

Study of the Book of James

Lesson 1 Trials and Temptations

Opening Discussion: ‘Getting in shape is simple. Just eat right and exercise regularly.’ Do you agree or disagree? If so why or why not?

Disagree. It’s simple to understand but difficult to do because it takes will power and dedication every day.

What are the similarities and differences in keeping in shape physically and keeping in shape spiritually?

Both require will power and dedication everyday. Both make us feel better about ourselves so can be mutually supporting to accomplish. Spiritual performance failures are much more difficult to recover from and can impact many more people than physical conditioning failures. Spiritual failures usually impact others and dieting or exercise failures only impact ourselves.

Read James 1: 1 to 12

1. How is joy different from happiness?

Joy: The emotion excited by the expectation or acquisition of expected good.

Happiness: Securing pleasure from the possession of good.

Joy is received from an event, where happiness is more a state of continued pleasure due to a good situation.

2. What do you think of the idea that we should “consider it pure joy whenever we face trials of many kinds”

An unusual concept for most people to accept but if we know that God will work good as a result of the trial we can have joy by looking forward to that good event.

3. Can you describe a time when you were better able to endure a trial because you had endured it before?

My second time having cancer was much easier than the first since I had learned that God gives me peace even in those trying times.

4. How does enduring trials develop perseverance and maturity?

One learns they can get through the trial with God’s help and thus should have more patience and persistence to endure through other trials. One learns to rely on God and to keep things in perspective and not let the trial be the sole focus of their life, which is a more mature approach than panic or other rash reactions. Think about how we train our children to have patience and “learn the rules” through

handling the minor trials in their lives. (sharing, punishments for disobedience, handling peer comments & pressures, etc)

How does our attitude toward these trials affect our growth?

Trusting in God and leaning on Him and Christian friends for strength to get us through will build our faith and endurance. Blaming God for the trial will result in negative growth.

5. What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge?

Knowledge is understanding facts. Wisdom is knowing how to correctly apply knowledge. God's word mainly gives us general principles and he will give us wisdom that helps us understand how to apply these principles to specific situations in our lives when we ask him.

6. What do you think James meant when he said that a person who doubts is like a wave of the sea tossed by the wind?

A wave goes from peaks to valleys, with the height of the crests depending completely on the strength of the wind. One who doubts will go through similar spiritual and emotional cycles in their life, not under their own or the Lord's control, but under the control of evil. "A double minded man, (i.e. wanting both good and evil,) unstable in all his ways". A person who doubts what God has told her or him to do in a situation will go one way and then another, appearing very unstable in their actions. How does God give us his wisdom in a particular situation when we ask? (His word, counseling by faithful others, doors opened or closed, Holy Spirit giving us significant peace with our decision)

7. What are the "high position" of the humble (poor) man in vs. 9 and the "low position" of the rich man in vs.10?

a. The humble man would be looked on highly by God for his humility and the rich man would be looked on lowly by God if his attitude was self centered and materialistic.

b. James says the rich man should look on his low position with pride because he will pass away like a flower. This may mean he should do things with pride that would be normally considered beneath him, low positions like serving others, realizing that his life like everyone's was very short.

c. It may also say that a rich man should continue to have pride even if he loses his riches knowing that this life is short and therefore our material status isn't important for the brief time we are on this earth.

8. Are there any ways you consider yourself to be like the rich man? In what ways do you rely on your possessions or other things for your joy?

We are all rich in possessions compared to the vast majority of people in the world. We need to focusing on using our riches for building God's kingdom, not evil personal desires.

I would like to be able to say like Paul " I have learned to be content in all situations, with plenty or nothing". However, this is more difficult for me than it seemed to be for Paul. I have learned as I have gotten older that my joy comes much more from relationships, times with family and friends, than from "things". However I still like to have the comforts of a nice home, vehicles to drive places, eat out, travel etc which are only available to the very rich in many societies.

9. What is the crown of life the Lord promises us in vs. 12? How can this promise increase our joy in the midst of trials?

Eternal life, We can have joy if we focus on receiving this crown rather than our present trials.

Read James 1: 13-18

10. What has tempted you or does tempt you today?

Food, sexual desires, risk taking, financial success and reputation

Do your sources of temptation concur with what James says in vs. 14?

Yes, they are all my own internal desires, which can be evil if I let them get out of control.

