

SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE

James 1:12–18 — Run Toward Jesus

Brief Summary

Life will inevitably bring trials, and those trials often bring temptations to abandon faithfulness to Jesus. James distinguishes between the trials God may allow and the temptations that arise from our own desires, reminding us that God is never the author of temptation but is always the giver of what is good. The goal of following Jesus is not a life of ease, but a life of increasing maturity, endurance, and faithfulness. We can endure because we know what—and ultimately **who—we are running toward**: Jesus.

1. BE PREPARED FOR THE TRIALS

James assumes that trials are a normal part of following Jesus. Rather than viewing difficulty as an interruption to the Christian life, James sees trials as opportunities for endurance and spiritual formation. The goal of our spiritual lives is not simply to *get somewhere*, but to *become someone*—to become more like Jesus.

Trials have a way of turning what we believe into something we actually know through experience.

“Trials turn theory into testimony.”

It is one thing to say, “God is good” when life is going well. It is another thing to discover God’s goodness in the middle of grief, uncertainty, disappointment, or suffering. On the other side of a trial, our faith can become less theoretical and more deeply rooted in personal experience.

Takeaways

- Trials are not an indication that God has abandoned us.
- Difficult seasons can become places of spiritual formation.
- Faithfulness during difficulty produces endurance and maturity.
- Some of our deepest experiences of God’s faithfulness come through seasons we would never have chosen.

Discussion Questions

1. **Think about a difficult season you have walked through. What did that experience teach you about yourself, God, or your faith that you probably wouldn’t have learned otherwise?**

2. **What kind of trial or difficulty tends to challenge your faith most deeply—loss, uncertainty, disappointment, conflict, failure, waiting, exhaustion, something else? Why do you think that particular kind of difficulty affects you that way?**
 3. **Consider the idea that, “Trials turn theory into testimony.” What is something you used to believe about God that became more real to you because of an experience you walked through?**
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2. BE FAITHFUL IN THE FACE OF TEMPTATION

James makes an important distinction between **trials and temptations**.

“Trials test our fortitude. Temptations test our faithfulness.”

A rough patch in our marriage (trial) can tempt us toward selfishness or unfaithfulness. A difficult coworker (trial) can tempt us toward gossip. A season of disappointment (trial) can tempt us toward bitterness.

James reminds us that God may allow a trial, but God does not author temptation. Temptation emerges from our own desires, and we are called to remain faithful even when the pressure is greatest.

Takeaways

- Being tempted is not the same thing as sinning.
- Trials can create environments where temptation becomes particularly strong.
- Our difficult circumstances do not excuse unfaithful responses.
- Our desires can become disordered when we allow them to rule us.
- Following Jesus often means surrendering what we want in order to become who God is calling us to be.

Discussion Questions

1. **What desires tend to become louder for you when you are stressed, disappointed, tired, hurt, or afraid? What do you typically do with those desires?**
 2. **The sermon described the temptation to return to a “self-serving, self-preserving life.” Where are you most tempted to protect yourself, promote yourself, or pursue what you want rather than trust Jesus?**
 3. **How can this group help one another remain faithful when life gets difficult? What kind of support, encouragement, prayer, or accountability would actually be helpful rather than merely well-intentioned?**
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3. REMEMBER WHAT YOU'RE RUNNING TOWARD

James says that the person who remains steadfast under trial is “blessed.” But biblical blessing is not primarily about receiving more money, success, comfort, or favorable circumstances.

“Blessing is less about material abundance and more about confidence in God’s faithfulness.”

The blessing of endurance is knowing God more deeply. It is experiencing his presence, developing greater trust in him, and discovering that his faithfulness is real even when circumstances are not what we hoped they would be.

James ultimately points us toward hope. God is the giver of every good and perfect gift. He is unchanging, faithful, and good. And through Jesus, we are the “firstfruits” of a new creation. Our suffering is not meaningless or ultimately permanent.

“Remember what you’re running toward. Remember who you’re running toward.”

Takeaways

- God’s blessing is not measured primarily by comfort or material success.
- God’s character does not change when our circumstances do.
- We can endure because our suffering is not the end of the story.
- We are running toward Christ and toward the new creation he has begun and promises to complete.

Discussion Questions

1. **When you picture a “blessed life,” what do you naturally picture? How has your understanding of blessing changed—or been challenged—by this passage and sermon?**
2. **Think about a time when God was faithful to you even though he did not change the circumstance you were praying about. What did you learn about God’s presence or character through that experience?**
3. **What would it look like this week to intentionally “run toward Jesus” in the middle of your current circumstances? Identify one concrete action you could take.**

Bringing It Together

James 1:12-18 gives us a simple picture:

Trials → Endurance → Maturity → Life

But trials can also bring temptation:

Desire → Sin → Death

The question isn't whether difficult seasons will come. They will.

The question is **how we will respond when they do.**

We can prepare for trials.

We can remain faithful in temptation.

And we can endure because we know what—and who—we are running toward.

Prayer Focus

Pray that God would:

- Give us endurance when trials come.
- Help us recognize and resist temptation.
- Give us wisdom to surrender our desires to Jesus.
- Remind us of his unchanging goodness and faithfulness.
- Turn our theories about God into testimony.
- Give us hope because we know our suffering is not the end of the story.
- Help us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus—the one we are ultimately running toward.