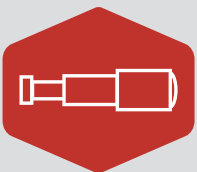




## Lesson 2: Trials: A Means to Grow

**Main Idea:** In this portion of Scripture, James teaches some practical principles about how to profit during trials. He shows Christians how to live a changed lifestyle, offering a different perspective of trials.

**Scripture:** James 1:1-6



### The Author's Lens (Spyglass)

*What did the Scripture mean to the original author and audience? As you explore information on the author, content, culture, history, land, and language of the Bible, you will gain a better understanding of the intended message of God's Word.*

The letter of James is found near the end of the New Testament. James is a smaller letter that deals with the practical dimensions to the Christian faith. Some have felt James taught that salvation is based on what a person does rather than a gift from God based on faith.

James writes as a humble servant of Christ and His Church to fellow believers who are scattered throughout the Roman world as a result of persecution for their faith. These are people who have a deep faith in Jesus Christ. James writes to give them practical counsel regarding how they can follow Christ as the Lord of their lives even more effectively.<sup>1</sup>

James understands who he is and who the people of God are within the Christian family. Being a servant of God was James's highest calling. However, where there is faith, there are also behavioral changes. Faith is not just cognitive or intellectual. It is not just checking off the items of a creed and saying, "I agree," as if agreeing will make any difference in how you live or how

<sup>1</sup> Paul A. Cedar and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *James / 1 & 2 Peter / Jude*, vol. 34, The Preacher's Commentary Series, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1984), 34:19.

you talk or how you behave. James points believers to the notion that while salvation comes by grace through faith, Christians demonstrate their faith with a lifestyle characterized by good works. James writes about how to live to please God, showing the difference between faith and deeds. The book of James places an emphasis on the fruit and footprints of faith.<sup>2</sup>

Five people in the New Testament bear the name James. There is James the son of Zebedee. There is James the son of Alphaeus, who is probably also the son of Mary. There is James the younger and James the father of Judas Thaddaeus. The James who writes this letter is the fifth James of the New Testament. Most believe he was the earthly brother of the Lord. But even though he grew up with Jesus in Nazareth, James did not initially believe in Him. In fact, one time, James came with his brothers and sisters and mother to try to take Jesus away, because they thought he was beside himself or mad (Mark 3:21).

At some point, he came to believe, perhaps after the Resurrection, that His elder brother is the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus, according to 1 Corinthians 15, made a personal appearance to James. James was present in the Upper Room, in Acts 1, when the Spirit is first poured out. He is one of the one hundred and twenty. As we see from Acts 12, Acts 15, and Galatians 1, he becomes the leader of the church at Jerusalem. In Church tradition, he is called Old Camel Knees because he spent so much time in prayer that his knees became leathery.

James identifies himself in a unique way as he begins the letter: simply as James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ (verse 1). Notice he does not say James, the brother of the Lord. Nor does he say James, the pillar of the Church. Those would have been true titles he could have used about himself, for he was the brother of the Lord and he was called by Paul and others a pillar of the Church. But he does not refer to himself that way, because true Christian humility does not depend on earned titles or honorary titles. The word that is appropriate for Christian character is the word that James employs here when introducing himself. He simply says, “I am a servant.” The word in the biblical period meant slave. It had more intensity than the word servant has today. A slave was one wholly owned by another and under the total direction and command of another. If you were to ask James who he was, his response would have been, “Count me as one who is owned by another, under another’s direction and control. A slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

James writes to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations (James 1:1). The Greek word for scattered is *diaspora*, which means scattered seed. Israel was scattered away from its land among the nations, beginning with the captivity of Assyria in the eighth century before Christ, then the Babylonian captivity

<sup>2</sup> McGhee, Quentin, General Epistles, Faith in Action Series. (Springfield, MO: Faith and Action Team, 2014), 22.

in the sixth century BC, and the Diaspora continues to this day. Three out of every four Jews in the world is still a Jew in the Diaspora, the dispersion away from Israel. But James uses the word *diaspora* and the title “twelve tribes of Israel” the same way Paul does in Galatians 6:16 when he calls the Church the “Israel of God.” So we know James is not writing to his fellow Israelites. He is writing to the redeemed Body of Jesus Christ, both Jew and Gentile, the new Israel of God. He addresses them as “scattered among the nations,” not because they had sinned as ancient Israel had, but because that is where they lived.

