



Turning Trials into Triumphs

James 1:1-12

Big Picture of James

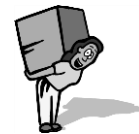
- ❑ To get the “big picture” we should read the whole book of James. Since the book is a letter, we should ask: Who wrote it? To whom? When? Why? Read James 1:1.
- ❑ *Author.* Most believe this “James” is the brother of Jesus (*Matthew 13:55, Galatians 1:19*) and leader in the Jerusalem church (*Acts 15:13*).
- ❑ *Recipients.* The “12 tribes” are likely Jewish Christians (*James 1:2; 2:1; 5:7-8*) who were scattered outside Palestine as a result of persecution (*Acts 11:19*).
- ❑ *Date.* Likely middle 40s AD (prior to the Jerusalem council, Acts 15).
- ❑ *Purpose.* James’ purpose is to encourage perseverance in the midst of trials (e.g., economic distress and challenges to genuine faith), to instruct in godly wisdom, to give directives about relationships, and to emphasize the necessity of demonstrating faith by action.

Zooming In

- ❑ This Bible study series breaks James into 14 parts, mainly based on subject matter. The first part is James 1:1-12. We have already read James 1:1 (the greeting). Read James 1:2-12.
- ❑ Verses 2-12 talk about different things: facing trials (*1:2-4*); asking God in faith (*1:5-8*); the humble and the rich (*1:9-11*); and again, trials (*1:12*). “Trials” tie these verses together.

Facing Trials

- ❑ Read James 1:2-4.
 1. Why should believers consider it joy when they face trials? (*1:3-4*)
- ❑ The testing of the believer’s faith produces endurance¹ (*1:3*), but endurance is not the final goal. Endurance must do its complete work (*1:4*).
 2. What is this “work” and what does it mean?²
- ❑ *Comparing Scripture to Scripture.* Paul and Peter had similar teaching (see Romans 5:3-4 and 1 Peter 1:6-7).
 3. James’ instruction is easier said than done. What practical things can we do to apply this teaching to our lives? (both in the midst in trials and in preparation for them) (*1:2-12*)



¹ The word ‘endurance’ (*hupomonē*) comes from the idea of ‘remaining under.’ A person who successfully carries a heavy weight for a long time develops strength and endurance. The word used for ‘testing’ (*dokimon*) is also used for the process of refining gold. The trials in our life are meant to refine our faith – to prove it genuine and purify it.

² To make us ‘complete,’ perfect in character (conformed to the image of Christ, the model of character). ‘Lacking nothing’ – wholeness, completeness in spiritual integrity. In its ultimate sense, this goal is not fully realized in this life, but the believer should be maturing in character (becoming more like Christ) throughout his/her life. Trials can aid the process, because they tend to humble us and influence us to turn to God who transforms and strengthens us.

Asking God

- ❑ Read James 1:5-8. James says, “if any of you lacks wisdom,³ [you] should ask God, who gives generously and without criticizing” (1:5, *HCSB*).⁴
 4. When we “ask God,” we need the proper attitude (1:6). How would you describe this attitude? How does it contrast with the attitude of “the doubter?” (1:6-8)⁵

Proper Boasting

- ❑ Read James 1:9-11. James talks about proper “boasting”⁶ for both the “[believer] of humble circumstances” (1:9) and “the one who is rich” (1:10).
 5. In what way does the believer in “humble circumstances” have a “high position?” (1:9)⁷
- 📖 “The one who boasts must boast in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:31).
- ❑ On the other hand, the rich person should boast in his “low position” (1:10).⁸ The rich person should certainly *not* boast in his wealth or social status because it has no lasting value (1:11).

God's Promise

6. Read James 1:12. How does James encourage believers who are facing trials?⁹



Reflection & Application

- Are you experiencing difficulties or trouble? If you aren't now, you will in the future. How will you handle it? What are you trusting in? Do you need to trust in the Lord, Jesus Christ?
- As a believer, how do you respond to trials in your life? Regularly reflect on today's passage, Romans 5:1-5; 8:28-39; 1 Peter 1:3-9, and similar passages. Ask God to put these truths in your heart, deepening and strengthening your trust in Him and His good plans for you.

³ Biblical ‘wisdom’ is not merely intelligence or good judgment. Wisdom comes from God (Proverbs 2:6) and is characterized by a proper attitude toward God and his moral will (Proverbs 9:10; James 3:17).

⁴ Jesus said, ‘Keep asking, and it will be given to you ...’ (Matthew 7:7-11; Luke 11:9-13, *HCSB*)

⁵ We must have faith in God; trusting in His character. To doubt is to question His character. Many times, we go back and forth between trust and doubt. The doubter is unstable, like the sea blown and tossed by the wind (e.g., circumstances). Such a person is ‘double-minded’ (*dipsychos* – ‘double-souled’). God wants us to have undivided trust and loyalty. That is why Jesus said the greatest commandment is: ‘Love the Lord your God with *all* your heart, with *all* your soul, and with *all* your mind’ (Matthew 22:37).

⁶ ‘boast’ (*kauchasthō*) is often used positively in the Bible. In some contexts, it is translated ‘rejoice’ (e.g. Rom. 5:3).

⁷ See James 2:5 and Ephesians 2:4-7. Humble circumstances may result in a more humble spirit. And God ‘gives grace to the humble’ (James 4:6).

⁸ Scholars are divided on whether the “one who is rich” is a rich believer or a rich non-believer. If he is a believer, he is instructed to not take pride in his money or social position, but rather in his ‘humiliation’ (low position) – that is, his identification with the humility of Jesus Christ (who was ‘despised and rejected’). If he is a non-believer, his ‘humiliation’ relates to the inevitable loss or destruction of his wealth and influence; whether in life, death, or judgment. Thus the instruction to ‘boast in his humiliation’ is intended to be ironical (that is, all the rich person will have left to ‘boast in’ is his inevitable humiliation).

⁹ Those who persevere will receive ‘the crown of life’ – signifying eternal life and its abundant blessings, fully realized at the end of this present life. ‘Passes the test’ (1:12) does not mean we can earn eternal life by our efforts (see footnote 1). Eternal life is a gift of God received through faith in Jesus Christ, but genuine faith is evidenced by our perseverance in trusting and loving God.