

Bible Fellowship Teaching Plan for James 1:1-18 (September 20, 2026)
Growing Your Authentic Faith Through Trials

Central Truth: Authentic faith is actively demonstrated in how we respond to trials, seek God for wisdom, resist temptation, and live as people who genuinely follow Christ.

Background: James was the half-brother of Jesus and leader of the church in Jerusalem. He writes to “the twelve tribes in the Dispersion,” referring particularly to Jewish believers living outside of Israel. James addresses his message to believers who know the truth but struggle with consistently living out what they profess, particularly in trials, temptation, speech, relationships, pride, selfish ambition, and worldliness.

The Theme: James calls us to authentic, practical Christianity. Real faith is not merely something we profess or understand intellectually; it’s seen in how we actually live day-by-day, and real faith is seen by its fruit.

Key Passage (2): “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

Opening Question: When you encounter a difficult circumstance, what is your first thought? Is it “What am I going to do?” or “God, how do you want me to grow through this?”

Lesson Objectives:

- 1) Explain why James tells believers to “count it all joy” when facing trials.
- 2) Understand how the testing of our faith produces steadfastness and spiritual maturity.

- 3) Recognize the importance of asking God for wisdom rather than relying solely upon ourselves.
- 4) Distinguish between a trial that God can use to mature us and temptation that comes from our own sinful desires.
- 5) Identify how wealth, poverty, and changing circumstances can test our faith and identity.
- 6) Understand that God is good, unchanging, and the source of every good and perfect gift.
- 7) Consider what it means to live as God's "firstfruits"—people whose lives are consecrated to Him.
- 8) Apply James's call to practical Christianity: allowing our walk to demonstrate the reality of our faith.

I. Trials Can Become Opportunities for Spiritual Growth (2-4)

A. James begins with a startling command: "Count it all joy ... when you meet trials of various kinds."

1. James is not saying that suffering itself is enjoyable. We're not being asked to pretend that painful circumstances are wonderful. Rather, we are called to seek what God may accomplish through them.
2. Note the progression: Trials → Testing of faith → Steadfastness → Spiritual maturity. Steadfastness should be allowed to complete its work so that believers may become "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."
3. Christian perseverance is not passive survival. It's a powerfully active perseverance in the face of opposition, remaining faithfully fixed on following Christ.

B. The question we ought to ask during testing times is not, "How can I get out of this?" but, "Lord, how can You use this to make me more like Christ?"

Questions for Discussion:

Why do you think James begins his letter with the subject of trials?

What does it mean to “count it all joy” without pretending that suffering itself is enjoyable?

How can a difficult experience produce spiritual maturity?

What is the difference between merely enduring a trial and actively persevering through it?

Can you think of a time when a difficult circumstance ultimately strengthened your faith?

II. God Gives Wisdom for the Trials We Face (5-8)

A. Trials often leave us asking: “What should I do?” “Where should I turn?” “How should I respond?” “What does God want from me?” James' answer is remarkably simple: “Ask God.”

B. God gives wisdom generously and without reproach. He doesn't shame His children for recognizing their need for His guidance.

C. But we must ask in faith. James contrasts steadfast faith with the person who doubts and is like “a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.”

D. The issue is not merely intellectual uncertainty. James describes the “double-minded” person as divided between competing allegiances--trying to trust both God and the world.

Application: When facing a difficult decision, don't begin with self-reliance; instead, begin with dependence upon God.

Questions for Discussion:

Why do we so often try to figure things out ourselves before asking God for wisdom?

What does it mean to ask God for wisdom “in faith”?

What is the danger of being “double-minded”?

How can Scripture and the Holy Spirit guide us when we lack wisdom?

III. Our Circumstances Do Not Determine Our Worth (9-11)

A. Two circumstances that can present a test of faith

1. The lowly brother has no reason to be ashamed of his status. Poverty can tempt someone to believe that he has little value, but he or she is a person of absolute worth in God's eyes--children of God, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.
2. Wealth can tempt someone to believe that his possessions establish his value, but wealthy believers have proven that they are faithful stewards of everything God has entrusted to them.

B. James points both people to the same truth: our identity is found in Christ, not in our circumstances. Poverty and wealth can both become tests of faith, but both are corrected when our identity is grounded in Christ. The believer's eternal inheritance never fades.

Questions for Discussion:

How can either poverty or prosperity become a test of faith?

What are some things people commonly use to determine their worth?

