

week two

# UNWAVERING



FIRST THINGS FIRST / WEEK 2

# *Faith Under Pressure: Unwavering*

There's just something unique about visiting Magic Kingdom<sup>®</sup> at Walt Disney World<sup>®</sup>.

The minute you walk into the amusement park, it's like you've stepped into another world. A world full of princesses, castles, and music. Beasts and their beauties. A silly old bear and his Christopher Robin. In the Magic Kingdom, little girls become princesses, and little boys turn into pirates. It really does seem like the happiest place on earth—a place where there's no mounting deficit, no wars in the Middle East, and no political lobbyists peddling their brand of truth.

This year, I got to take my almost 6-year-old daughter to that magical place for the first time. She was enraptured. She got to meet characters from books, ride the teacups with her Grammy, and stay in a hotel with giraffes grazing outside her window. Nothing could have been better.

Until we came home.

We had to come back to real life—where friends say hurtful things, dogs run away, and mean people sometimes go to jail. No one can stay in Magic Kingdom forever.

This week, you'll discover that life is no trip to Magic Kingdom. Life isn't perfect; most of the time it's just hard. Tough stuff happens. People will hurt you. Your life will get turned upside down by situations you never expected.

But you'll also discover that while the kings in the fairy tales are just imaginary, the King who rules over the world is real, and He rules over every circumstance and trial you'll ever face.

Jesus meant it when He said He would be with you “always” (Matt. 28:20).

# Ready or not, here they come!

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Some words just don't go together in the same sentence. For example, the phrase *chocolate-covered* should never be next to the word *ants*. It's just wrong. And so are these: *pretty ugly*, *seriously funny*, *old news*, *crash landing*, *hot chili*, and *jumbo shrimp*. And one that I will never get: *sweet tart*.

Today's Scripture passage contains words that just don't seem to go together, especially when you're going through a rough time. But God often does the unusual (like speaking through talking donkeys, having dry land under the Red Sea, and coming to earth as a Baby), so this passage sort of fits in with His character.

### Read James 1:2-4.

\* What are your initial thoughts about these verses? What sticks out to you?

\* What strange combinations of words do you notice?

My Bible reads this way: "Consider it a great joy . . . whenever you experience various trials" (v. 2, HCSB).

Seriously? Has James lost his mind? When I'm going through a hard time, the last thought on my mind is, "Oh, I can consider this a great joy!" Most of the time, I'm busy trying to figure out what I did wrong to deserve such a hardship and how to get past it as quickly as possible. What in the world was James trying to tell us? A little digging may help answer that question.

## \* LOOKING FORWARD

First, you and I need to understand a little Greek. The word *joy* in James 1 doesn't literally mean *be joyful in the moment you are hurting*. James wasn't telling his readers to ignore or deny their difficult circumstances. Instead, the word *joy* as James uses it has the eternal end in mind. It means that you and I can find joy and hope in the end result of our present suffering. We know that there is a good end coming out of the trial, so we fix our focus and our joy on that, not on the immediate circumstances, as tough as they may be.

### Read verses 3-4 again.

\* According to these verses, what good can come out of trials?

\* What is the ultimate result—the final end—of all of the trials we face?

Verse 3 tells us the outcome of our trials. We gain endurance. Think for a moment about the word *endurance*.

\* What sorts of things would you need endurance to accomplish?

Maybe you listed some sort of athletic activity. If so, you're on the same track (no pun intended) as James was when he wrote these verses. Think of it like this: as a believer, you're like an athlete in training and each trial you go through builds your spiritual muscles, so to speak. Those trials produce commitment, consistency, and a faith that does not waver or give up. That faith is complete or mature. It's a faith in God that's fully grown and fully devoted. It's not going anywhere, no matter what happens. But the key to enduring life's most painful trials—and this is important to remember—is in looking forward to that end, not just focusing on the immediate pain. This kind of faith and endurance is a lifelong pursuit, not an instant transformation.

### \* REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE

When I moved to Nashville, my life began to fall into place like I'd always dreamed. I was blessed with a great job that played on my strengths. I found a church that I loved. And in a couple of years, I found him—the man I would spend the rest of my life with. We began to plan how we would

spend this married life together. We planned our wedding and all its details.

Then everything started to fall apart. Two months (to the day, in fact) before we got married, my older sister died. And then, when we got off the plane from our honeymoon, we got into a car and went straight to the hospital, where my new father-in-law lay sick without a cause. We would later find out the name of that disease—cancer. He died two years after our marriage. In the middle of grieving his loss, my husband and I tried to have children but couldn't. So add that pain on top of the others. We pursued adoption, but had to endure a "failed match" (we were matched with a child, but later could not adopt her). A few months later, we found out that our (future) daughter was born. Six days later, my mother died.