James, in the first six verses of his letter, begins talking about trials. Normal people do not enjoy trials. In fact, most do everything within their power to avoid trials. In the English language today, the words “test” and “temptation” are synonymous with “trial.” Because of its sinister, negative connotation, “temptation” is probably not the right word to employ when discussing James 1. Generally, when you think of temptation, you think about being sucked under or pulled down or perhaps falling into sin. In contrast, the Greek word for trial or test speaks of someone who is going to come through a difficult time with triumph, who is going to emerge stronger and purer as a result of the test. The Greek word for trial is *peirasmós*. The root of this word means “to assay, to examine, or to put to the proof.” A good biblical and theological definition might be “an external adversity which provides a testing towards an end.”<sup>3</sup> The idea is not one of seduction into sin, but of being proven, like a young bird testing its wings. The kind of test James is referencing will give you something you have not had in your life before, new strength and power.

Most of the people James addresses had lost their homes, their jobs, and security within their community. James encourages them to respond to these trials with pure joy. The verb translated “consider” is in the imperative form and could mean “to think,” “to regard,” or “to consider”; it calls for the readers to look at their circumstances from an unexpected vantage point.<sup>4</sup> *Pure* joy is the idea that joy should be the result of a changed perspective, which is that trials will produce endurance in you. The Old Testament is filled with powerful examples of the positive effects upon individuals going through trials. Here is what one author says: “The productivity of faith under fire can be seen in great figures of the Old Testament such as Joseph, Abraham, and Job who, resolute in their trust in God and commitment to walking in his ways despite opposition, received the spiritual dividends of the experience.”<sup>5</sup>

3 Cedar and Ogilvie, *James / 1 & 2 Peter / Jude*, 34:20.

4 George H. Guthrie, “James,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Hebrews-Revelation (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 13. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 13:213.

5 Guthrie, “James,” 13:213.

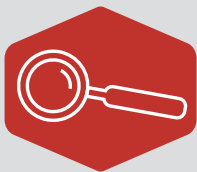


## My Lens (Eyeglasses)

*What does this Scripture say to you? Through completing the reading assignments below, you will better understand what God's Word is saying to you.*

The believer must meet trials with joy, for testing will develop persevering faith, proven character, and mature hope. Your faith can only reach full maturity when faced with difficulties and opposition. James calls these trials a “testing of your faith.” Trials are sometimes brought into believers’ lives so that God can test the sincerity of their faith. Scripture nowhere teaches that troubles in life are always an indication that God is displeased with us. In fact, they can be a sign that He recognizes our firm commitment to Him. (Job 1-2). Consider these things James says about tests:

- Tests or trials are inevitable (1:2).
- Tests or trials come in many different kinds (1:2).
- Tests or trials arise unexpectedly (1:2).
- Tests or trials test faith (1:3).
- Tests or trials develop staying power (1:3).
- Tests or trials need to be responded to properly (1:3).
- Tests or trials properly responded to makes a believer productive (1:4).
- Tests or trials provide an opportunity for God to provide help (1:5).
- Tests or trials provide an opportunity for you to ask God for help in faith (1:6).



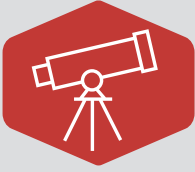
## The Holy Spirit Lens (Magnifying Glass)

*How can the Scripture apply to your life? By listening to the Holy Spirit's leading as you answer this series of questions, you can gain useful insights that will help you apply the truth of God's Word to your daily life.*

### Application:

- Write down your answer to the following questions here or in your journal:
  - » Who appears in this passage?

- » Where is this passage taking place?
- » When is this passage occurring?
- » Why is this passage important?
- » What is happening in this passage?
- » How does this passage apply to my life?
- Circle and write down any reoccurring words in this passage.
- What is the purpose of trials?
- How have you seen patience/perseverance develop in your life through trials?
- Describe a time in your life when you asked God for wisdom.
- Is there a situation you are facing now where you need God's wisdom?



## Upward and Outward Focus (Telescope)

*How does the Scripture affect your relationship with God and others? You experience God's Word in action as you use it to direct your journey with Him and those around you. Answer the following questions and record the answers in your journal.*

- Take some time to listen to the Lord about the text you just studied. How did these verses help deepen your love for God?
- As a result of your deepened love for God, how can you practically demonstrate this love to others?



## Using My FireBible

*Read the study notes for the following verses in the Fire-Bible and answer the accompanying questions.*

- James 1:2. What are three things you can glean about trials?
- James 1:4. How does a mature believer who is growing in Christ walk out their Christianity?
- James 1:5. What is biblical wisdom?