How should knowing that our identity is in Christ change the way we view success, failure, possessions, or status?

IV. Steadfast Faith Yields an Eternal Reward (12)

A. James offers a beatitude like that of Psalm 1:1 and the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial."

B. The promised reward is "the crown of life," a picture of the believer's eternal hope, ultimately pointing to Revelation 21:3 where believers find their heart's desire in the presence of the Lord.

Teaching emphasis: Faithfulness in the midst of everyday trials must be viewed in light of eternity.

V. Trials Are Not the Same as Temptations (13-16)

- A. James makes an important distinction: God may use trials to test and mature our faith, but God does not tempt us to sin.
- B. Temptation arises when a person is “lured and enticed by his own desire.”
- C. Note the progression of temptation: Desire → Sin → Death
- D. We must accept responsibility for our response to temptation rather than blaming God, circumstances, or other people.
- E. Difficult circumstances may provide the setting for temptation, but they do not make or cause us to sin. We make the choice.
- F. Four responses to temptation:
 - 1. Stop blaming God.
 - 2. Remember where sin ultimately leads.
 - 3. Remember God's goodness.
 - 4. Receive God's Word of Life.

Questions for Discussion:

What distinction does James make between trials and temptation?

Why is blaming circumstances or other people so tempting when we sin?

What is the progression from desire to sin to death?

How can remembering God's goodness help us resist temptation?

What does it mean practically that believers do not have to allow sin to reign over them?

VI. God Is the Source of Life and Every Good Gift (17-18)

- A. James declares, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.” God's character is good and unchanging. He is not the source of evil or temptation.
- B. There's a great contrast: Sin gives birth to death and God gives birth to life.

1. God brought believers forth “by the word of truth” so that they might be “a kind of firstfruits of his creation.”
2. Firstfruits in the Old Testament involved giving the first portion of the harvest to God as an acknowledgment that the entire harvest belonged to Him.
3. The implication for believers is profound: we belong to God. Our lives, abilities, possessions, opportunities, and decisions are to be yielded completely to Him for our good and His glory.

Questions for Discussion:

What does it look like for faith to be understood as a verb rather than an abstract noun?

In what areas of everyday life is it easiest to claim we believe but find it hardest to live out what we believe?

If someone watched our actions without hearing our words, what evidence would they see of our faith in Christ?

Summary:

James begins his letter by confronting a fundamental question: “What does genuine faith look like when life gets difficult?”

According to James, trials test our faith in order to grow us into spiritual maturity.

When we lack wisdom, we should ask God.

Faith requires wholehearted dependence upon God rather than trying to please God and the world or our own, selfish desires at the same time.

Our identity is not determined by wealth, poverty, status, or circumstances, but by our relationship with Christ.

God does not tempt us to sin; temptation arises from our own desires.

Every good and perfect gift comes from God.

God has given us a new birth through His Word of truth so that we might belong to Him as His “firstfruits.”

Christianity is meant to be lived, not merely talked about.

“True Christianity is not just talked about, it’s lived--every day, every moment of every day.”

Questions for Personal Reflection:

How do I normally respond when God allows a difficult trial into my life?

Am I looking only for relief from my trials, or am I also asking what God wants to teach me through them?

When I need wisdom, is my first response to ask God—or to rely upon myself?

Where might I be divided between trusting God and trusting the world?

Have I allowed my circumstances, possessions, accomplishments, or failures to influence my sense of worth?

When I am tempted, where do I tend to place the blame?

What desire most frequently makes me vulnerable to temptation?

How does remembering God's goodness change the way I view temptation?

What area of my life most needs to be surrendered to Christ?

If authentic faith is demonstrated by its fruit, what fruit is my life currently producing?

Closing Challenge: When the trials, temptations, decisions, and circumstances of this coming week test your faith, ask yourself: “What would it look like for my faith in Christ to be visible in the way I respond?” James calls us not merely to know what is true, but to live what we believe.

Sunday School Lesson for September 20, 2026
James 1:1-18

Welcome to Sunday School on the go from the First Baptist Church in Tallassee. I'm Jim Glass, one of the teachers in the Pairs and Spares Class, and, on this third Sunday in September, we're starting a new series of lessons on the letter of James. Throughout our study of the gospel of John, we heard the Lord Jesus call His disciples to follow Him. In this brief letter, James shows us exactly how we are to follow Jesus.

