

LESSON ONE  
*Christian  
Living 101*

**FOCAL TEXT**

James 1

**BACKGROUND**

James 1

**MAIN IDEA**

Faith that is genuine calls for action in all the details of life.

**QUESTION TO EXPLORE**

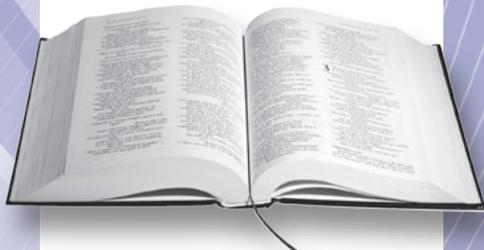
Is our Christian faith so real that we live it out in the details of our lives?

**STUDY AIM**

To consider whether the Christian faith is so real to me that I live it out in the details of my life

**QUICK READ**

Faith that is genuine calls for action in all the details of life. Those who hear the word but whose actions are not affected have deluded themselves.



Years ago I heard a story from a Baptist pastor about a homebound member of his congregation who was found dead in her home. The pastor had gone to check on her because she had not been heard from in several days. One of the police officers who investigated her death found a stack of almost seventy-five unused prescriptions for medicines. She had gone to the doctor, who had prescribed treatment, and yet she failed to do what the doctor had said. She was merely a prescription collector.

In the first chapter of James, we are reminded that reading the Bible and failing to act on its teachings is just as foolish and deadly as collecting prescriptions without taking the medicine.<sup>1</sup>

## JAMES 1

<sup>1</sup> James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings. <sup>2</sup> Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, <sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. <sup>4</sup> And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. <sup>5</sup> But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. <sup>6</sup> But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, <sup>8</sup> being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. <sup>9</sup> But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; <sup>10</sup> and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. <sup>11</sup> For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away. <sup>12</sup> Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. <sup>13</sup> Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. <sup>14</sup> But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. <sup>15</sup> Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin;

and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. <sup>16</sup> Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. <sup>17</sup> Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. <sup>18</sup> In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures. <sup>19</sup> This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; <sup>20</sup> for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. <sup>21</sup> Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. <sup>22</sup> But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. <sup>23</sup> For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; <sup>24</sup> for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. <sup>25</sup> But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. <sup>26</sup> If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. <sup>27</sup> Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

### From Skeptic to Believer (1:1)

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James, a half-brother of Jesus, is traditionally thought to be the writer of this letter. James was mentioned first among the brothers of Jesus in Mark 6:3. He was not a believer until after the resurrection, when Jesus appeared to him (1 Corinthians 15:7).

Paul referred to James as the Lord's brother (Galatians 1:19) and then identified him as a leader of the church (Gal. 2:9, 12). He was the same one who presided over the Council of Jerusalem and a leader among the elders (Acts 15:13; 21:18).

God has turned many hardhearted skeptics into humble followers of Christ, including James and Paul. No one is beyond the hope of God's grace. James's humility is seen as he referred to himself, not as a brother of Jesus, but as "a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ."

The recipients of the letter are referred to as the twelve tribes who were scattered throughout the *Diaspora*, which would indicate they were Jewish Christians living in a Roman world. They faced the challenges of following Christ in a secular society, where they were often isolated by both their beliefs and their heritage.

## Hang in There (1:2–4)

Many of James's early readers faced hardships because they were Jews living among Gentiles. They endured additional challenges from their own people when they became followers of Christ. Their faith required obedience to Jesus that appeared to be treason to Romans and blasphemy

### TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS

Believers are reminded of the inevitability of "trials" in verse 2. In verse 13, we are instructed that no one is "tempted" by God. Both of these words, *trials* and *tempted*, come from the same root word in Greek, *peirasmos*. The noun form of the word is seen in verses 2 and 12, while the verb form of the word is seen in verse 13.

The original word meant *trials*, whether good or bad. In verse 2, *trial* is obviously seen in the good sense with the intent of strengthening our faith; but in verse 13, *temptation* is the negative idea of a destructive impulse.

When confronted by a trial, we should thank God for it and be joyful, recognizing that it produces endurance. We should pray for perseverance that we may be able to hang in there until it accomplishes all God intends.

When we face temptations, we should run from them, realizing that God has already prepared a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Persevering when faced with trials leads to steadfastness. Succumbing to temptations lead to destruction.

to Jews. Christians today who live in nations where they are in the minority often encounter the same difficulties.

In verse 2, we are told “when you encounter various trials.” It doesn’t say *if* but “when.” Trials are inevitable. No one is immune. We face sickness, rejection, grief, hardship. Trials do not come to us as punishment but as opportunities to prove the authenticity of our faith. They can either devastate us or make us strong. James challenges us to face our trials with joy because trials produce endurance.

When challenges arise in our marriage, job, church, and school, our human nature encourages us to quit or run. Yet these situations may provide the perfect time for relationships and trust to mature and be strengthened.

Golf courses provide challenges for golfers to test their abilities—water hazards, rough, trees, sand, distance, undulating greens. For some of us, a golf ball sitting perfectly still on a tee is enough of a challenge in itself. Anyone can tell quickly whether a person is truly a golfer by watching him or her play. In life, we also face trials that test or prove us. How we respond indicates whether our faith is real or phony.

