

BEYOND BELIEF

"BEYOND TRIALS"

JAMES 1:1-18

This Week's Core Competency

Joy – I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances. John 15:11 *I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*

Life throws all kinds of things our way. Some are everyday troubles, the kinds of things everyone faces, faith or no faith, like running out of money before payday, finding a big dent in your parked car and no note on your windshield, having to stay up all night with a sick child. Some are Christian troubles, the kinds of things that people of faith face like being shunned by family, discriminated against in school, and persecuted in public—not the kinds of things many Christians face in North America but the kinds of things many Christians do face in other parts of the world.

The problems people pray about are perhaps the sorts of things James had in mind when he told his readers, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds." Most prayer requests fall into one of four categories. First, *relationships*, e.g., my son is incorrigible, my husband is cheating on me, my sister and I haven't spoken to each other in years. Second, *health*, e.g., my brother recently suffered a heart attack, my aunt found a lump in her breast, my coworker

*He who has never looked on
sorrow will never see joy.*

-Khalil Gibran

discovered he has cancer. Third, *finances*, e.g., my sister lost her job, the bank is foreclosing on my house, I can't afford to buy a new car neither can I afford to fix my old one. And finally, *spiritual needs*, e.g., my dad is lost and needs the Lord, my son no longer believes in God, I'm just not interested in spiritual things like I used to be. Life throws all kinds of trials our way. Our perspective on them determines in large part how they affect us and how we respond to them. Believe it or not, given the right perspective, such things can be a source of joy.

James counseled his readers to view the various kinds of trials and tribulations they were encountering in their lives as opportunities for growth. He did not urge them to rejoice that they were undergoing trials. He did not advocate a masochistic attitude that unnaturally rejoices in painful experiences. Rather he commanded them to view their trials as profitable even though unpleasant. He considered them profitable in that, "the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete not lacking anything" (Jas 1:3, 4).

Conventional wisdom views trials as either temporary setbacks at best or destructive wastes of time at worst. In both cases, one would think escaping them far better than enduring them, but according to James, one would be wrong to think so. One would also be wrong to give in to the temptation to do evil to escape a trying situation. Neither giving up nor giving in is acceptable. Wisdom finds a way to persevere; joy flows in anticipation that it will.

For Discussion

John and Cathy have a twelve-year-old boy who's being bullied at school. It's nothing physical, just occasional name calling and exclusion from the group at this point. One day he's teased for being puny; another for dressing funny; another for going to church; another for being bad at sports. Most of the time he's just ignored. Jonathan has a couple of friends who are treated the same way. One has decided to transfer to a Christian school; Jonathan asked his parents if he could transfer too.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

James 1:1-18

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations:
Greetings.

2Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

4Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. 5If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. 6But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; 8he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

9The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. 10But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he

will pass away like a wild flower. 11For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.

12Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

13When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

16Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. 17Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. 18He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Box "because" indicating *reason* and "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 1-18.
- * Circle "trials," "testing," and "perseverance" in vv. 2-4.
- * Bracket "mature and complete, not lacking anything" and a forward slash through the comma in v. 4.
- * Draw a line from "lacking" in v. 4 to "lacks" in v. 5.
- * Bracket "generously to all without finding fault" and a forward slash between the words "all" and "without" in v. 5.
- * Bracket "believe and not doubt" and put a forward slash through the word "and" in v. 6.
- * Bracket "double-minded man, unstable in all he does" and a forward slash through the comma in v. 8.
- * Draw a line from "pride" in v. 9 to the same word in v. 10; then draw another line from "high" in v. 9 to "low" in v. 10.
- * Box "like" and "in the same way" indicating *comparison* in v. 11.
- * Underline "crown of life" in v. 12.
- * Circle all the forms of "tempt" in vv. 13, 14.
- * Draw a line from "sin" to "death" in v. 15.
- * Highlight v. 17.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. To whom does James address his letter? (See note on v. 1)
2. Give an example of the kind of trials James might have had in mind had he written to us today.
3. If spiritual formation is the process we go through to become like Jesus, explain the role trials play in that process.
4. Are trials essential for spiritual growth? What do you think?
5. Put what it means to be mature in your own words. (See v. 4; cf. Eph 4:13.)
6. Explain the *contrast* introduced by the word "but" in verse 6.
7. Why should the rich not take pride in their riches?
8. Verse 12 makes a statement. Explain the relationship of that statement to verses 2-11.
9. Put verse 13 in your own words.
10. Explain the *contrast* introduced by the word "but" in verse 14.
11. **Discussion:** Talk about the point of verse 17.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

The book of James, is one of even letters following Hebrews that are commonly called the General Epistles. Eusebius (c. A.D. 265-340), the early church historian, first referred to them as Catholic (universal) Epistles presumably because they were not addressed to specific persons or groups. The author was most likely the brother of Jesus, who evidently came to faith in connection with the resurrection (Jn 7:2-5; cf. 1Co 15:7) and later became a prominent leader in the church (Gal 1:19; 2:9; cf. Ac 12:17; 15:13). The Gospels come first in the New Testament, but James was written first, followed shortly by Paul's letter to the Galatians-both between A.D. 44 and 49.