That summarizes the first five years of my married life. Three deaths of close family members, infertility, and a failed adoption. And I will fully admit that in the midst of that pain—and grief, confusion, anger, desperation, and absolute desolation—the very last thing on my mind was joy in the moment.

My only goal was survival.

### \* LOOKING TO SCRIPTURE

What kept me going during those painful trials was choosing not to focus on the immediate circumstances. I won't say that was easy, because it wasn't. Those years were hard and painful, full of struggles and doubts. I had to go back to Scripture many times and look for the promises of God in the middle of my struggles, to be reminded of who He was and what He could do. One of my favorite passages of Scripture during that time was 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. **Read it below. Underline all of the promises you find in these verses.**

"So we're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace. These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us. There's far more here than meets the eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can't see now will last forever."  
—2 Corinthians 4:16-18, The Message

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What promises did you discover in those verses? List them in your own words below:

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

**This passage is only one example of dozens of promises God makes to us. Read the following Scriptures and list the promise or promises in each.**

\* John 16:20-22

\* 1 Corinthians 15:58

\* Philippians 3:8-9

\* Philippians 4:19

\* James 1:12



## \* YOUR OWN STORY

You will face hard times. Scripture says “whenever” you face trials, not “if” you face them (v. 2). In fact, chances are, you’ve already had your fair share (or an unfair share) of difficult circumstances in your life. By remembering those times—especially how God used them for your growth and maturity—will help you when you face a new trial.

**In the space provided, journal about a time you faced a trial or testing of sorts.** The situation doesn’t have to be huge; a fight with your best friend can be the laboratory for your growth. Or you may have faced trials that most of us have never had to endure. Whatever comes to mind, write it down in the space provided. **Also write down any promises you clung to in the midst of your trial.**

## \* TWO LAST WORDS

**One last word of encouragement today:** You may be in the middle of a fierce storm as you read this. And in that storm of life, it’s pretty hard to think clearly. Everything is upside down. You feel like this hard time is never going to get any better. You may be on the verge of giving up. You may even feel abandoned by God. That’s OK. What you feel is real, but it may not be reality. Your circumstances won’t tell you what’s true about God. Your feelings aren’t necessarily the truth.

Take heart! This storm will not last forever. You will see the sun again. And when you do, you’ll see that the Father was as close as your next breath. Joy will come—maybe not as quickly or as easily as you hope—but joy will come (Ps. 30:5).

DAY 1

# TRAINING MANUAL

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Today, you'll read through James 1 again. Use the following outline to help guide your interaction with Scripture as the Holy Spirit speaks to you.

- \* Pray.
- \* Read the entire chapter.

\* Paraphrase the major points of this chapter in the space provided. What sticks out to you today in light of this week's theme of unwavering faith?

\* What is God telling you about Himself in these verses?

\* What is God telling you about yourself or others in this chapter of James?

\* What steps will you take today in response to what God has revealed to you through His Word today? List at least two below.



# What you need most

Your parents divorced. You find out you have cancer. You are the target of a mean girl at school. Someone started a rumor about you and your boyfriend. Your best friend moves across the country. You get cut from the team. Your mom loses her job.

Tough situations, aren't they? What do you need in all of these situations? What will help you in every one of them?

Jot down your answers here:

Your answers could be as different as the girls who are doing this Bible study. You probably wrote things like *prayer* or *someone to talk to*. You might have even written *a miracle*. All of those would be helpful. But James offers one other thing that is essential for triumphing over trials.

### Read James 1:5-8.

\* What does James focus on in these verses? Write your answer here:

\* How would you define \_\_\_\_\_?

\* Now, answer that question in the space provided.

Why do all of these situations need wisdom? Because wisdom is the ability to apply what you know about a spiritual truth. And when you face a trial—something that tests your strength, patience, endurance, and stick-to-itiveness—applying truth to your current situation is **critical**.

And the only place to find wisdom is the Only Wise One.

## \* WISDOM'S SOURCE

Why can't you rely on your own wisdom? Why do you need the wisdom of God? Those are good—but difficult—questions. So, what does the Bible say about human wisdom?

**Check out 1 Corinthians 1:25 to find out.**

\* What did you learn?

We need wisdom in the midst of trials. And thankfully, God offers a way to for us to receive it.

**Reread James 1:5 to find out how to get wisdom.**

\* According to this verse, who is able to receive wisdom?

\* How does God offer wisdom?

\* Why does that matter?

Notice that James said, “If any of you lacks wisdom.” He didn’t say that wisdom was just for the super-spiritual or the mega-holy. He doesn’t keep it on reserve just for your youth minister, pastor, parents, Sunday School teacher, or Billy Graham. He said that you—even as a teen—can have wisdom. Not only that, but God will give it freely and generously. He will give it to you without making you feel like a loser. He won’t rebuke you or insult you, and He doesn’t just give wisdom to the people that are always at church or seem to have it all together. He wants to give you wisdom, and He wants you to have as much as you need.

But there’s a catch.