James, the author of the letter that bears his name, was a half-brother of the Lord, but, even though he was so closely related to Him, he didn't believe that His brother was truly the Promised Messiah until after the resurrection. James was a *half*-brother because, although our Lord and he shared the same mother, James was, most likely, the natural son of Joseph.

James was the leader of the church in Jerusalem as we find in Acts, chapters fifteen and 21. Although some scholars find parallels to some of Paul's words in this letter, most believe that it was one of the earliest, if not the first, letter in our New Testaments to be written. Josephus puts the date of James' martyrdom in A.D. 62, but, because James doesn't write about the Judaizing controversies that were addressed in the Jerusalem Council of Acts, chapter fifteen around A.D. 49, some scholars believe this letter was written before the council meeting.

James writes his words to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations. You'll recall that the nation of Israel was conquered and her people dispersed in 722 BC, and Judah fell in 586 BC with her people being sent into exile in Babylon. Many of those Israelites scattered throughout the known world had come to place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and James writes this letter to them. His message is this: Real faith is seen by its fruit--if you say you've placed your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and you've been saved, then your life should reflect the characteristics of an authentic Christian life.

Joel Gregory, in his excellent commentary entitled, *James: Christianity in Real Shoe Leather*, writes, “In the few pages of his brief letter, James never leaves the practical. The Christian faith for James is definitely a verb, not an abstract noun. Here you find no grandiose theology difficult to understand. James puts the Christian faith into the commonplaces of daily life. You can read James right now and know how a Christian lives in this moment.”

“The author demonstrates his noted ability to bring the understanding of the Bible from then to now, from the world of first century Christianity in Roman Judea to your address in the post-modern world. He turns the message of this text into a text message for you. Using his knowledge of biblical language with an eye to contemporary, lived experience, James never strays far from the text or from your life.”

Cindi Murphy, a dear friend of mine whose workbook on James will soon be published, lets her readers know what to expect as they work through James’ call. She writes, “James writes to people who already identify as believers--people who know God’s Word, gather with his people, and understand what is true. Yet he continually presses them because hearing the truth is not the same as living it. They face trials, give in to temptation, struggle with their speech, show favoritism, and wrestle with worldliness. Their lives do not always reflect what they profess to believe. We are not so different. James writes to those who are willing to be transformed by God’s Word.”

“[Our study of James, she writes,] will require something of you. ... At times, you may find yourself wanting to explain things away, soften what you see, or move past conviction too quickly. Don’t. James is not exposing your sin to leave you in guilt. He is exposing your need for Christ. Every place [where] this study uncovers impatience, pride, inconsistency, self-reliance, or self-deception is another reminder of your need for the Savior. James is not calling you to try harder; he is calling you to draw nearer to the One who gives wisdom, grace, and life. So don’t rush to defend yourself. Don’t settle for

surface-level answers. Don't aim to protect your image. And don't [pretend] you are doing well in the very areas James is bringing into the light."

Her prayer for her readers and my prayer for you is that "you will finish this study seeing both yourself and your Savior more clearly than when you began, able to say with greater honesty and gratitude, *'I need Christ more than I thought.'*"

So, how is it that we are to follow Jesus as He calls us to follow Him? In the first verse of this letter, James identifies himself as "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." In that day, a servant--or as some translations read, "a slave," which is actually a more accurate translation--was someone who had been bought with a price. Paul and Peter also regarded themselves as servants or slaves of the Lord Jesus, and every believer should regard himself or herself in the very same way--someone who is the property of the Lord and who has no other desire than to please the Lord. This declaration frames everything that James will write in this letter as he shows us what it means to truly follow Jesus.

After the brief salutation of "Greetings," James jumps right into his first description of what it means to follow Jesus: "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

We don't know what or even if, the Jewish believers to whom he's writing were facing any specific threat or temptation. Their circumstances may have been different, but their spiritual struggles were those we all face: temptation, uncontrolled speech, favoritism, pride, selfish ambition, worldliness, and even conflict within the church. We'll find that they knew the truth, but their lives didn't always reflect what they said they believed.

His opening words are, "Count it all joy," or, as the New International Version reads, "Consider it pure joy." At this point, a lot of Christians close

their Bibles and walk away because they can't imagine experiencing joy in the midst of the life they're living. They think it's just not possible. "My problems--my trials--are real, persistent, seemingly inescapable, and I don't have what James had / to deal with all the stuff in my life." Well, James is going to show us that we do have what he had, and, if we think we don't, he tells us what we can do to correct our misunderstanding.