"The epistle of James has been characterized as the Wisdom Literature of the New Testament. That the Old Testament Wisdom Literature had nourished the meditations of the writer is evident. His pithy, pungent sentences, his authoritative tone, and his ethical emphasis declare it. Again, not without reason, James has been styled 'the Amos of the New Testament.' The epistle has in it the direct thrust of that Old Testament prophet. Like Amos, it draws much of its imagery from nature and offers a stinging rebuke to social injustice. Its remarkable Jewish cast makes it clear that its author had his roots deep in the Old Testament. It is equally clear that the epistle reveals obvious traces of the influence of the teaching of Jesus, especially the Sermon on the Mount" (D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, *The Non-Pauline Epistles and Revelation*, 32).

James was likely written to Jewish Christians from Jerusalem who were scattered as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Syrian Antioch following the persecution that broke out after Stephen's death (see Ac 8:1-8). They faced all sorts of trials

because they were Christians and needed to know how to respond to the circumstances that tested their faith. The first thing our Lord's brother told them was to treat their unpleasant situations as an occasion for joy not sorrow because the trials they faced, rightly responded to, would produce perseverance, and perseverance would in turn ultimately produce maturity. And if they didn't know how to respond to their trials, all they had to do was ask God for wisdom, and he would give it to them graciously without finding fault with them for asking. But they had to believe and not doubt either God's willingness or his wisdom. Regardless of their humble circumstances, brothers in such predicaments were to exult in their identity and hope in Christ.

Then James issued a warning. He told them, should they be inclined to try to escape their trials by doing something wrong, they should not accuse God of tempting them. After all, no one can get God to do what is evil. He is impervious to evil. Neither does God try to get anyone to do evil. They are tempted by their own evil desires that lead them astray not God. Don't fool yourself, James goes on to tell them, God isn't the one behind your trials; he gives good and perfect gifts. And since he never changes you can't blame God for your troubles or accuse him of inciting you to do evil.

Some things never change. We face trials of many kinds, too, some different from the one James' readers faced, some the same. We, too, need to know how to respond to our trials. We, too, are inclined to blame God for our trials and excuse our evil responses by finding fault with him. So we, too, need to hear James' message.

The Message of this Passage

Don't despise trials and don't accuse God of tempting you, either; instead consider yourself blessed when you persevere and stand the test since you can look forward to receiving the crown of life.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Journal your thoughts on the passage:**

–Write about what God wants you to know . . .

–Write about how God wants you to feel . . .

–Write about what God wants you to do . . .

“Beyond Trials”

(Use the space below for Sunday’s message notes)