## \* THE CONDITIONAL PROMISE

According to James, there’s a condition attached to this promise, an “if you will, then I will...”

**Read James 1:6-8 to find out that condition.**

\* What is it?

\* What illustration does James use to describe a person who doesn’t have faith? Why is that a good illustration?

\* Is doubt a sin? Why or why not?

\* How is a person who doubts described in verse 8? What does it mean to be “indecisive” and “unstable”?

\* Think about your journey of faith. When could you describe your faith as being indecisive or unstable?

These verses have always confused me. In the middle of my tough times, sometimes I doubt. I wonder where God is, and I question His goodness. Is that wrong? What was James trying to tell us in these verses? To answer that, let's look at the words James originally used when he wrote his letter.

**Read over the definitions below.**

**believe:** be firmly persuaded and convinced

**doubt:** be divided in his mind; to hesitate or to waver

**double-minded:** trying to embrace the way of God and the way of sin at the same time

**unstable:** restless, not firmly anchored, unsteady

**Now, look at the activity at the top of the next column. In the spaces provided, write in the original word's definition that you just read.** When you're done, read over the passage again, letting the definitions provide a little more depth.

"But when he asks, he must \_\_\_\_\_ and not \_\_\_\_\_, because he who \_\_\_\_\_ is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a \_\_\_\_\_ man, \_\_\_\_\_ in all he does" (vv. 6-8, NIV)

\* Based on these definitions, what was James trying to say in these verses? And what does it mean for you?

When you examine what the words actually mean, you get a clearer picture of what James was trying to say. When you ask for God's wisdom to help you through troubles, you need to be firm in your conviction of God, His grace, and your assurance of His trustworthiness. When you go back and forth between belief and disbelief in God—those moments when you trust one minute and doubt the next—you're like a ship tossed around in a storm. You're not firmly anchored in God. You're trying to embrace both what God offers and what the world offers. You are divided, double-minded, and restless. And when you are restless, you can't gain God's wisdom.

It's not that God is holding out on you or taunting you. He would gladly give you wisdom (remember, He gives generously and freely) if you would stop running everywhere else in the world to find a solution instead of humbling yourself before Him and admitting that you need His help.

When you face a situation that you can't conquer (and there will be many of those in your life), you have a choice: you can believe in God and His ways, or you can try to figure it out on your own. You can't embrace your ways and God's ways at the same time (being double-minded). Only when you are anchored in God (not unstable) and humbly admit that you need His direction, can you receive the wisdom you desperately need.

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We spend a majority of our faith journeys like a wave in the ocean tossed by the wind. But it doesn't have to be that way. Decide now to believe in God no matter what the circumstances. Resolve to trust Him no matter what life throws your way. Choose to believe that God is who He says He is, that His ways are better than yours, and that He will give you what you need to endure this current trial. You will have doubts in your journey of faith, and when you let those doubts shape the foundation of your faith, it becomes unsteady. But when your faith is rooted in God and His trustworthiness, it can't be shaken.

This passage reminds me of a story in the Gospels. You should be fairly familiar with it.

**Read Matthew 14:22-31 and complete the paraphrase of the story in the next column. As you read, jot down any notes or verses that stick out to you below.**

Jesus made the disciples \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_. After dismissing the  
crowds, Jesus \_\_\_\_\_. When  
the evening came, \_\_\_\_\_.  
The boat was already over a mile from the shore,  
\_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.  
\_\_\_\_\_ Around three in  
the morning, Jesus decided to \_\_\_\_\_.  
\_\_\_\_\_. The disciples  
saw him and \_\_\_\_\_. In  
response to their fear, Jesus \_\_\_\_\_.  
\_\_\_\_\_. Of all of the  
disciples in the boat, \_\_\_\_\_  
was the only one to say anything to Jesus. He asked  
\_\_\_\_\_. Jesus told him to  
\_\_\_\_\_. And everything  
was going great until  
\_\_\_\_\_, and then Peter  
cried out, \_\_\_\_\_! Jesus said  
\_\_\_\_\_ and reached out to  
grab Peter's hand.

I sometimes wonder if James thought about this encounter between Jesus and Peter when he wrote his letter. I don't know that he did, but he could have. In that passage from Matthew, all of the disciples were in the same storm. But only Peter trusted Jesus enough to step out of the boat and onto the water's surface. Peter was fine until he stopped looking to Jesus and started looking at his surroundings. The storm was still there. But in an instant, Peter's focus was split. He was double-minded—fearful of the storm, yet trying to believe in Jesus at the same time.

But the story doesn't end there.

**Read Matthew 14:31-33 and fill in the rest of the story below.**

When Jesus caught Peter, he \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_. Then, the two  
of them got into the boat and \_\_\_\_\_.  
Then the others in the boat \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ and said \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

I used to think that Jesus was chastising Peter for his swan dive into the waves. But then I noticed that Jesus called Peter "you of little faith." Notice Jesus didn't say, "you of no faith." A little faith is better than no faith at all. It's only my opinion, but I think the question, "Why did you doubt?" was meant to help Peter process the experience. I think Jesus was

helping Peter to see that he could have trusted Jesus the entire way back to the boat.