James has just greeted his readers with the word that reads in just about every translation as, "Greetings." It's an unfortunate rendering. The word is actually "rejoice" as we saw in John, chapter sixteen, verse twenty, as the Lord was preparing His disciples for His death: "You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy" and they did rejoice--chapter twenty, verse twenty. At His appearance in the locked room, "the disciples [rejoiced] when they saw the Lord."

In this word that's unfortunately translated "Greetings," James is saying, "I wish you joy--the same joy that my Brother, Jesus, prayed for you to have." Joy that's a deep-rooted, Holy Spirit-produced sense of confident gladness and contentment that's anchored in God's grace and His love. Not happiness, but the grounded confidence and serenity that God is at work in your life for your good and His glory.

In these verses, James wants us to see the challenges, the difficulties, even the disasters in our lives as occasions to rejoice. This doesn't mean we're supposed to be happy about the things in our lives we call, "bad." James isn't asking us to pretend that suffering is wonderful. He's asking us just to pause long enough to see what we might otherwise miss. The very circumstances we would try to avoid may be the very ones God wants to use to develop us to be more like Christ.

James tells us that trials have a purpose. So often in life we try to live for Christ and think we get nowhere. We try to do what we know is right to do and it just doesn't seem like it does any good. So, the natural attitude is to

think that, if it doesn't work, it's not true. If Christianity doesn't make me happy, then I need to modify it to suit my own needs or give up on it altogether.

The truth of the matter is that bad times are inevitable. But that's not the only truth. The greater truth is that pain and suffering have a purpose, but before we can grasp what that purpose is, we've got to stop thinking that trials are mistakes in the otherwise smooth flow of life or merely punishment for something we've done or failed to do. For each and every person, life's challenges are opportunities for God to demonstrate His love for us. James invites us to evaluate our trials through the lens of God's purposes rather than our present circumstances. Joy becomes possible because we know God is accomplishing something through our trials that our personal comfort could never produce.

So, what's the process? "The testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." Just as metal is tempered and made stronger by repeated exposure to extreme heat, so also is the Christian character developed through the furnace of life.

God is at work through your difficulty. None of us is saved to immediately become a perfect saint. God leads us through times of cleansing and purification so that we might be mature and complete, lacking in nothing. It's to our benefit, then, that we not run from the stuff life throws at us, but seek to learn and to grow through it. This doesn't mean that we're to seek out or create problems for ourselves to see what God will do. What we are to do is to trust God in everything in life, and when those distasteful, difficult, or even disastrous times come, we are to seek God, recognizing that He is helping us to "grow up" in genuine, authentic, tried and true faith.

So, what's being tested? "Your faith." What is being produced? "Perseverance," "endurance," "patience,"--depending on your translation--

that's designed to lead us to spiritual maturity and inner peace. What happens when perseverance finishes its work? "That you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

The patience that James calls us to seek is an intensely active energy, and not merely a passive endurance. Alexander MacLaren illustrates it in this way: It "is perseverance in the teeth of the wind, and not merely keeping our place in spite of it, that James exhorts us to here. The ship that lies at anchor, with a strong cable and a firm grip of the flukes in a good holding-ground, and rides out any storm without stirring one fathom's length from its place, exhibits one form of this perseverance, that is patience. The ship with sails wisely set, and a firm hand at the tiller, and a keen eye on the compass, that uses the utmost blast to hear it nearer its desired haven, and never yaws one hairbreadth from the course that is marked out for it, exhibits the other and the higher form. And that is the kind of thing that the Apostle is here recommending to us--not merely passive endurance, but a brave, active perseverance in spite of antagonisms, in the course that conscience, illuminated by God, has bidden us to run."

"Brethren," he adds, "be sure of this, you will never grow like Christ by mere wishing, by mere emotion, but only by continual faith, rigid self-control, and by continual struggle. And be as sure of this, you will never miss the mark if, 'forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those that are before,' you 'let patience have her perfect work,' and press towards Him who is Himself the Author and Finisher of our patience and of our faith."

