

STUDY GUIDE

NEW VISION
MYTHEOLOGY
A VALLEY MEANS A MISTAKE
JAMES 1:1-12
10/30/2016



MAIN POINT

There are always lessons to be learned and character to be built no matter what the cause or what the valley.

INTRODUCE

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Discuss examples of endurance outside of the Christian faith—things that require physical or mental endurance.

Share an example of a time when you had to endure something and what that experience was like for you. What motivated you to endure during that time?

Endurance can take many forms. We often think of endurance when it pertains to physical long distance events such as a marathon or a triathlon. Endurance is not merely a physical tool, it is a spiritual one as well. James begins his letter urging endurance in trials.

READ AND REFLECT

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 1:1-4.

According to James, what should be a Christian's attitude when facing trials? How often is this your attitude in your own hard times?

When you have experienced trials in your life, did you consider it all joy or become depressed and discouraged?

James advised those facing trials to approach them with joy. When trials are rightly faced, they are avenues to spiritual growth. When faced wrongly, they become temptations to evil. James did not say trials should make us happy or that we should look forward to them. Rather, James wrote with a deep realization that life's pressures have a way of strengthening our character and faith. In other words, they help us develop perseverance.

Why is perseverance important? What reward comes with persevering in the faith?

Perseverance or “endurance” is not the goal, but the means of reaching the goal. The goal is to become mature and complete. A physically mature adult who behaves at the level of a young child is not a mature adult. Likewise, a Christian who is mature in the knowledge of the Scriptures but whose behavior does not match his or her profession of faith is not a mature Christian.

Read Romans 5:3-5. What two things did Paul say we can rejoice in because of God's grace? Which of Paul's stated reasons for rejoicing is a little tougher for you? Why?

How can a believer's Christlike endurance of suffering offer a testimony of hope to others?

What incident in your life can you look back on and see the truth of verses 3-5?

Christian joy runs deep and endures because its source is the ever-flowing stream of God's grace. This is why both Paul and James could state that we as believers also rejoice in our afflictions. Paul's statement doesn't imply that we somehow enjoy suffering. Rather, it means that we have confidence God will use even our afflictions to bring about His good purposes in our lives. For this confidence, we need look no further than the example of Jesus. He willingly bore the most horrendous pain and suffering with a view that His death and resurrection would open the way to our salvation (see Hebrews 2:10; 12:2).

In what specific ways does suffering provide an opportunity for believers to show they believe in Jesus and rejoice? How is Jesus' life a model for this?

How can testing or trials actually strengthen a believer's faith?

Endurance is self-authenticating; we grow in endurance by staying the course of faith and not being swayed by trials. Proven character follows naturally from the believer who has remained faithful through trials. Enduring trials causes us to grow in faith, and such growth is a testimony of faith's authenticity.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 1:5-12.

How do you define “wisdom”? How is it related to enduring trials?

Heavenly wisdom, the internal and practical means to endure, is particularly needed when we face trials. Difficult times often visit us suddenly and without warning. Our natural reactions could be distress, grief, perplexity, confusion, disappointment, or hopelessness. Without wisdom, we do not have God's perspective on our trials, a perspective that helps us get through the dark days of difficulty. When we find that we lack wisdom, we should turn to God for it. To access this wisdom, we must ask. God gives generously without finding fault.

What does James teach us about the nature of our prayers for wisdom?

How will God respond to us when we pray by faith for God's wisdom?

We must come to God in faith, trusting that He will grant us the wisdom we need. We should not expect results when we exhibit a faith mixed with doubts. When our faith wavers in such a manner, we are like a wave in the ocean that is driven and tossed about at the mercy of the wind. The imagery is that of vacillation and instability.

What does it mean to be a “double-minded” person? What impact would this have on how a person faces trials?

Based on the description in this text, would you consider yourself to be double-minded? How can one avoid being double-minded?

Authentic, vibrant Christianity depends on our living moment-by-moment in the reality of knowing Jesus Christ, a knowledge that comes through faith. The term “double-minded” describes people with divided loyalties in heart and mind. They attempt to serve both God and self, both the spirit and the body, both light and darkness, both heavenly wisdom and human wisdom, both the law of life and the law of death.

APPLY

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What has helped you see God’s hand and feel His love during times of affliction in your life?

How can you share the faith and hope you have with someone you love or care about this week?

When have you prayed for and received God’s wisdom? What do you do when you pray but still have doubts?

PRAY

Pray for God’s supernatural courage and strength to endure and mature in trials.

COMMENTARY

JAMES 1:1-12

1:1. James, the half-brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church, referred to himself modestly as a servant, literally “slave.” The term indicates full submission to God and the Lord Jesus Christ. James wrote to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations, a reference primarily to Jewish Christians scattered most likely because of persecution such as that following Stephen’s death (see Acts 8:1b). Some interpreters extend the designation twelve tribes to include all the people of God in Christ. For more details about the Letter of James, see the “Introduction” on pages 8-9.