## \* WHERE ARE YOU?

In this story, the disciples and Peter represent different levels of faith and trust in the middle of a storm. Absolute faith, doubt, trust, fear, and everything in between are on full display in this story.

Think about a situation in your own life—a storm called \_\_\_\_\_ (*algebra or cancer or frenemies or grief or whatever. . .*) In the middle of that storm, you are just like one of the characters in the story you just studied. Whom are you most like? Peter before he walked on water? As he walked? When he was sinking? Or are you more like one of the disciples who stayed in the boat?

**Describe that storm in your life. Record the name of the character in the story you're most like right now and jot down your reasons for choosing that character.**

**The good news** is that Jesus takes you just as you are, wherever you are on your journey of faith. The even better news is that He loves you too much to leave you there. He longs to give you the wisdom to endure the trial and move forward, but you must believe and trust that He is bigger and stronger than whatever you face. You must trust Him enough to ask Him for the help you desperately need.

## DAY 2

# TRAINING MANUAL

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## WEEK 2

Today, you'll read James 2. Use the following outline to help guide your interaction with Scripture as the Holy Spirit speaks to you.

- \* Pray.
- \* Read the entire chapter.

\* Paraphrase the major points of this chapter below. When you're done, compare this list to the one you compiled last week. What's different? How?

\* What is God telling you about Himself in these verses?

\* What is God telling you about yourself or others in this passage?

\* What steps will you take today to let what you've read in this chapter of James change the way you live?



# Keep your eye on the prize.

The last couple of days of study have been full of heavy (and sometimes difficult) truths to absorb. You've learned that you will face trials in your journey of faith, that joy comes later, and that doubt can keep you from gaining God's wisdom. After all of that heavy stuff, you might be asking yourself if there's any good news in this Bible study.

Absolutely!

**Read James 1:9-12 and summarize what it says. Think about how these verses apply to trials. Write your thoughts here:**

You might be wondering if James needed an energy drink because in these verses, he seems to go off on a tangent, unable to concentrate or keep his thoughts focused. In one sentence (v. 8), he's talking about an unstable, indecisive man; in the next, he's talking about a rich man and poor man. What's the connection? Was James just rambling? Let's investigate.

**Go back to page 18 and recall to whom this letter was written.**

\* Who was James writing this letter to? What was their situation?

Most of the people whom James was addressing in this letter were displaced Jews. They'd been conquered by a foreign king and shipped off to some foreign land, so they didn't exactly have time to sell their chariots, pack up their mules, and gather all their cherished belongings. They had simply grabbed what they could carry and left—and a lot of treasured belongings likely got left behind.

So maybe that sheds some light on James' discussion of the poor man in James 1:9-12. The people he was writing to didn't have a lot of stuff. They didn't have much money. But what does all that talk about rich people have to do with anything?

To figure that out, you have to know that the Jews believed that God showed favor on people by blessing them financially. In their minds, wealth equaled godliness, meaning the more godly you were, the richer God made you. Therefore, the poorest of the poor were generally considered to be the least godly people. (It doesn't work that way, FYI.) So in James 1:9-12, James was taking that idea on, reminding his readers, wealthy and poor alike, that having a lot of stuff doesn't mean much. Material stuff is temporary—one quick gust, and it's all gone.

I think what James wanted his readers to walk away with was an understanding that everyone goes through trials. No one gets a free pass from tough times. And having a lot of stuff doesn't mean you're anymore godly than anyone else or somehow immune to facing tough times.

By now, James' readers were probably wondering—just like you are—what the purpose of life's trials was. If trials don't exist to show God's judgment or blessing, then why do we have to face them? James tells us in verse 12.

## Read James 1:12.

\* What point does James make? Use your imagination and draw it below.

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## \* THE CROWN

God promises a crown of life to us when we have passed the test and endured life's trials. When I first read this verse, I'll admit I wasn't that excited about the crown thing. I thought to myself, *A crown? Really? That's it? That's the reward for enduring life's toughest challenges?* I'm not a girly-girl, so the thought of getting a tiara just didn't encourage me. There had to be more to this than a simple piece of metal, or James wouldn't have made such a big deal out of it. So I did a little digging, and what I found made this verse come to life for me.

In ancient times, when people heard the word *crown*, they would picture one of four kinds of crowns:

**Crown of flowers:** This crown would have been worn at festivals, feasts, weddings, and times of joy.

**Crown of royalty:** This crown would have been worn by the members of the royal family and others in positions of authority.