11. How can you successfully overcome these temptations? (See Philippians 4:8, 4:13; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 Corinthians 6:18, 10:14; 1 Timothy 6:11, 2:22)

a. Focus on pure not impure things b. Ask for God's strength which he has promised us to get through the temptation. c. Look for the way out since God has said he'd provide a way. d. Flee from the temptation (sexual immorality, idolatry, materialism, youthful lusts)

12. What is the ultimate result of yielding to temptations?

Evil desires lead to evil actions which leads to death.

13. How is God the ultimate example of goodness and dependability?

Every good and perfect gift comes from God.

He gives us birth (becoming one of his children) through his word (Bible) so that we can be the first fruits (most important harvest items which were given to God) of all He has created. We can depend on God treating us as his children, the best of all creation.

14. What is the difference between trials and temptations?

Trials are difficulties we face in life, sickness, financial problems, accidents, etc.

Temptations are those things which entice us to do that which we know we shouldn't do.

How does James describe the differences in God's involvement in our trials vs. our temptations?

God brings trials into our lives to strengthen our perseverance and maturity and faith in him as we endure the trial successfully. (However, I don't think that all trials are from the Lord. Since the Lord allows everyone a free will to do things that they desire, not just what He'd like us to do, our own actions or others may result in us facing trials that are from evil actions, not Godly.)

Vs 13: "God cannot be tempted by evil nor does He tempt anyone"

15. How can these passages help you face trials and temptations?

Know God is there to help you through, ask for his wisdom and strength, focus on the crown of life we are all waiting for as Christians, focus on good not evil things and flee from temptations.

Lesson 2: Listening and Doing

Read James 1: 19-21

1. Place the following in the order of difficulty for you to do: be quick to listen, be slow to speak, be slow to anger.

Slow to speak, quick to listen, slow to anger

2. What problems have resulted from your not being quick to listen, slow to speak or slow to anger?

Not really understanding the other person so taking actions or saying things that are destructive rather than constructive to improving relationships and resolving issues.

3. What specific actions will you take to improve in these areas?

Focus on really listening rather than thinking of what I want to say next.

4. What does James say results from our anger?

Unrighteousness (20: Anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires)

Can you relate a time when you saw these results from someone's anger?

A minister getting very mad at the umpire at games when I was a child made me think much less of him as a man of God.

Read James 1:22-25

5. Summarize the verses above in one short sentence.

Do, don't just read what to do.

6. In what ways does God's perfect law give freedom?

Future: Freedom from eternal death

Now: Freedom from: stress in many decisions, just use WWJD; worry (let not your heart be troubled), diseases resulting from sins (alcoholism, sexually transmitted diseases, diseases related to smoking, obesity, etc); breakdown of relationships (if all parties were perfect in staying within God's laws)

Read James 1: 26-27

7. How can the improper use of our tongue make our religion worthless.

We can destroy our witness and desecrate our Lord. We can't witness to people who hear us using our tongues improperly,(taking the name of the Lord in vain, gossiping, slandering)

8. What does God accept as a pure and faultless religion?

- a. Care for widows and orphans in their distress (Benevolence)**
- b. Keep my self pure.**

Are these items the primary focus of the church today? Why or why not?

a. Benevolence is a low priority with most church members today, possibly because we think the government does this now. However, when we rely on the government to do this we lose the joy of helping others and the opportunity to witness to those who we might not otherwise be in contact with. Jesus focused significantly on benevolence in his teachings. Probably not so much for the benefit of the receivers of the benevolence as for the givers.

b. This has historically been an important topic of preaching and the church has been an important influence in helping people and society in general maintain a high moral standard for acceptable practices. However the emphasis of the church on moral issues and it's influence on society has declined significantly in the past years.

Lesson 3

Comment [VGC1]:

Read James 2: 1-13 Favoritism Forbidden

1. Have you ever felt discriminated against or put down by others due to your clothes, possessions, family status, etc? If you have, how did you feel?

I cannot think of a time that I have so I can't relate from personal experience.

2. Do we ever show favoritism in our local church? If so in what way.

I think all visitors are welcomed without discrimination but I think our local evangelistic efforts are focused on those who are similar to our current members, i.e white, middle class, conservative people.

After thinking about it honestly, what would your reaction be to a person who came to our services in dirty, ragged clothes, who hadn't bathed and smelled strongly of alcohol?

I would probably question to myself why he was there and try to talk to him after the service to find out why. Hopefully we could make him feel welcome and see what we could do to help him in his current situation.

Why do you think all of our members and most visitors are of the same race and similar living standards?

Because our growth is primarily through personal contacts rather than a formal evangelistic program. Everyone contacts those who they have relationships with today, which are usually people like themselves. If we want diversity we will need to specifically seek people of different races, social classes, religious backgrounds etc.

