.
 - a. In Jm 1:2-12 he addresses the trials and temptations that Christians face.
 - b. We might expect him to counsel us to avoid temptations and to flee from trials.
 - c. However, James says we should consider our trials and temptations to be "pure joy" (v. 2).

3. Read James 1:2-12.**A. Trials and Temptations (2-4)****1. It's not if trials come to us but when they come.**

- a. These trials (Gk., *peirasmois*) come upon us from two sources.
 - 1) Temptations - Inner enticements to sin from selfish/sinful desires within us, and
 - 2) Trials - Outer afflictions of the world, especially the persecution of our faith by others.
 - 3) The same Greek word, *peirasmois*, is used by James to address both temptations (1:13-15) and trials (1:2-11).
 - 4) James 1:12 serves as a beatitude/blessing for those who persevere under both trials and temptations.
- b. These trials are "many" (Gk., *poikilois*) (v. 2).
 - 1) The word many in Greek is the source for our English word polka-dot.
 - 2) We can expect our lives to be spattered or polka-dotted with trials of all shapes and sizes.
 - 3) We face the trials of illness, death, financial reversals, spiritual oppression, and our own selfishness.
- c. Remember that this verse was written to Jewish Christians "scattered among the nations" who were being martyred for their faith and economically abused. In Christian history, this verse has been abused by Christians who sought out being persecuted and even martyred for their faith.

2. How does James encourage his readers to respond to trials?

- a. "Consider (Gk., *egesasthe* – "count, recon, evaluate" – a Greek financial term) it pure joy (Gk., *pasan charan* = "all/whole joy")" (2)
- b. What is Christian joy? How is it different than the world's version of joy?
 - 1) "joy" (Gk., *charan*) is related to the Greek word for grace (Gk., *charis*). Grace and joy go together. Joy is a response to the grace shown to us by God and evidence of the sure hope that we have in him in spite of past sins and continuing trials and temptations in this life.
 - 2) The world teaches that we can have joy or enjoy things only when they are good, positive, happy occurrences in our lives.
 - 3) Christian joy turns the world's concept of only having joy in the good times on its head.
 - a) Paul pointed to the paradox that Christian joy is to be found in the midst of sadness, affliction, and cares. This is where it shines forth and proves its power in the Lord.
 - b) Example: In Acts 16:25, Paul and Silas in Philippi were beaten and jailed for their faith but were "praying and singing hymns to God" in jail.
 - c) "For the joy set before him [Jesus] endured the cross, scorning its shame . . ." (Hb 12:2b).
- c. Colin Brown summarizes it well, "The present period of trial and distress is limited. The Lord is at hand! Hence joy is based primarily on the hope that after suffering together we shall be glorified together. This joyous and confident waiting for the day of Christ puts our present experience into true perspective" (*Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol.2, 360).
- d. Joy in facing trials comes when we believe that God can work through these present circumstances to bring good to our lives both now and ultimately at the end of this world.
- e. Therefore, we must face our trials and deal with them joyfully and directly rather than running from them, denying them, or repressing them.