**Crown of victory:** This crown would have been given to the winner in an athletic game.

**Crown of honor:** This crown signified some sort of honor or dignity that had been bestowed on a person.<sup>1</sup>

So why does that matter to you? You don't exactly get a crown for winning the 4x400 relay at a track meet. And you're not exactly royalty. Just stay with me.

Below are four Scripture verses. Next to each, write the name of the crown (from the list you just read) that best matches the topic of the verses.

2 TIMOTHY 4:7-8

JOHN 12:26

1 PETER 2:9

REVELATION 2:10

James' use of the phrase "crown of life" is no typo. In fact, it could be better translated as "the crown which consists of life."<sup>2</sup> Real life is only found in a relationship with God. When we become Christians, we become part of a priesthood, royalty even. We are bestowed with honor and dignity. We will be victors (because Jesus was the victor). And one day, we will be participants in the wedding feast in heaven. Frankly speaking, that's one reception I don't want to miss.

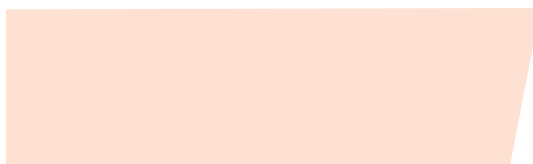
The crown was simply a visual picture for James' readers. These early Christians were not in the best of situations and needed to know that persevering—sticking with the life of faith in Jesus Christ—is worth it. James used an item, the crown, that most people could relate to in order to make his point: A life with God—even in the midst of suffering and persecution—is more valuable and full of more life than any life without God, even if it's filled with comfort and ease.

## \* IN YOUR OWN WORDS

Imagine for a moment that a teacher at school is giving you a rough time for your faith in Jesus. She teaches science and constantly makes fun of people (especially you) who believe in God. Sometimes, she just makes snide remarks. Other times, she's rude and uncaring, and her words wound. But every time she acts that way, you simply answer her with gentleness and respect, explaining why you believe the way you do.

After class one day, a friend walks up to you and says, "I don't know why you keep putting up with that. And I don't understand why you keep believing in this God stuff. Is it worth all this harassment? Why don't you just give up?"

- \* What would you say? James gave his reasons in today's Scripture passage. Now it's your turn to give yours. Explain your reasons in the space provided.



## \* AND IF YOU NEEDED MORE ENCOURAGEMENT

Verse 12 is meant to be pure encouragement for believers (for us and James' original audience). If the message in this verse isn't enough to keep you going, you can even be encouraged by the very words themselves. Let me show you.

- \* Read the verse again, maybe even in a couple of different translations to help you understand it a little better. Then in the space below, write down any words that have a positive message in them. Next to each word, write down why it is encouraging, helpful, or uplifting. This will require a little more thought, so take your time.



I am a word geek. In school, I loved diagramming sentences. Even now, I love looking up Bible words in the original Greek and dissecting what they mean. I love pondering Scripture. It's like letting tomato sauce simmer. The longer you let it mull in your brain, the richer the meaning, flavor, and depth of your understanding.

This verse is rich in flavor, meaning, and depth. First, notice that James calls the person who endures trials “blessed.” That’s not the term I would use to describe a person going through a trial. So why does he use that word? Because James understood that even in the pain, God’s plan and God’s purposes prevail (Rom. 8:28).

James also used another little term that carries a big punch. It’s the tiny word “when.” He didn’t say, “*If* he passes the test” in verse 12; he said, “*When* he passes the test.” I love that assurance.

And did you notice the word “will”? That’s a strong word, not like a wimpy *might, could* or *possibly*. It’s definite. We will receive the crown of life. Definitely. It’s a guarantee. Why? Because God promised it.

And He doesn’t break His promises.

## \* WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR CROWN?

Scripture doesn’t tell us much about the crown of life we will receive. There is no description of its shape, size, color, or composition. There is no verse that tells us if we will wear them in heaven or even if each person’s crown looks different based on our trials on earth. But Scripture does give us a little hint of what we might eventually do with our crowns.

### Read Revelation 4:1-11.

\* What is described here?

\* Which description stands out most in your mind? Why?

\* Whose throne is described in this passage?

\* Who is described in verse 10?

\* What do the elders do before the “One seated on the throne”? Why?

**What a picture!** It’s hard to wrap my mind around what it will be like to stand before God while He’s seated on His throne. I think that’s why John used the language he did in the passage from Revelation that you just read. He was just grasping for words, words that couldn’t do justice for what he had seen. I may not be able to picture what it’s like to stand before God, but I can tell you what I’m going to do. I am going to fall on my face and do exactly what the elders did. I will worship “the One who lives forever and ever.” And just like the elders, I will cast my crown at His feet.

I can think of no other response that would be worthy of who He is.

1. William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 55-56.
2. *Ibid*, 56.

# TRAINING MANUAL

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Today, you'll read James 3. Use the following outline to help guide your interaction with Scripture as the Holy Spirit speaks to you.