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

- v. 1 **James** Of the three most likely candidates, (1) James, son of Zebedee (Mt 10:2; Mk 3:17; Lk 6:14; Ac 1:13; 12:2), (2) James, the son of Alphaeus (Mt 10:3; Mk 3:18; Lk 6:15; Ac 1:13), or (3) James, the Lord's brother (Gal 1:19; 2:9; cf. Ac 12:17; 15:13), most certainly the last.
- v. 1 **servant** James called himself a "bond-slave" of God and of the one he could have called his brother. A bond-slave (Gk. *doulos*) belonged to his owner and was not a free man, yet he freely chose to serve his master. Ironically the term connotes both humility and authority in that "servant" is a designation of privilege and honor, used of Israel's great leaders of the people such as Moses, David, and the prophets" (Ralph P. Martin, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 48, *James*, 4).
- v. 1 **scattered** Most likely a reference to Jewish Christians viewed as "true Israel" (cf. Ro 9:6), who were scattered from Jerusalem as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Syrian Antioch after Stephen's death (Ac 8:1-8).
- v. 2 **joy** We should treat trials as an occasion for joy in that they are a good thing even though they are not a pleasant thing. With regard to the physical we sometimes quip, "No pain, no gain." With regard to the spiritual, the pain of persecution, when it is patiently endured, leads to the gain of perseverance, and perseverance in turn leads to Christian maturity.
- v. 2 **trials** The general term James uses [*peirosmos*] qualified by the phrase "of many kinds" suggests he is referring to adversities of life in general, as well as to hardships resulting from his brothers' and sisters' faith and obedience to God. The term *adelphoi* can mean "brothers and sisters" (cf. TNIV and the NET Bible).
- v. 3 **testing** Trials challenge our faith; when we face up to the challenge, we develop spiritual fortitude, a character quality that we could not otherwise attain. Testing is evident in the Old Testament; consider Abraham (Ge 22), the prime example of one who passed the test, and to the Israelites in the wilderness (Dt 8:1-18; esp. vv. 2, 16), the prime example of ones who didn't.
- v. 3 **perseverance** Cf., "fortitude" (NEB), "patient endurance," (RSV). The term means more than passive patience; it refers to an active persistence that one writer calls, "heroic endurance" (Peter Davids, *Commentary on James*, NIGTC, 68). "Testing does a service for the Christian, for the virtue of fortitude comes out of the process, however slow and painful it may be" (69).
- v. 5 **wisdom** In this context "wisdom" refers to knowing how to cope with the trials mentioned in v. 2.
- v. 6 **believe, not doubt** Not believe in God in general but believe that he will, in fact, grant the wisdom we need to cope with the trials in question. We must neither doubt God who gives wisdom nor the wisdom he gives.
- v. 8 **double minded** Cf., "unable to make up his mind and undecided in all he does" (TEV). "A double-minded person is one who has a divided opinion or allegiance (e.g., Lot; cf. 1 Clem. 11:2). He is unsteady, fickle, staggering, and reeling like a drunken man" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on James," www.soniclight.com).
- v. 9 **high position** James exhorts Christians whose trials include poverty to look beyond their humble circumstances and exult in their identity and hope in Christ.
- v. 10 **low position** This verse is difficult, but not critical to the overall sense of the passage. The rich are likely Christians, whom James exhorts to look beyond their riches and exult in their lowly state as humble followers of Jesus. After all, their riches are only temporary. But if they are not Christians, James exhorts them ironically to exult in their low position because they will suddenly vanish like a wild flower scorched by the hot sun. "The sun rises and the anemone and cyclamen droop and wither, becoming fit only for fuel" (77). Put differently, the "rich man's 'humiliation' (i.e., his low position) is the judgment he suffers (v. 10). On the other hand, the poor man should exult, for his vindication draws near (5:1-11)" (Martin, 27, 28).
- v. 12 **crown of life** The word "crown" often metaphorically means "reward." In the phrase "crown of life" eternal life is the content of the reward. We are encouraged to persevere in the face of trials knowing that eternal life will be ours in the future.
- v. 13 **tempted** In the midst of our trials we might be tempted to blame God and give up, which would be inexcusable. God doesn't give trials; he gives blessings (v. 16). What's more, if we should be tempted to do something wrong to cope with or escape our trying circumstances, we can't excuse ourselves by saying, "God made me do it." "Don't let anyone under pressure to give in to evil say, 'God is trying to trip me up.' God is impervious to evil, and puts evil in no one's way" (*The Message*).

Connect the **FAMILY**. During this series, Bible stories appropriate for children will be used that complement the adult teaching.

Experience it!

Experience scripture through the activity-based learning exercise. Dinner is a perfect time to engage the family.

Choose a few TV or book characters and ask, "Describe a difficult time he/she went through. How did they handle it?" Read Genesis 37:12-35. Because Joseph trusted God would take care of him no matter how bad things got, he was able to show everyone around him how real his faith was. How is your faith shown when things are difficult?

Pray it!

As a parent you can teach your child to pray by using actual scriptures as a guide. Pray this scripture with them this week..

Father, help me to fix my eyes on Jesus, the author and the perfecter of my faith.
Heb 12:2a

Post it!

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the memory verse throughout the house. Lead your children to interact with them as they memorize.

Joy – Being happy on the inside no matter what's happening on the outside

Memory verse – "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith"
Heb 12:2a

Discuss it!

Discover biblical truth by discussing the scripture. Reflective questions are great with older kids.

- *Why were Joseph's brothers so angry with him?
- *How could the hard times Joseph encountered been worse?
- *What did Joseph's brothers do with his robe?
- *Describe the hard times Joseph's dad encountered?

Live it!

Live out the Core Competency and build deeper relationships by doing this activity.

When things don't go their way, a person's face usually shows how they are feeling. Unfortunately, we don't always notice the look on a persons face. As a family this week notice the faces of people around you and discuss what they might be feeling. Are they excited, happy, upset or sad? Talk about what you can do for someone who seems sad.

Kids K through fourth grade receive Kid Pix Tokens for each discipleship activity completed.



Family completes **Experience It** _____
 Child memorizes kid-friendly **Core Competency** _____
 Family participates in **Live It** _____ and **Pray It** _____
 Child memorizes **Memory Verse** _____

Child's name _____

Parent's signature _____

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.