3. So, what can we hope to gain by facing our trials actively?

- a. **Joy** – We have already noted that trials are a source of joy because they provide opportunities for us to demonstrate our faith. (2)
 - 1) We can have joy because we know there is an eschatological reward coming (i.e., “crown of life” in 1:12) after the trial.
 - 2) We can have joy because trials are part of our discipleship, of being formed in the image of Christ, growth in our character, wisdom, and moral formation.
- b. In addition to joy, God wants us to “know” (Gk., *ginoskontes*)” that trials come our way in order to test and approve our faith.
- c. **Approved Faith** - Trials provide a “testing (Gk., *dokimion*) of your faith”(3)—by yourself and by the world—that can build your character in God as you look to him for help in the midst of our trials and temptations and remain faithful so that you experience his grace and joy at work in your life.
 - 1) Clay jars that the Greeks used to transport grain and wine were tested (Gk., *dokimion*) in the fires of a kiln to solidify and strengthen the pot not to destroy it. Likewise, the trials that we face in life are not meant to make us crack but to strengthen and prove God’s character in us.
 - 2) “God always tests us to bring out the *best*; Satan tempts us to bring out the worst. The testing of our faith proves that we are truly born again” (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Mature*, 33).
 - 3) Successfully coming through the fires of trials/temptations gives proof of our faith not just to God but more importantly to ourselves and to the watching world.
- d. **Perseverance** - Trials help us develop “perseverance” (Gk., *hupomone* = “patient endurance under pressure”). (3)
 - 1) Paul put the process this way in Ro 5:3-4, “. . . we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”
 - 2) “The only way the Lord can develop patience and character in our lives is through trials. Endurance cannot be attained by reading a book . . . listening to a sermon, or even praying a prayer. We must go through the difficulties of life, trust God, and obey Him. The result will be patience and character. Knowing this, we can face trials joyfully” (Wiersbe, 35).
- e. **Maturity** - Trials develop perseverance that over time leads us to become “mature” (Gk., *teleioi* = “end; result; completion; perfection; wholeness”) in Christ. (4)
 - 1) We must be active participants with God in allowing the trials/tests of life to bring perseverance, maturity, and joy to our lives. Trials don’t just happen to us passively. We must actively engage them with God’s help.
 - 2) We take small doses of a toxin (i.e., inoculations) to become immune to an illness. Pilots expose themselves to high g-loads in a centrifuge to build endurance in stressful flying situations. So, exposure to trials/temptations builds our ability to resist and to move toward maturity in Christ.
 - 3) Trials also mature us so that we are “complete (Gk., *holokleroi*), that is not lacking anything (Gk., *en medeni leipomenoi*)” in the Lord. (4)
 - a) Trials can only be a joy as we work through them by keeping our eyes on the maturity in Christ that we bring into our lives as we faithfully persevere in facing them.
 - b) We strive for this perfection but never reach it in this life. Only Jesus was complete and perfect.
 - c) Jesus faced and overcame many trials in his life. We look to his model as we seek to grow to maturity in him with respect to all of his virtues. It is a high calling and a lifelong pursuit.

B. Seeking Wisdom (5-8)

1. Notice how James sounds like Hebrew wisdom (cf., Jm 1:5-6).
 - a. “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Pr 3:5-6).
 - b. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Pr 1:7)
 - c. “For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk blamelessly, guarding the paths of justice and preserving the way of his faithful ones” (Pr 2:6-8).

2. We need to seek wisdom from God not only for handling the trial but to learn from it and apply its lessons to our lives. Lord what are you teaching me in this trial? What do I need to adjust in my life in order to live more wisely and productively in the future?
 - a. “Wisdom is for James, at least in part, what faith is for Paul, what love or life is for John, and what hope is for Peter” (Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 86).
 - b. “The wisdom James exhorts us to possess is not merely information or knowledge but spiritual knowledge applied to life” (Johnny Hunt, *Shoe Leather Christianity*, 7).
 - c. Max Lucado asks, “When was a time that God’s wisdom helped you get through a problem?”
3. “you should ask God” (5b) – Prayer is the resource that God gives us for requesting wisdom.
 - a. “The people to whom James wrote had problems with their praying (James 4:1-3; 5:13-18). When we are going through God-ordained difficulties, what should we pray about? James gives the answer; Ask God for wisdom . . . We need wisdom so we will not waste the opportunities God is giving us to mature. Wisdom helps us understand how to use these circumstances for our good and God’s glory” (Wiersbe, 37-38).
 - b. When we encounter a trial, we must ask God for wisdom to persevere and learn from it. This process moves us along the path toward maturity. We are growing up in Christ Jesus. Wisdom and maturity are linked in this passage. Prayer is the way we open the door to gain wisdom that leads us to maturity.
 - c. This may be why Solomon’s prayer for wisdom so pleased the Lord. He knew the trials the king would face and his desperate need of the Lord’s wisdom to face them. Unfortunately, Solomon failed to apply the lessons of wisdom he learned early in life to his later years. (1 Kings 3:1-14).
 - d. Max Lucado asks, “How have some recent “thumps” challenged you to seek God?”
4. When we ask God for wisdom he gives “generously” (Gk., *haplos* – hapax). This adverb can also mean “with simplicity, single-minded intention, or integrity.”
 - a. Based on the use of this adverb by Jesus (cf., Mt 6:22, Lk 11:34) and James’s illustration in vv. 6-8 concerning a “double-minded” man, it appears that the best translation is “with simplicity, single-mindedness, or integrity.”
 - b. “So if someone asks of God in faith, God responds simply, with integrity, and with the single-minded intent of answering that request” (McKnight, 88).
 - c. Jesus said, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Mt 7:7-8).
5. Faith is required when asking God for wisdom to deal with trials (6-8).
 - a. Asking in faith (Gk., *pistis*) is the opposite of asking in doubt. We must believe that God hears and will answer in his time and way.
 - b. “And without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hb 11:6).
 - c. “The greatest enemy to answered prayer is unbelief” (Wiersbe, 38).
 - d. The “double minded man” (Gk., *dipsychos* – “two souls” or OT = “double-hearted”) is “like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed (Gk., *akatastatos*) by the wind” The wave moves up and down, this way and that way. One moment he says yes and the next no. One minute believing and the next doubting.
 - e. We must trust God single-mindedly, simply, and with integrity for the wisdom we need to face each trial. We must have unwavering, single-minded trust in God’s provision of what we need.