- \* Pray.
- \* Read the entire chapter.

\* Paraphrase the major points of this chapter. Read the passage in light of what you've been studying this week. Notice anything different from last week?

\* What is God telling you about Himself in this passage?

\* What is God telling you about yourself and/or others in these verses?

\* What steps will you take today to respond to the truths God has revealed to you in James 3?



# What's in a word?

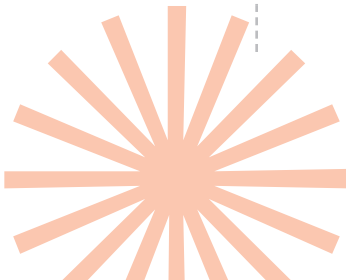
## WEEK 2

One outcome of the birth of social media is that every person can be a writer. In the time it takes to watch an episode of “Glee,” you can set up your own blog. And blogs are everywhere. In fact, the Wall Street Journal reported in 2009 that in the United States alone, 20 million people are bloggers.<sup>1</sup> The problem is that not all of those self-proclaimed writers have a good grasp of grammar, vocabulary, or the basic mechanics that make up good writing—which has led to some really bad online text. And one of the biggest mistakes people often make is using the word in an incorrect context.

Think you're a pro in vocabulary? Let's test your knowledge. Complete the quiz below by matching the correct word with its definition.

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| <b>Irritate</b>   | to receive with approval                                       |
| <b>Aggravate</b>  | to create a negative condition                                 |
| <b>Accept</b>     | person with highest rank or main participant                   |
| <b>Except</b>     | to improve or complete something                               |
| <b>Principle</b>  | a statehouse   |
| <b>Principal</b>  | to increase the severity of an existing negative condition     |
| <b>Complement</b> | more distant   |
| <b>Compliment</b> | praise or flattery   |
| <b>Imply</b>      | to express indirectly  |
| <b>Infer</b>      | more time or quantity  |
| <b>Farther</b>    | to conclude from evidence                                      |
| <b>Further</b>    | excluding; other than  |
| <b>Capital</b>    | city at the center of politics or industry; wealth in business |
| <b>Capitol</b>    | a standard or rule that often pertains to morality or nature   |

In today's Bible study, we'll take an in-depth look at two words that are often used interchangeably. When it comes to surviving the hard times, being able to distinguish between the two words can make all the difference. You're about to see why.



## \* A LITTLE REVIEW

Before we go any further in our study of James, we need to do a little review. Look back at the pages from this week to help you answer the following questions.

\* On page 47, you learned that trials are \_\_\_\_\_ . Everybody will experience them in life.

\* On page 49, you learned that when (not if!) you face a trial, God will give you the \_\_\_\_\_ you need to endure that trial.

\* On page 43, you learned that when you ask for wisdom, you need to \_\_\_\_\_ that God will provide for you.

\* On page 48, you learned that you will receive a \_\_\_\_\_ for enduring through trials.

\* On page 48, you learned that \_\_\_\_\_ —sticking with a life of faith in Jesus Christ—is worth it.

Today's study continues with the theme of enduring trials. It will focus on how to distinguish between trials and temptations, who's responsible for them, and how to respond.

## \* YOU MADE ME DO IT!

Read James 1:13-15, then consider the questions in the next column.

What is the end result of sin?

If that is the case, why do you think so many people continue to sin?

What do these verses say God does NOT do?

Why would a girl say God was tempting her?

What do these verses teach you about God's character?

According to these verses, what is the source of temptation?

What tendency was James telling his readers to avoid in these verses?

What is the progression of sin? (Hint: 3 steps)

BONUS: What two fishing-related words are used?

Here are the answers. Check to see how you did:

**What is the end result of sin?** Death.

**If that is the case, why do you think so many people continue to sin?** Focus too much on immediate gratification; blinded by sin; sin is fun for a while; nobody told them

**What do these verses say God does NOT do?** Tempt anyone

**Why would a girl say God was tempting her?** To avoid taking responsibility for her actions

**What do these verses teach you about God's character?** He is holy—and cannot be tempted by sin. Can you imagine not being able to be tempted?

**According to these verses, what is the source of temptation?** Our own sinful desires; in other words, you are responsible for your own sin. That's painful to admit sometimes, but it's true!

**What tendency was James telling his readers to avoid in these verses?** To say that God is tempting them

**What is the progression of sin?** 3 steps: desire gives birth to sin; sin gives birth to death

**BONUS: What two fishing-related words are used?** Drawn away and enticed; the word "drawn" is like luring a fish out of its hiding place; enticed is the idea of putting a juicy worm on a hook.