1:2-3. James advised those facing trials to approach them with great joy. The Greek word translated “trials” can be used in a good or a bad sense. When trials are rightly faced they are avenues to spiritual growth; when faced wrongly they become temptations to evil. In this context James is using the term in a positive sense; trials are tests of faith. The noun translated “trials” is related to the word rendered “tempted” in verse 13, but there the word clearly refers in a negative sense to the temptation to sin. The Greek term translated “many” kinds literally means “variegated” or “multicolored.”

1:4. Perseverance or “endurance” is not the goal, but the means of reaching the goal. The goal is to become mature and complete. A physically mature adult who behaves at the level of a young child is not a mature adult. Likewise, a Christian who is mature in the knowledge of the Scriptures but whose behavior does not match his or her profession of faith is not a mature Christian.

1:5. Heavenly wisdom, the internal and practical means to endure, is particularly needed when we face trials. Difficult times often visit us suddenly and without warning. Our natural reactions could be distress, grief, perplexity, confusion, disappointment, or hopelessness. Without wisdom, we do not have God’s perspective on our trials, a perspective that helps us get through the dark days of difficulty.

When we find that we lack wisdom, we should turn to God for it. The term translated “lacks” is a banking term that means “experiencing a shortage.” To access this wisdom, we must ask. The form of the verb translated “ask” indicates that we should keep on asking. James reassured his readers that God will not scold them for asking. God

gives generously without finding fault. God will give the gift wisdom not just to special people, but to any believer who asks Him for it.

1:6. This verse calls attention to a prerequisite to our asking God for wisdom. We must come to Him in faith, trusting that He will grant us the wisdom we need. We should not expect results when we exhibit a faith mixed with doubts. When our faith wavers in such a manner, we are like a wave in the ocean that is driven and tossed about at the mercy of the wind. The wave moves one way one minute and another way the next minute according to the movement of the wind. The imagery is that of vacillation and instability.

1:7-8. "That man" designates the person who asks for wisdom with the mouth but does not trust God with the heart. Such an individual is a walking contradiction. James called someone who behaves in this manner double-minded, literally "two-souled." Such imagery may remind us of John Bunyan's "Mr. Facing-both-ways." The double-minded person has not set his or her life-guiding principles in concrete. A double-minded believer is not demonstrating love for God with one's whole heart, mind, and soul (Matthew 22:37).

Authentic, vibrant Christianity depends on our living moment-by-moment in the reality of knowing Jesus Christ, a knowledge that comes through faith. The term double-minded describes people with divided loyalties in heart and mind. They attempt to serve both God and self, both the spirit and the body, both light and darkness, both heavenly wisdom and human wisdom, both the law of life and the law of death. No wonder such people are unstable and restless. They pray, but their prayers are not genuine. They step out in faith but then doubt and step back. They seek spiritual answers but explain them away with human wisdom. As long as divided loyalties rule, confusion and instability remain. James also characterized such a believer as "unstable," a translation of a Greek word meaning "unsteady," "staggering like a drunken person," or "fickle."

1:9. To emphasize his point, James introduced what may be viewed as two specific kinds of trials. Each of his readers could probably identify with one of these two situations. The first trial is poverty. To be in humble circumstances is to be in poverty or in low social standing. Perhaps persecution had reduced believers from a position of social influence to a state of poverty. Such persons might be tempted to adopt an attitude of hopelessness. Instead, James encouraged these Christians to take pride or "glory" in their eternal spiritual riches rather than be discouraged by their poverty.

1:10. The second trial is having money beyond that needed to meet life's basic needs (one who is rich). James warned that the rich also would confront tests of their faith, but their tests would be of a different nature than those faced by the poor. For example, the rich might easily be tempted to assume an attitude of false pride and self-sufficiency because of their wealth. James encouraged wealthy believers to take pride instead in a low position. Wealthy believers needed to view their social and economic statuses as temporary and fleeting. They needed to humble themselves in order to guard against trusting in their wealth instead of trusting in God.

1:11. In this verse James continued his comparison of the wealthy individual to a wild flower, a familiar image of frailty in the Old Testament. All the splendor of the rich eventually vanishes, if not before then certainly after the person dies. Only because the sovereign God allowed it did that individual possess wealth in the first place. The wealthy believer who keeps this truth in mind will find strength in the Lord to resist the sin of trusting in riches.

1:12. Persevering or remaining faithful while undergoing trials has its reward from God. The crown of life probably refers to life in its fullness or completeness as God intended. Those who endure trials often have an unmistakable mark of Christ's life on them, a heavenly fragrance about them that is attractive and sweet. The crown of life can also refer to the life to come with God in His kingdom that will include reigning with Christ in victory.

The phrase "stood the test" means to stand approved as gold or silver is approved after passing the test for genuineness. Trials are tests of faith. Living by faith is not difficult in the absence of testing. But when the test comes, will we stand? When we exercise faith during trials, we stand the test. Such faithful perseverance under trials is evidence of our love for the Lord