3. Is it easier to have faith when you are poor than when you are rich?

It seems that a greater percent of poor people than rich people are Christians, both in the US and in foreign countries so the numbers seem to show this. Generally, the rich turn their backs on God since they think they can "take care of themselves" while the poor truly look to God for their protection and provisions. The rich tend to focus on their lives today while the poor look forward to a better time in the future when they will be with their Lord. Are your actions more like the rich or the poor? Note these distinctions aren't about how much money we have but what our attitudes are towards our money and possessions.

4. “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it”. What is the significance of this verse to you? (See 1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

I’m a sinner. Note that greed, slander(gossip), swindlers (liars and cheaters), are in the same class as murders and adulterers.

5. How can we show mercy to others, as God requires (vs. 13)?

Forgive them when needed and forget the issue, make the best assumption of situations we see not the worst, don’t seek restitution even though legally possible.

Read James 2: 14-26 Faith and Deeds

6. Summarize the message of these verses in a short sentence.

Faith without works is dead.

7. In your opinion are people today generally doing a good or poor job of showing their faith through deeds as James discusses in these verses?

Poor. Many church members are very content to set in the pew for an hour a week or less, do nothing else, and think that is being faithful. Others think that being in the church every time it’s open is being faithful, even if they do nothing else.

How is our local church doing?

Better than many churches but as a church we focus more on deeds and services for our own group with less emphasis outside the membership. Should we go into the community to find those in need that we can help physically; have singing groups or speakers where we invite all local churches and others to attend; open our facilities to more outside groups for youth and sports activities to give people a place to meet and fellowship; etc.

How are you doing? **Not enough**

Should we know how others are doing or should these deeds be done confidentially? Why or why not?

Helping should be done without fanfare but I don’t think it needs to be strictly confidential unless those receiving the help desire this. Helping others can be a good witness to others of how Christians act. However if this is done in a showy manner or for self credit then it is really being done for the glory of the one doing the act and not to glorify God.

8. What justified Abraham and Rahab as righteous in God's view?

Their actions showing their faith.

9. How do you respond when people's professed faith and their actions are far apart?

I do not believe what they say about their faith. (Example of the wire walker asking for a volunteer to get into the wheel barrel to be pushed across the high wire)

Discussion questions and answers on James 4

James 4: 1a (first sentence)

What have been the primary causes of fights or quarrels you've had in the past? Please think of the root causes not the specific issues involved. i.e. were you or the one you were quarreling with angry, jealous, hurt emotionally etc.

Envy, Anger, Jealousy, Hate, Selfishness, Hurt feelings, Greed, Negative attitude so looking for the worst in what someone says or does, Misunderstanding of what was said or done,

1b and 2: Which of the above listed causes were tied to you or someone else not getting what you or he or she wanted?

Vs 3: Are there specific types of things we should or should not ask God for? Should we ask for more than the basic needs God has promised to provide for us? Does asking for more imply wrong motives since we just want that for our personal pleasure?

Solomon asked for wisdom and God made him the wisest man that ever lived plus he gave him great riches and peace for most of his reign when he was following God. Should we ask God for little but be looking at all the additional blessings he also gives to us daily and thanking him for these extras?

We should not ask for anything that would be counter to God's teachings in his Holy Word.

Vs 4: a. How can we be adulterous to God?

We are to be the “bride of Christ, his Church” and anything we do to go against his teachings means we are putting our allegiance in something other than Him and thus being adulterous to Christ.

b. What type of actions show we are a “friend of the world and an enemy of God”?

Accepting anything God has declared as sin to be acceptable actions for myself or others who proclaim to be Christians. Drunkenness, Fornication, Adultery, Lying, Homosexuality, Gossip, Cheating on Taxes, Using illegal drugs, Gluttony

c. Can inaction make us a “friend of the world and an enemy of God”?
i.e. Remaining silent when people are putting down Christians and Christianity?

God expects us to speak up when others are putting Christianity down, at least to acknowledge we are a Christian and don't concur with what the person is saying. Daniel spoke up and supported the Lord but he didn't require others to do so in the foreign land he was in but he refused to partake in their worship of other gods. God rewarded him for his actions.

Vs 5: How has God shown that He is a jealous envious God?

Throughout the Old Testament God punished his people when they went away from following him and worshiped heathen Gods. Many judges and kings were killed along with all of their families when the leaders lead the Israelites astray to worship other gods.

We worship the same God who hasn't changed and our nations, our leaders and ourselves will be punished if we turn to the gods of materialism, greed, sexism, egotism, and political correctness that has grossly infiltrated our American society.