## \* BREAK IT DOWN

From the beginning of creation, humanity has been playing the blame game. Adam blamed Eve; she blamed the serpent. We as human beings are good at trying to shift personal responsibility from ourselves to someone else. *My friends made me do it. I acted that way because she started a rumor about me. If I didn't dress this way, I'd lose my boyfriend. I listen to that music because there's nothing else that I like.* But James 1:13-15 makes it very clear that we sin because of our own sinful desires. When we give in to those desires (which is a choice), sin results. You are responsible for your choice. You are responsible for your own sin. And unfortunately, you bear the consequences of those sinful choices—and sometimes, so do others.

## \* NOT THE SAME, BUT CLOSE

It seems a little odd that all of the sudden, James started talking about temptation and sin. I mean, why? He had been talking about trials throughout the whole chapter. And we know that it's not a sin to go through a trial, so what's the connection? **Here it is:** while trials are not temptations from God, you **will be tempted** to sin in the midst of trials.

Here's an example: One of your classmates posts something mean about you on Facebook. In retaliation, you do the same thing and post something awful about her on your Facebook wall, talking about what a skank she is.

The first situation—her saying something awful about you on Facebook—was a trial. The second situation—when you responded by posting your own nasty note about her on your wall—was a temptation that became sin. You wanted to get back at her, and you saw the opportunity (*temptation*), then you acted on it (*sin*) by posting about her on Facebook. See the difference? The two are not the same, but they are very much related. Trials and temptations are not from the same family, but they hang out with each other just the same.

Almost every trial you face will come with a temptation to sin. With God's help, you can recognize those areas of temptation and avoid the sin that would make the trial even worse.

Listed below are some trials. Next to each, list some possible temptations you might face as you deal with the ordeal.

| TRIAL   | POSSIBLE TEMPTATIONS |
|---|----------------------|
| Your boyfriend dumps you for another girl.                |                      |
| Someone sends you a "sext."                               |                      |
| You get cut from the team.                                |                      |
| Your parents decide to divorce.                           |                      |
| You're forced to move to another state.                   |                      |
| A friend brings her parents' prescription drugs to camp.  |                      |
| You make a horrible grade on your test.                   |                      |
| Your mom is diagnosed with cancer.                        |                      |
| The most popular girl at school starts a rumor about you. |                      |
| A friend dies in a wreck.                                 |                      |

See how easily you can be enticed into sin in the midst of a trial? Trials by nature test us—emotionally, physically, and spiritually. And if you are weary, frustrated, angry, scared, or sad, be on your guard. That’s a prime time for the Enemy (the roaring lion who wants to devour you according to 1 Peter 5:8; more on him later) to bring out every trick in the book.

\* To summarize your time in the Word today, take a moment to reflect on any trials you’ve faced recently. Ask yourself, *Did I sin while I was going through it?* If so, write a prayer to the Lord, asking Him to forgive you. If you’re facing a trial right now, write a prayer to the Lord, asking Him to help you to not be snagged or pulled away by temptation.

**One more day to go this week, sisters! You are doing great work!**

1. Mark Penn and E. Kinney Zalesne, “America’s Newest Profession: Bloggers for Hire,” *Wall Street Journal* [online], 21 April 2009 [cited 11 July 2011]. Available from the Internet: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124026415808636575.html>

DAY 4

# TRAINING MANUAL

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WEEK  
2

Today, you'll read James 4. Use the following outline to help guide your interaction with Scripture as the Holy Spirit speaks to you.

- \* Pray.
- \* Read the entire chapter.

\* Paraphrase the major points of this chapter. Turn back to page 28 and compare this week's findings to last week's.

\* What did God tell you about Himself in this passage?

\* What is God telling you about yourself and/or others in these verses?

\* What steps will you take to respond to what God has told you to do?



# Good gifts from a loving Father

What is God like? How would you describe His character? Why?

\* In the area provided for you below, create a thought cloud that focuses on different character traits of God. Don't limit yourself. And be honest—there are no right or wrong answers. Just write down every trait of God that you can think of. If one trait is similar to another, just link them together with a line.



BIG  
POWERFUL

Today's Bible study will focus on a certain aspect of God's character and why that trait would be important for the people who received James' letter—and to you!

## \* INTRODUCING THE FATHER OF LIGHTS

Before we dig into the character of God, let's do a little more reviewing. (Gotta make sure you remember what you've learned this week!)

\* In the space provided below, summarize the work you've done over the past four days. (You can look on page 53 for days 1-3, then add your notes about what you learned yesterday.)

Yesterday, you learned about trials and temptations, the source of both, and how one can lead to the other. Today's study will wrap up this week's focus on trials and the Christian life.

\* Read James 1:16-18. These verses tell us a lot about the character of God. Create another thought cloud, but use these verses to make your cloud.



## \* GOD AS GOOD

The first thing you learned about God in James 1:16-18 is that He is the generous Giver of perfect gifts. In other words, “Every good and perfect gift is from above” (v. 17, NIV). In that one verse, we learn that God loves to give to us—generously. And His gifts are good, because God is good. (Check out Ps. 119:68 for more on that.)

