

Welcome and Reminders

Welcome to any visitors and welcome back to the group members. It is important to remember that everything said and done in this group is confidential. The expectation is that there will not be discussion about our conversations to anyone outside of the group that is represented here and now. We understand that sometimes personal insights or information may be shared by someone who feels comfortable doing so in this group and not around others. Let's be respectful of that and carry our commitment to confidentiality as we leave this group. *(Pass out the confidentiality reminder to anyone who has not yet received one).*

Prayer and Praises

Introduction

One of the most powerful things about CARE groups is the input each of you gives to each session. Your experiences, perspectives and theologies add to the greater understanding of the given theme. With that in mind, we will continue to ask what you hope to get out of CARE groups in both structure and study themes. Recently, there has been some interest expressed in focusing some of our study and discussion in structured Bible study format. In response to that request we will be studying the Book of James.

I have broken these sessions into a structure that will allow for study, discussion, and personal insight. I encourage each of you to read the Book of James throughout the next few weeks to allow for time of personal contemplation and meditation on the Scriptures.

Overview of the Book

With the understanding that it is always important to understand what a book meant to the author and the audience before understanding what it can possibly mean to us, we will begin by discussing the authorship of James.

Who

The author of James is commonly believed to be James the brother of Jesus. This is an interesting story in and of itself. James and Jesus were not really close, as sibling relationships go. In fact, there are indications in Mark 3 and Luke 4 that Jesus' brothers were involved in his hometown's thinking that Jesus was quite mad. In John 7:5 John tells us that "not even (Jesus') brothers believed him." At the cross, none of his brothers were present with his mother, Mary.

After Jesus' resurrection Jesus appeared to James (1 Corinthians 15:7). This seems to be the turning point where James turns from a brother who disliked Jesus' mission and ministry to an active believer who quickly rises to prominence within the church – becoming the Bishop (what we recognize as Pastor) of the Jerusalem church.

➤ *How might James' relationship with Jesus affected the content of his writing?*

When

The general consensus among scholars is that James was one of the earliest works in the New Testament. This is important to note because it gives us an idea of the state of the church at the time of its authorship. The church was experiencing recent and rabid persecution. You will see that James writes his address in verse 1 "to the twelve tribes scattered abroad." He is writing to the Jewish Christians who were scattered around the known world because of this persecution. James wrote in a volatile era—a time of religious and social upheaval—and wrestled with questions that would impact the church forever.

Why

James seems to be very deliberately written for the purpose of demonstrating that faith requires action, what that action should look like, and how that faith in action leads to victorious living. James is the perfect recipe for authentic Christian living. It is filled with wisdom and practical knowledge that can assist believers in dealing with the details of daily life. Some earlier critics disliked James, thinking that it was too focused on works as opposed to grace and faith. Martin Luther, in fact, went so far as to refer to James as "a rather straw-like epistle." James is different than the familiar tones of the Paul's epistles, but it is also quite faith-based. The book deals with the prescription and product of genuine faith.

Faith Grows Through Trials and Temptations

Read James 1:1-18

¹ *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,*

To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations:

Greetings,

² *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,*

³*because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. ⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. ⁶But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. ⁸Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.*

⁹*Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. ¹⁰But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower.*

¹¹*For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.*

¹²*Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love the Lord.*

¹³*When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does God tempt anyone; ¹⁴but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. ¹⁵Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*

¹⁶*Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. ¹⁷Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the creator of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. ¹⁸God chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all that was created.*

- *Discuss anything that stood out to you in these verses. Share your first impressions. Was there anything that struck you as profoundly inspiring or difficult?*

Faith that Endures

It is one thing to understand that trials will come and to seek to pass through them admirably. When we do not go through these trials as well as we had hoped it is just as easy to say, "But they don't understand. This is much harder than the trials most people go through." It is astounding to read these words, "Consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds," knowing that the recipients of these words were going through trials that are unfathomable by our standards. The government and institutionalized church (they were really one in the same) was literally hunting those who identified with this new growing belief that Jesus was the Messiah. Churches were targets. New believers would often lose their livelihoods, their homes, and their families because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

James is telling his readers - those who had moved to lands of strangers speaking dialects they were unfamiliar with; those who were mourning the loss of their loved ones; those who were likely feeling despair, confusion and an impending sense of hopelessness – he was telling them to be joyful in the midst of these extreme trials.

- *How does one respond with complete joy to brutal hostility brought about by one's faith?*
- *How is one filled with joy while being tempted, especially when temptation wins?*

James breaks it down to these few strategies – as each are read feel free to discuss:

- We should face trials and temptations with a joyful attitude (v. 2) ...*consider it pure joy...*

- We should face trials and temptations with an understanding mind (v.3) ...**knowing** that the testing of your faith produces perseverance...
- We should face trials and temptations with a submissive will (v.4) ...**let** endurance have its perfect result...
- We should face trials and temptations with unshakable faith (v. 5-8) ...**ask in faith** without any doubting...
- We should face trials and temptations with a humble spirit (v. 9-11). ...**Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position...**

Faith that resists

For the believer, temptation is as much a part of lives elements as the air we breathe. Temptation is, as James puts it, a trial equal in scale to that of persecution. But James also makes it clear that the force of this trial can be overcome with the stronger force of the God's strength and wisdom. If one does not seek out God and responds out of his or her own power or wisdom, chances are that the natural self will win out.

Temptation will happen. Every person experiences it in one form or another. The 'if and when' is not the question – the question is how will we, as believers, respond to the temptation. James is offering the strategies to say "no" to temptation with a super-natural response. As we respond in this Godly manner, not only will we avoid faltering in our faith, but we will also be building muscles of spiritual maturity, wisdom and strength.

Notice, here, that temptation itself is not the sin. We are often inclined to chastise ourselves for even thinking about such things that our temptations involve. Verses 14 and 15 give a life-cycle of sin. It begins with temptation – but temptation is not the sin itself. Sin occurs when the temptation is entertained and not dismissed. "When a person is confronted with the alluring temptation, that person sees only the attractiveness of the desired object; only when one's will has sanctioned the performance of the sinful act do the tragic consequences come into action." *D. Edmond Hiebert*

James also recognizes that our first response to temptation is to blame. Rather than accepting that we are being tempted and intentionally taking decisive spiritual action, we play the blame game. If it is not our fault it cannot be our responsibility. Acknowledging our temptation gives us the ability to seek help from God and make a choice to defeat it.

- *Can you relate to temptation being a trial? If so, how?*
- *After reading this are there any behaviors or thoughts that you recognize as needing to be changed the next time you are tempted? If comfortable, share with the group.*

Putting it into Practice

Throughout this series each session will end with a few practical focuses and the Scripture for next session's study. Your group is encouraged to add to the list if any discussion prompted other focus or actions.

- Recognize the unique trials you are currently facing
 - Consider why God may allow them in your life
 - Ask for Godly wisdom to face them in a way that will build endurance and bring glory to God.
- Recognize your own unique lusts and temptations
 - Work to terminate the life and growth of sin in your life by repenting
 - Make a decision to not offer excuses to God for your sins

- ---

- ---

Session II Scripture: James 1:22 – 3:18