This patient endurance is indispensable to growth in the character, temperament, and strength of an authentic Christian, for James tells us that the objective is that you and I "may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." We'll find shortly in verses twelve through fifteen that this includes the crown of life, but here, the picture is that of a mature, fully-grown individual whose integrity and morality are fully aligned with God's design. That's the goal of every authentic follower of Jesus Christ, and James calls us to relentlessly,

persistently pursue what Paul wrote about in Philippians, chapter three, verse thirteen: “forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way”

Now, if you’re not there yet--and on this side of heaven none of us is-- James has the solution to our lack of maturity beginning in verse five: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

Trials sometimes leave us wondering what we should do, but James doesn’t tell us to figure everything out on our own. Instead, he points us to a generous, gracious God who delights in giving wisdom to his children. Faith confidently leads us to God, trusting that He is both willing and able to provide the wisdom we need. The God Who knows the end from the beginning, Who sees every tear that falls, Who knows our weaknesses and failures and inability to live as we should / actually invites us to ask Him, and, when we ask, He gives generously--abundantly. Through His Spirit and His Word, he gives us everything we need to pursue His goal for our lives with perseverance **through** the trials we face in life.

What’s the first question you usually ask when you’re faced with a challenge in life? “What am I going to do?” James tells you what to do: “Ask God.” Ask God for the specific wisdom you need in this moment, in this situation. Don’t try to figure it out on your own. Trust the loving, sovereign God of creation to lead you in the way.

Why should we ask God? James gives us three reasons. First, because He generously, lavishly, even extravagantly gives us the wisdom we seek. Second, because He doesn’t reproach us, doesn’t scold us, doesn’t rebuke us, doesn’t

think less of us for asking, doesn't remind us of how we caused the mess we're in and say it's up to us to fix it, doesn't tell us we've used up our quota of guidance for the day; instead, He gives the wisdom we ask for out of His grace--a grace we don't deserve, but the grace He longs for us to experience. Third, why should we ask God for wisdom? Because He gives us the wisdom that we ask for--Matthew, chapter seven, verse seven: "Ask, and it will be given to you; ... For everyone who asks receives."

But there's a condition--a qualification--of this asking: we have to ask in faith--not a faith that believes that there's a God out there somewhere, but a faith that implicitly trusts the God of creation and eternity Who chose to reveal Himself in Jesus Christ. And the wisdom we are to seek is the wisdom that begins with the fear of the Lord that we read about in Psalm 111, verse ten and Proverbs, chapter nine, verse ten--that reverential awe of the glory of God that's seen in our loving obedience to Him--a wisdom that has for its objective the life-changing insight into the facts of life and the boundaries of right and wrong that shape and regulate and motivate our actions and attitudes, leading us to the perfection God designed and desires for us.

But if you don't offer your request to God out of a sense of complete and utter dependence on Him, you shouldn't expect an answer. You're like a wave, tossed by the wind--lifted up for a moment, only to be dropped in the next--unstable, erratic, unsecured. Up and down, up and down, never finding peace or balance or rest. "That person should never think that he will receive anything from the Lord." You can almost hear a tone of contempt in James' words as he thinks of someone who refuses to believe / in the way John described to us in his gospel / and thinks that his superstitious, irrational attempts at prayer would ever be heard by God.

What's the problem that makes a lack of faith so destructive to a search for wisdom that calms the storms in your life and mine? Such a person, James says, "is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." He's trying to serve two masters, caught between two allegiances, trying to serve both God and the

world, staggering like a drunken man trying to walk a straight line; confused in his mind, restless in his thoughts, unsettled in his intentions, inconstant in his direction, uncertain in his opinions, reckless in his actions, always playing the odds, refusing to take a stand, never making a commitment, stumbling along in a continual state of uncertainty, doubt, indecision, insecurity. “Without faith,” --a rock-solid, steadfast trust that God exists and He rewards those who seek Him--as the writer of the letter to the Hebrews tells us in chapter eleven, verse six, “Without faith, it’s impossible to please God.” Why should such a person ever expect to receive anything from God?

In every decision, every choice we make, we need wisdom. If we try to do life on our own, doing our best and asking God to pick up the pieces, we make a mess of our lives and often hurt others in the process. James knows that we should “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

When we lack wisdom, God is waiting for us to ask. He won’t force us to ask; He simply waits for us to ask, and then He responds by giving us what we need--generously, lavishly, without reproach. Why would anyone not want to trust our God Who is so amazingly gracious to those who seek Him with all their hearts?

But this faith requires humility on our part lest we find ourselves torn between trusting in God and trusting in the things of the world. If there is a connection between the verses that follow in verse nine and what’s come before, it’s this; so, in verse nine, James writes, “Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.”