So what exactly does the fact that God is the good and generous Giver have to do with trials and temptations? A lot actually.

**A good God doesn't bring temptation.** (Remember? See vv. 13-15 for a reminder.) We can look at a situation and know that if it involves a temptation to do something wrong, it's not from God. Ever. God will not contradict His character (which is holy) or His Word (which says that God is not the author of temptation).

If you're facing a situation and you're not sure what to do, the first question you should ask is simply, *Will this lead to sin?* If it would lead to disobeying God—like lying to your parents to go out with a guy you like—then you know it's not from God. (Even if that guy is a Christian, and even if he's a great guy.)

**The fact that God is good matters when you are in the fires of a trial.** When you're in the middle of a nasty trial, you will be tempted to question God's goodness. Believe me, I've been there. You'll say things like, “If God was good, He wouldn't do this to me.” Or, “If God really loved me, then this wouldn't be happening. And here's a classic: “If God is good, then why does bad stuff happen?” **Never allow your circumstances to define the character of God.** Situations change. God's character does not.

\* What trials are you facing? How can the fact that God is good, even when the situations or your emotions don't seem to show God's goodness, help you in the middle of that trial? List a few of them and your thoughts below.

## \* GOD AS UNCHANGING

The second thing you learned about God in James 1:16-18 is that He is constant, consistent, and dependable. James calls Him the “Father of lights” in verse 17. In the original language, the word “lights” refers to the sun, moon, stars, and other stellar bodies up in the sky. And “Father” in this instance carries the idea of God as the “creator, preserver, governor of all men and things, watching over them with paternal love and care.”

Put them together and you get what? God is the Creator and Preserver of the sun, moon, stars, and everything else there is. He's the Creator of everything, but He doesn't change like the things He has created.

Did you know that stars move? And so do the sun and the moon. Everything is in a constant state of change—your hair, your friends, the clouds in the sky, the caterpillar on the tree outside your window. Everything, that is, except God. James tells us that “with Him there is no variation or shadow by turning” (v. 17). In other words, “There is nothing deceitful in God, nothing two-faced, nothing fickle” (v. 17, *The Message*).

### Think through the following questions.

- \* Why would it matter to people going through trials that God is constant and consistent?
- \* What difference does God's unchanging presence make in your own life? Why does it matter?

## \* GOD AS MERCIFUL

The third thing you should have learned about God in these verses? That God is merciful and gracious.

\* Reread James 1:18. Why does this verse point to the mercy and grace of God?

The fact that God chose us, that He gave us a new birth through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is a statement about His mercy and His grace. We don't deserve forgiveness, but He offers it. We don't deserve eternal life with Him, but He made it possible. He chose to give it to us.

\* Why does the mercy and grace of God matter to people who are in the midst of a trial?

Because of God's grace and mercy, we have access to God. No matter what is going on in our lives, God promises that nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:38-39) and that He will work all things together for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28). Those verses are true. And they're true for you! Knowing those two truths can strengthen, encourage, and keep you going when you're struggling. You are never alone—and your trial is not useless.

## \* ONE MORE THOUGHT

\* The last character trait of God from these verses is actually in verse 16. Look closely. What character trait can you find?

What does James call his readers in this verse? “Dearly loved brothers.” Dearly loved by whom? Yes, James loved the church at Jerusalem—but more importantly, those people were dearly loved by God. Notice that James didn't say *brothers that God merely puts up with* or *people who drive God crazy with their unfaithfulness and sin*. James didn't call them a bunch of sinners who were a disappointment to God and unworthy of His love. He called them “dearly loved.”

Of all the character traits that matter, this is the biggest: God is loving. He loves you furiously and without condition—even when you rebel against Him in huge ways. He yearns for a relationship with you (Jer. 31:20). You are the apple of His eye, the object of His holy affection, the one for whom He was willing to die.

You may be reading this in disbelief. No one has ever loved you unconditionally. In fact, you may have been the object of fierce violation by others through abuse or betrayal of some sort. The idea that love could be real and true, pure and holy, good and free, and perfect and healing is just beyond your realm of possibility. **But there is a God who loves you**—purely, freely, perfectly. His love is real. It is good, and it heals. His love is the one thing you can count on in this life and in the next. No matter what you have done—or what has been done to you—you can fall safely into the arms of a God who promises that you can rest securely in Him (Deut. 33:12). Having a safe, secure place to fall makes all the difference in the world. And it can make all the difference in your heart. Thank you, God!

DAY 5

# TRAINING MANUAL

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WEEK  
2

Today, you'll read James 5. Use the following outline to help guide your interaction with Scripture as the Holy Spirit speaks to you.

- \* Pray.
- \* Read the entire chapter.

\* Paraphrase the major points of this chapter. How are they different from what you wrote last week? (See page 38)

\* What did God tell you about Himself in these verses?

\* What is God telling you about yourself and/or others in James 5?

\* How will you respond to what He has said to you?