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### When You Don’t Have a Clue (1:5–8)

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Too often in life we face situations for which we are unprepared. What do we do? James tells us to seek wisdom. In James 3:13–18, we are reminded that there are two kinds of wisdom—one that is earthly, natural, and demonic; and another that is from above. Earthly wisdom is filled with jealousy and selfish ambition, but godly wisdom is peaceful, gentle, and unwavering.

Godly wisdom is accessed through prayer; “ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach” (James 1:5). We are to pray with confidence, knowing that God desires for us to know the truth that liberates us (John 8:31–32).

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### Don’t Bet on Your Possessions (1:9–11)

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A person who thinks security can be found in personal possessions is foolish.

Even Christians in the West appear to be running a marathon race, competing with one another and seeking to acquire more possessions than their neighbors. We are taught to believe that financial security and the accumulation of wealth will bring joy and fulfillment. Yet the race never ends. There is never enough. Fear of losing it all or being surpassed by others urges us on.

One would think that the church would not fall into this trap. However, the same favoritism of the rich is often evident even there. Most Baptists are never more than a generation or two removed from poverty, or at least humble circumstances. The poor almost always respond to the gospel first. Yet as congregations grow and members become more affluent, we quickly turn our attention away from those most receptive and favor those who are least receptive.

In James 1:9–11 and 5:1–6, we are reminded about the folly of riches. They fade away as quickly as grass withers in the sun. The person of humble means should be honored in the church, and the person with social status should be humbled. The church must resist the values of society and acknowledge that our worth is found in serving Christ.

### **Don't Take the Bait (1:12–18)**

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Satan attempts to lure us with temptations. Yet rather than bringing life, yielding to temptations brings death.

James clearly stated that God cannot be tempted by evil; neither does God tempt anyone, leading us to sin. We are tempted by our own lusts. When we give in to these evil impulses within us, they bring about destruction.

The birth of a new baby is one of the most joyful events anyone can experience. When it is learned that a child has been conceived, the family begins to anticipate and plan for the birth. The nursery is prepared. Baby clothes are purchased. Days are counted until the day of delivery. One of the greatest tragedies that can be imagined results from the death of a child at birth. Instead of joy, a family is faced with unbelievable grief.

James used this same metaphor to describe the pain of sin. When lust is conceived, it promises life and joy. There is great anticipation of fulfillment. Yet when sin is experienced, it brings heartache and death.

## PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY AS IT RELATES TO LIFE'S TRIALS

- Find strength for life's trials in the joy of the Lord
- Seek wisdom from God's word in making life decisions
- Don't fall for the world's values
- Run from temptation
- Apply the principles of God's word
- Be a lifestyle advocate for the marginalized

Christians must run from temptation. Jesus taught us to pray daily for God to not allow us to fall into temptation but for us to be delivered from evil. God is “the Father of lights” (James 1:17). Our experience with God is the opposite from temptation. He gives good and perfect gifts. When we follow God, God gives life, not death. God promises a crown of life to all who persevere.

### The Prescription Won't Help Unless You Take the Medicine (1:19–27)

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God's word is the law of liberty. It offers life—freedom—forgiveness. Yet it is of no value unless we act on it.

Dr. A. R. Jones, a veterinarian, was the chairman of deacons and a Sunday School teacher in the first church I served as a full-time pastor. He was one of the godliest men I have known through the years. He was a quiet man, possibly because of a lifetime struggle with stuttering. He was also a very wise man and the first person I would turn to when I needed advice.

Doc Jones was committed to the Bible and prayer. His large class of young adults was a result of his practical teaching from the Scripture. Doc would read the Bible, meditate on it, and consult commentaries. Even though he was a gifted Bible student, he was hungry to learn more. The Bible shaped his values, instructing his behavior as a man beyond reproach.

We live in a noisy world, surrounded by sounds of people, traffic, and media. We are bombarded with sexual temptations, racial prejudice, and greedy impulses from the internet, television, radio, billboards, and conversations. Bitter and jealous feelings of past hurts constantly reappear and seek to dominate our thoughts.

What will save us from these influences? We must humbly come before the word of God and seek the Lord. The Bible will instruct us, correct us, and equip us for right living (2 Timothy 3:16). Yet it is foolish to hear the word from God and then live according to the world's standards. James reminds us that this is as foolish as someone who looks at himself in the mirror and walks away without observing what he has seen. A blessed person is one who puts away all filthiness, listens to God's word, and then acts on it.

Anyone who claims to be religious and cannot even control his own speech has deluded himself. Genuine faith is expressed when we reach out to the most needy among us, like orphans and widows, and minister to them. Authentic Christ-followers, like Doc Jones, are unstained by the world but shaped by God's word.

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## Implications and Actions

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My Louisiana grandmother made beautiful quilts. She took small pieces of cloth that appeared to me to have nothing in common and sewed them into practical works of art.

James covered many different subjects in the first chapter—trials, wisdom, humility, riches, temptation, and speech—which appear to be unrelated. Yet when one looks at the whole chapter, the pieces fit together like the symmetry of a quilt. A person of genuine faith is not just someone who talks a good game. A person of faith is one who reflects a life transformed by the grace of Christ, evidenced by a genuine concern for the needy.



