

# BRENTWOOD BAPTIST

TRIALS AND MATURITY • TRIALS AND MATURITY • JAMES 1:1-27 • NO DATE

## MAIN POINT

Trials, in the hands of God, are God's means of bringing His children to maturity.

## INTRODUCTION

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.

## UNDERSTANDING

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

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 1:1-18.

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

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

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

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. 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. Enduring trials causes us to grow in faith, and such growth is a testimony of faith’s authenticity.

**How do you define “wisdom” (v. 5)? How is it related to enduring trials?**

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

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.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 1:13-18.

**In these verses, James focuses on temptation, a specific type of trial we face. What is the goal of temptation? What is the devil trying to get us to do when we are tempted?**

**In your own experience, where do your temptations most often come from?**

**What is the ultimate fruit of our temptations?**

James wrote, “When tempted . . .” The implication here is that temptation will come eventually, just like suffering and trials. No one can escape the presence of temptation, which at its most basic level is the desire to satisfy a God-given desire in an ungodly way. We are tempted every day, but we must always remember that temptation itself is not a sin. Jesus was “tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Though our temptations are all different, they follow the same process. All temptation begins with desire—a good desire given to you by God, but also includes a deception that leads us to see that desire through the lens of our sinful nature. Giving into that temptation happens because we disobey, and the result of disobeying God’s commands

is death. The language James used here is like a fish who takes bait without realizing there is a hook inside the bait. Once the hook is in, death is inevitable.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 1:19-27.

**With these verses, James draws attention to what the mature faith looks like in action. How are James's three commands in verse 19 related to one another? What is the root issue James warned his readers against with these commands?**

**What do we communicate to other people when we don't listen well or talk too much? What happens when these negative traits enter into our relationship with God?**

Christians can pretend to obey God without truly listening to His commands. The readers of James's letter knew the transforming power of God's Word, the gospel. James urged them to demonstrate this change, particularly in their speech. He challenged them to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. The commands probably refer both to our relationships to one another and to God.

**Why do we often "hear" and not "do" when it comes to Scripture? What does this say about our faith?**

**In what area of your life could you do a better job applying God's Word rather than just listening to it?**

James was concerned that believers persevere in living out God's Word. James maintained that just listening to God's Word was insufficient. When one hears the Word and does not act on the admonitions contained in it, that person really is engaging in self-deception. Simply listening to the message is not enough. For James, genuine religion and daily life could not be separated. He had little patience with those who claimed to be pious or religious but gave no evidence of inward change by their daily conduct.

## APPLICATION

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?**

## PRAYER

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

## COMMENTARY

| JAMES 1:1-27

1:1. The use of slave indicates James's humility and total devotion in service to his Lord. As a "slave" of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, James's words bear authority, for he does his master's bidding and speaks as His representative (2Pe 1:20-21). The 12 tribes in the Dispersion refers symbolically to Jewish Christians scattered abroad.

1:2. The phrase whenever you experience various trials assumes that trials are a normal part of the Christian life. In fact, trials are a given for a faithful disciple (2Tim 3:12). The Jewish wisdom tradition held that the experience of "trials" was proof of a person's faithfulness. Joy suggests an eschatological (end times) hope of deliverance from trials. The joy with which a believer endures trials in the present is a sign of their hope for future relief.

1:3. Knowing (or "because you know") modifies "consider" in verse 2. Knowledge that the testing of your faith produces endurance is the basis for joy. "Endurance" is the ability to persevere through increasing levels of testing or suffering.

1:4. Endurance indicates that further work must be done for the purpose of making the believer mature and complete, lacking nothing. Immaturity and incompleteness are not acceptable long-term states for the Christian disciple.

1:5. The world's harsh treatment tempts us to withdraw and refuse to expose our lack of wisdom for fear of being shamed by our peers, but God gives to all generously and without criticizing. Thus he who lacks wisdom should ask God freely.

1:6-8. A person should ask for wisdom in faith without doubting. The basis for confidence here is not just the fact that we exercise faith, but the person in whom we place our faith

—God.

1:9-11. James offered two illustrations of people facing trials: the brother of humble circumstances (the poor) and one who is rich. In relation to eternity, neither the poor nor the wealthy have anything to boast about; they are equals before God.

1:12. Blessed reflects the understanding that a person who walks in the paths set by the Lord sees his plight in terms of the eschatological hope that awaits him. Set within this context, his current troubles seem fleeting.

1:13-18. The term trial (v. 13) connects this group of verses to the preceding section (vv. 2-12). God's relationship to temptation is made clear by two kinds of statements. On the one hand, there are assertions that clarify what God is not or does not do: God is not tempted... and He Himself doesn't tempt. On the other hand, there are assertions as to what things do come from God: every generous act and every perfect gift.

1:13-14. The twofold negative stance ( God is not tempted and He Himself doesn't tempt anyone) emphatically denies that God leads people into temptation. The source of temptation is one's own evil desires. "Desires" focuses on the immediacy that carnal desire creates, spurring a person to act, to be drawn away and enticed like a fish is baited to bite a hook and is then pulled from the water.

1:17. Father of lights refers to God (v. 5), who created the lights that rule days and seasons (Gen 1:14-19). No variation or shadow cast by turning alludes to the fact that God's nature is unchanging and that His promises are secure.

1:18. Message of truth refers to the gospel, by which new birth comes. Firstfruits refers to the best that the harvest produces. God gives good gifts that yield wondrous fruit, not temptation that leads to death through wayward desires.

1:19-27. The focus of this section is on proper Christian conduct, especially regarding use of the tongue.

1:21. Implanted word refers to the gospel as received by the believer.

1:22. The presence of the "implanted word" should produce more than idle listening. True worship leads to putting gospel exhortations into action.

1:23-25. In the contrast between the hearer of the word who looks at his own face in a mirror and yet forgets, and the doer of the word who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres, the distinction is found in whether the one who looks allows

“the perfect law of freedom” (the gospel) to shape his life’s course. The person who hears and does “the word” puts faith into action and is blessed; his worship influences his life.

1:26-27. James made an observation about true religion. Just as the hearer looks in a mirror and forgets his own face, so the person who refuses to hold his tongue is deceived about his faith. He hears and talks, but he does not act on what he has heard. James’s definition of pure and undefiled religion is based on action, not heedless hearing and meaningless lip service.