As James turns from addressing trials, troubles, and temptations in general, he moves to have us consider a particular type of difficulty, one that results from our circumstances in life. “In the world of James’ day, wealth and honor often shaped a person’s social standing and perceived worth.” “James reminds us that both poverty and wealth can become tests of faith. One tempts us to believe we have no value. The other tempts us to believe our value comes from what we possess. Both are corrected by the same truth: our identity is found in Christ, whose promises never fade.”

Our faith is tested in our circumstances. If we experience unmet needs--felt or real--, we may turn away from God in anger. If we experience prosperity, we may turn away from God in pride and self-accomplishment. James addresses each of these in verses nine through eleven.

The one who experiences dependence or poverty can boast in his exaltation or high position, just as the Lord Jesus proclaimed in Luke, chapter six, verse twenty: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” Those Christ-followers who lack wealth, power, influence, abilities, intelligence, or anything else the world values--those who are poor, oppressed, and seemingly unimportant by the world’s standard--have nothing to be ashamed of. Quite the opposite. They can rejoice because, even in their lack of the things of the world, they’ve been adopted as children of God--heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, clothed in the very righteousness of Christ Himself, possessing an eternal inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, reserved in heaven for them and even now enjoying His justifying, pardoning, and sanctifying grace, and nothing can separate them from the love which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.”

The rich believer, on the other hand, should boast “in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away.” The rich are to glory--not because they’re rich; not because they aren’t burdened by a lack of basic necessities; and not because they have the means of doing good to others of

lesser means. The rich brothers and sisters in Christ are to rejoice because their faith has been tested in their prosperity, wealth, and influence, and they have proved that they're not trusting in their riches to save them, that they're faithful stewards of what God has entrusted to them--not amassing to themselves houses and lands and cars and boats and all the stuff the world lusts after for their own comfort and security--, but investing the wealth and influence entrusted to them to build up the Kingdom of God, all the while remembering that, just as the grass withers and dies, they also will die and stand before a holy and righteous God to whom they will give an account of how they invested what God had entrusted to them.

One commentator reminds us: "Every condition in life had its own trials. The two great conditions of poverty and wealth had theirs; but Christianity guards against the danger, both of the one state and of the other. It elevates the poor under his depression, and humbles the rich in his elevation, and bids both rejoice in its power to shield and bless them." And James will have more to say to the rich in chapters two and five.

In verse twelve, James pauses to tie what he's just said / back to the theme of his letter. It's a beatitude in the pattern of the opening verse of the first Psalm and the Lord's Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him." Fortunate, happy, content, gratified is the one who rejoices through trials, knowing God's purpose for them; seeks and finds God's lavishly-bestowed wisdom; and celebrates the place God has placed him or her for their good and His glory. These blessings come to those who have remained steadfast **under** and become approved **through** the trials of life.

Throughout the New Testament, we read of various crowns. In Second Timothy, chapter four, Paul writes about a "crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing." Peter tells us about "an

unfading crown of glory” in First Peter, chapter five--an emblem of the permanent satisfaction of our heart’s desire that awaits those who faithfully trust and obey the Lord. And there are the golden crowns of The Revelation, in chapters four, nine, and fourteen that provide an image of the faithful believer’s participation in the royalty of the Lord Jesus as we are so closely united with Him. We could spend an entire lesson just on the crown James speaks of / along with the others, but our time is so short.

So, briefly, the crowning reward of heaven will to be in the presence of God: Revelation, chapter 21, verse three: “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” Such is the reward of the crown of life for those who remain steadfast under trial, who prove themselves faithful, and who love the Lord.

As we look forward to that day, rejoicing through trials, seeking the objective of our salvation through faithful perseverance, trusting God for wisdom, investing whatever God has entrusted to us for His glory, we’ll be blessed / here and in the hereafter. But there are some dangers to be aware of as we face challenges to our faith, and James mentions one specifically, beginning in verse thirteen: “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”

Here’s the reality: God is perfectly good. He never tempts anyone. Every good and perfect gift comes from Him. His character is unchanging, generous, and never the source of evil.

James tells us that God never tempts anyone. If that's true, why are we so quick to look everywhere but within our own hearts when temptation comes? Our first thought is to shift the blame. We blame our circumstances, other people, and sometimes even God.

Difficult circumstances may explain the setting where a temptation appears, but James says the temptation never explains its source. So, he lovingly throws away every excuse until we're left facing the truth: the deepest problem is not around us--it's inside us.