C. Trials **Humble Everyone** (9-11)

1. “According to Scripture, the way up is always down in the kingdom of God” (Hunt, 11).
 - a. These verses resonate with last Sunday’s sermon on the rich, young ruler. The only way for him to follow Jesus fully was to give up his riches.
 - b. This is a reversal of conventional wisdom as often appears in the teachings of Jesus.
 - c. God humbled himself coming in flesh as Jesus: “Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Ph 2:8).
 - d. Jesus said, “Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted” (Mt 23:12). “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mk 8:34).

2. Economic oppression of the scattered Jews was one of the “trials” they were undergoing. Economic oppression and the response of those undergoing it is a constant theme in James (cf., Jm 1:26-27, 2:1-7, 14-17, 3:13-18, 4:6,13, 5:6). James addressed the problem of poverty and how to deal with it by seeking God’s wisdom in prayer.
 - a. Note again the contra worldly wisdom of James. The humble should glory in their high position while the one who is great in this world should note his humiliation.
 - 1) The “rich” (10) in this passage are most likely Jews but not Christians. This may be a reference to rich synagogue ruler or priests.
 - 2) This is a warning to all of us to never use our riches to bring economic oppression on the poor.
 - b. Spiritual riches last forever, while material abundance will soon “pass away like a wild flower” and wither like a plant in the sun’s “scorching heat” (11). James’s language here similar to Isa 40:6-8, Ps 90:3-6, and Ps 103:15-16.
 - c. Jesus said, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Mt6:19-20).
 - d. Faith trusts God to take care of the future. This is an opportunity for the poor to trust God for moral formation as they gain wisdom and endure this economic persecution and ultimately receive a “crown of life” (12) in the end.
 - e. Max Lucado asks, “How has your relationship with God changed as you have gone through trials?”

D. A Beatitude for Trials (12)

1. Does this verse end the preceding section (i.e., Jm 1:2-11) or begin the next section (i.e., Jm 1:12-18)?
 - a. Jm 1:2-18 is best seen as a unity addressing both trials and temptations.
 - b. While the verse grammatically appears to fit best with 1:2-11, it is a blessing that can also be applied to endurance in one’s experience of temptation as well.
2. This is a traditional Hebrew blessing. It is similar to those of Jesus in the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-10).
 - a. Blessing – “Blessed (Gk., *makarios*) is the one who perseveres under trial . . .”
 - b. Condition – “. . . because, having stood the test . . .”
 - 1) The Greek., *dokimos*, is a cognate of *dokimios*. The condition is that the one being blessed has stood the test vs. is going through the process.
 - 2) Those clay jars that withstood the process of going through the fires, were stamped with this Greek word, *dokimos*, meaning that they were approved. It’s like our Good Housekeeping seal of approval or Underwriters Laboratory (UL) listing.
 - 3) Persevering through trials authenticates us as true children of God. We prove it to ourselves and to the world.
 - c. Reason – “. . . that person will receive the crown of life that the lord has promised to those who love (Gk., *agapao*) him.”
 - 1) We receive eternal life as we pass through our trials.
 - 2) Remember Jesus’ saying concerning those who have given up riches for the sake of God’s kingdom. Jesus said, “Truly I tell you . . . no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life” (Lk 18:29-30).
 - 3) Note the importance of “love” (Gk., *agapao*) - “the crown of life” is for “those who love him [God].” “The Christian who loves God, and who knows that God loves him, will not fall apart when God permits trials to come. He is secure in God’s love” (Wiersbe, 40).
3. This important teaching about facing trials begins and ends with “joy.” The beginning of trials is considered “joy” because the result of enduring them is maturity in Christ. The end of trials is “joy” because we receive “the crown of life” as a blessing for enduring them.
4. Max Lucado asks, “How can you grow closer to God through the trials you are facing right now?”