Vs 6: What grace has God given us?

Grace: When God gives us good things we don't deserve. We get his grace everyday just to live in a free country like the USA and have the enormous abundant living we enjoy. We receive the blessing of fellowship and love in a church like Crossroads Christian. We have families to also surround us with love. The greatest grace is god

forgiving the many sins we commit when we seek his forgiveness and the promise of eternal life when we remain committed to striving to live as disciples of Christ.

Mercy: Spares us bad things we deserve, i.e. no punishment for us.

Blessings: When God is generous with both.

What should we do with that grace? See 1 Peter 4:10

We should give it to others along with mercy so they will be blessed by our actions.

Vs7: How do we submit ourselves to God ? Think of other situations in which you submit to someone or some organization and relate that to your submission to God. See 1 Peter 2:13&14, 18; 3:1&2; 5:5

a. We submit to governing authorities by complying with our countries laws, customs etc. We should do this out of honor and respect for our country, not just because we have to do so. Accept God as Lord of our life, follow his teachings.

b. We submit to our employers by doing what they ask us to do while on the job. (Slaves to masters in Bible days). Seek to do God's will at all times.

c. Wives submit to their husbands in a loving way to win them to the Lord if they are not Christians. Submit to God because we love him and honor him in this way.

d. Younger men submit to older men to learn how to be good elders, as explained in verses 1 to 4 of 1 Peter. Submit to God to learn more of how to satisfy him. (by studying his word and praying for more understanding)

7. How do we come near to God?

By humbling ourselves, putting God first instead of ourselves (vs 10). In Jesus day humility was shown by people publicly washing their hands for purification, dressing in sack cloths and putting ashes on their bodies, mourning and wailing publicly. Today this means giving God first place each day, communicating with him before others each morning, studying his word each day, giving his work priority in our use of our time and money. Doing his work because of our love for him and not to receive recognition from people or prestigious positions in the church.

How does God come near to us?

Vs 10 b: “And he will lift us up.” If we do the above we will feel the power of God in our life lifting us up as we go through each day.

8. How do we resist the devil?

a. Quote the Bible as Jesus did: Matthew 4: 1-11. To do this we need to study the Bible so we know what the Lord wants us to do in various situations where the devil tempts us to not be Christian in our actions or attitudes.

b. Flee from the devils temptations: 1 Cor. 6:18 Flee from sexual immorality; 10:14 Flee from idolatry; 1 Tim. 6:6-11 Flee from materialism; Don’t put yourself in tempting situations.

9. What is James purpose in telling us in verses 11 and 12 to not slander or judge one another? What is he trying to foster? What is he trying to prevent? See Titus 3: 1- 2 and 8 -11 where Paul addresses similar issues in more detail.

He is trying to foster peace and consideration for all people, humility toward all people, (Titus 3:2), with people devoting themselves to doing what is good (Titus 3: 8b)

He is trying to prevent arguments, quarrels and division among Christians. We are to warn a divisive person twice and if he continues to be divisive we should have nothing to do with him.

James 4: 13-17

1. Summarize the message of verses 13 to 16.

Put God’s priorities first in our planning. Plan what we are going to do but be sure we seek God’s guidance in those decisions and pray that his will be done in what we do. Be open to changing plans if we see the Lord opening other doors.

2. What does vs. 17 mean to you personally?

I’m so glad I’m saved by grace since this passage shows that no matter how good I am I can never do everything I know I ought to do. I am sinning even if the things I am doing are within his will since I am not doing all I could do for him.

I should remember this when I see needs but think someone else will fill the need so I don’t need to, whether another in church, the government etc.

Read James 3: 1- 12 Taming the tongue

1. James suggests that not many people should become teachers. (v1) Why do you think he said that?

What examples come to your mind of religious leaders or teachers whose lives people judged more strictly than others?

Why were they judged in this way? Do you agree with making these judgements?

2. Why do you think the tongue has such control over our lives as to be compared to a bit and a rudder? (v 3-4)
3. Why is it so difficult to control the tongue? (v 7-8)
4. If no one can tame the tongue then does this mean we aren't responsible for what we say? (v 8) Why or why not?
5. In what way can the tongue be poisonous? (v 8)
6. What inconsistencies do you see in the way you talk to others? Does fresh water ever flow at one time and salty water at another? (v 9-12)
7. James has focused mainly on the destructive power of the tongue. In what ways can the tongue also bring refreshment and healing?
8. What can you do to give God more praise? Be specific.
9. How can you give more affirmation and encouragement to those you come in contact with each day?