That realization should humble us, but it actually frees us. We can't repent of a problem we refuse to acknowledge. Only until we stop blaming God, our circumstances, or other people, are we finally able to acknowledge our sin, turn from our sin, and receive the grace Christ offers to those who truly repent of sin.

Think about the last time you were tempted to sin or gave into sin. Where did you first look for the cause: your circumstances, another person, God, // or your own heart? James unconditionally declares "each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire." It's not someone else's fault. You own the submission to the temptation.

So, how do we deal with temptation? James gives us four truths to keep us from blaming God and help us walk in faithfulness. First, stop blaming God. He does nothing in any way that's intended to lead us to do evil. As one writer says, "if there was nothing in the corrupt human mind itself leading to sin, there would be nothing in the divine arrangement that would produce it."

After all, "God cannot be tempted with evil." Nothing could ever convince God to do that which is contrary to His nature. He is absolutely unequivocally, spotlessly holy. There is nothing in Him that has a tendency to do wrong; there can be nothing enticing Him from without to induce Him to do wrong.

“God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.” It’s not that you can’t help it. It’s not that you were just born that way. It’s that, at some point in your life, you decided you could live a perfectly normal and happy life without God, so you rejected His authority over your life and placed yourself under the judgment of the righteous condemnation of God.

Unbelievers can't keep sin from reigning in their bodies and obeying its evil desires because they are stilled controlled by that tendency to reject God’s rule and authority in their lives; but believers have the power not to allow sin to reign. You don't have to give in to temptation if you don't want to--Romans, chapter six.

Second, remember where sin ultimately leads: “each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.” Temptation seems urgent / because we focus our attention on the moment. James tells us to slow down to remember the entire progression of sin--from desire to actual sin to death. Because we know how sin and its consequences develop, it’s best that you stop and say when you’re tempted, “Wait a minute. I’m a blood-bought, Holy Spirit-endowed, child of God. God declares that since I am in Christ, I don't have to do this if I don't want to, and I don't want to because I am a child of God, and children of God don't do things like that. Sin's rule over me is broken. Because Jesus loved me enough to become like me, I want to love Him so much that I might become like Him.” Looking honestly at the end result of sin helps us recognize the importance of addressing it while it is still taking root in our hearts.

Third in dealing with temptation, remember God’s goodness: “Don’t be deceived. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.” “Temptation always distorts our view of God's character.” If we misunderstand God’s character, we’ll misunderstand temptation as well. Temptation subtly whispers that God is withholding something good from us or that we would be happier or better off / apart from him. James responds by reminding us that

every good gift comes from God and that his character never changes. We don't fight temptation simply by resisting sinful desires in our own strength; we fight it by remembering who God truly is and who we are in Him." "Left to ourselves, we cannot change the desires that give rise to sin. We need new life, not only new habits. That is why guilt, shame, or sheer determination can never transform the heart. Only God can."

Don't blame God, remember where sin ultimately leads, remember God's goodness, and, fourth, receive God's Word of Life--verse eighteen: "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creation." Our deliverance from sin; our salvation from an eternity separated from Him, bearing the eternal punishment for our infinite sin were all made possible because God chose to do so: "Of His own will." Not because of whatever good we could do in life; not because of some great contribution we might make to the furtherance of the Kingdom of God, but only by His own free grace and favor, out of His rich and abundant mercy, and of His sovereign will and pleasure.

Using the same word for sin bringing forth death in verse fifteen, believers are brought forth by the word of truth. Just as sin gives birth to death, God's will gives birth to life. We owe our spiritual life to God, just as John told us in the first chapter of his gospel, verse thirteen. This "word of truth" is, of course, the gospel as Paul tells us in the first chapter of Ephesians, verse thirteen.

The "firstfruits" that James speaks of here has a long history among the Jews. In Leviticus, chapter 23, we read that the first sheaf of a new crop was to be presented in the Temple on the day after the Passover Sabbath. No part of the harvest was permitted to be used for food until after this first fruit was presented to the Lord as an acknowledgment that the entire harvest had come from God and belonged to Him. A similar law applied to the first-born of men and of cattle. Both were regarded in a special sense as being consecrated to and belonging to God.

Jesus, as Paul explains in First Corinthians, chapter fifteen, verse twenty, is “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” By the way, it was no coincidence that the Lord Jesus rose from the dead on the very day on which, according to the law, the sheaf was to be presented in the Temple. He was the first of all those who owe their eternal existence to Him. Through His resurrected life, He now raises from the dead the whole harvest of believing souls of which He is the first fruit.

As, therefore, the first-fruits, consecrated to the Lord by His own will, by the word of truth, through His grace and our faith, we are to be a living sacrifice, holy unto the Lord--Romans, chapter twelve. The singular objective of our lives that is to be visibly and constantly before us and diligently pursued through all the trivialities of daily life--that one thing is to glorify God.

MacLaren tells us that “Consecration means the utter giving of myself away, in the inmost sanctuary of the spirit. And it means the resolute devotion of all that I have and all that I am in the outgoings of daily life to His service and to His praise.” “All [our] capacities, opportunities, possessions, are to be yielded up to Him as [fully and completely] as Christ has yielded Himself to us.”

He then makes this appeal: “Christian men and women, behold your destiny! God’s purpose concerning you is that you might be not your own, because you are bought with a price. [Now] measure against that mighty purpose the halting obedience, the reluctant wills, the half-and-half surrender which is no surrender at all, which make up the lives of the average Christians among us, and see whether any of us can feel that the divine purpose is accomplished in us, or that we have [brought an acceptable return upon the investment God has made in us].” “Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creation.”

In summary, trials reveal where we turn--either deeper into ourselves or closer to Christ. God allows difficulties to come into your life in order to

develop and mature your faith. We can meet those challenges with confidence, knowing that nothing ever happens to us that God doesn't allow. God is still in charge of His universe, always working for our good and His glory.

Second, those who understand that God has a purpose in times of testing can rejoice, knowing that God has chosen to give us an opportunity for our faith to grow and mature. Perseverance in faith proves the vitality of your faith, and as you stand the tests of life, God has promised you a crown of life.

Third, you're responsible for your choice either to resist temptation or give in to temptation. God doesn't do the tempting; we are led astray by our own desires in those times when we do not subject our desires, holding every thought captive, to the lordship of Jesus Christ. You and you alone bear ultimate responsibility for your choice to sin.

Fourth, the Christian life is a life of practical faith. You exhibit the genuineness and the vitality of your faith in your attitudes, your thoughts, and your actions. True Christianity is not just talked about, it's lived--every day, every moment of every day. It's true that your talk talks and your walk talks, but your walk talks louder than your talk talks. So if you're not walking--not living out--the Christian life, it gives the lie to your talk about the Christian life. This is our first look of what James wants us to know and live as we follow Christ.

Thank you for walking with me through this challenging message from the brother of our Lord where we find, not a list of commands with the expectation for us to make it happen on our own. His words show us how deeply we need the Savior who endured suffering for us, secured our promised life, and now gives us the grace we need to remain faithful to Him every moment of every day.

Perhaps your prayer for our study might be something like this: "Heavenly Father, as I open the pages of James, I ask for a heart that listens and a spirit

that obeys. Teach me to receive Your wisdom with humility, to persevere through trials with joy, and to live out my faith in deeds of love and mercy. Let Your Word shape my thoughts, guide my speech, and direct my actions, so that my life reflects the compassion and integrity of Christ. May this study not only deepen my understanding, but transform me into a doer of the Word, bringing glory to Your name. Amen.”

Next week, we conclude this first chapter of James’ letter where we’ll find several specific characteristics that should be a part of the life of every authentic follower of Jesus as James challenges our hearing, our speech, our anger, our lifestyle, and so much more--all so that we might “be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

As always, as it’s still a good thing to do, keep calm, trust in the Lord, and wash your hands! God bless you!

The resources for this lesson include James: Christianity in Real Shoe Leather by Joel Gregory; Planting Roots unpublished manuscript, James: Rooted in Christ, by Cindi Murphy; Notes on the Bible by Albert Barnes (1834), text courtesy of Internet Sacred Texts Archive; The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, text courtesy of BibleSupport.com; The Expositor’s Bible, text courtesy of BibleSupport.com; The Expositor’s Greek Testament - Nicoll, Text Courtesy of BibleSupport.com; Exposition of the Entire Bible by John Gill (1746-63), text courtesy of Internet Sacred Texts Archive; ICC New Testament commentary on selected books, Text Courtesy of BibleSupport.com; Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical (John Peter Lange) text courtesy of BibleSupport.com; Expositions Of Holy Scripture, Alexander MacLaren, text courtesy of BibleSupport.com; and The Pulpit Commentary, Electronic Database, copyright © 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2010 by BibleSoft, inc.