

5. What is the result of praying without faith (doubt)? Can you give some examples of prayers of faith or prayers offered with doubt and what each has yielded in your life?

(Be certain to make a distinction between occasional doubts, which all believers have from time to time, and a consistent doubting attitude. See a similar distinction regarding “sin” in 1 John 3:6,9 compared to 1 John 1:8.)

6. Comparing verse 8 with verse 6, define the “double mindedness.” What does such “double mindedness” look like in us? Why is it so counter-productive? How do we guard against it?
7. What is the proper “pride” that the poor and the rich may take? What does it look like in our everyday relationships, i.e., recreation, work, and fellowship with Christian and non-Christian friends, etc.?
8. According to James what does it mean to have “stood the test”? Give some examples of how the Holy Spirit has prompted and enabled you to “stand the test” in your own walk with the Lord.
9. In what way is “standing the test,” related to the “crown of life”? What impact ought that to have on our Christian living?

¹ NIV Study Bible

James 1:1-12

Discussion Group Questions

April 6, 2008

LESSON 1

Dr. Jerry Nelson

For discussion following the sermon on April 6, 2008

The Testing of Faith

Key Points

The author of the Book of James is considered by most to be none other than the half-brother of Jesus. No doubt he has written from a perspective of life experience, which may be why it is so practical in nature. He knew what it meant to wrestle with unbelief, for at first he did not believe in Jesus and at one point even challenged him. Later on, as a prominent figure of the early church, he was able to observe the dynamics of relationships (both good and bad), and lead these young believers toward maturity in Christ.

James takes no time in getting to the heart of things. In the first twelve verses we are challenged with:

- Our attitude toward and response to trials
- Perseverance and maturity
- The need for wisdom
- Our propensity for doubt and/or double-mindedness
- Our positioning and posturing toward one another

Our spiritual formation is evidenced by our responses to God and our actions toward one another. How do we respond to the difficulties of life? What relational sin often transpires in the midst of our suffering? We know that without godly wisdom, faith, and the power of the Spirit at work within us, our natural bent for selfishness, one-upsmanship, pride, and revenge will result in all kinds of offenses against one another. Our challenge throughout this study will be to believe and obey God, and to relate to one another out of selfless, God-enabled love.

Leader's Guide

Personal Preparation

- As you think back over the times of great trials in your life (the testing of your faith), how did *God* change your responses from a natural response of bitterness to one of acceptance with joy for his divine providence? How did you persevere?
- We face numerous challenges in suffering. We may be tempted to pour out complaint, give up, operate on earthly wisdom, doubt, or look down upon others. What is your greatest challenge?
- As you move from the earthly to the eternal, thank God for his redemptive work in trials, and the empowerment of the Spirit as you face temptation.

Group Preparation

- If you have people who are new to your group, remember to take time for introductions. You might also want to consider asking everyone in the group what they hope to get out of the study. Those answers may influence the questions you choose and the direction of your study.
- The Book of James could quickly appear to be a long list of do's and don'ts. Without an inner transformation of the heart, we could easily attempt to “work harder” at loving others (which is often short-lived). Throughout this study you will be encouraged to help your group understand and rely on the work of Spirit to change our desires to love as Christ loves—to do a work in us that will be expressed in our actions toward one another.
- There are a number of issues that surface in this short passage. There are more questions than you have time to discuss. We encourage you to use only the questions you decide are most helpful for your group.
- Please take time to answer one question before going on to the next, especially when there are multiple parts to the question. Avoid asking more than one question at a time.

Discussion Questions

1. How might James define joy in the context of trials? How do many Christians in today's culture typically define joy and why?
2. What is our natural response to difficulties and hardships? What is a godly response?

If we respond according to our natural propensities, how will that impact our testimony to those around us (both believers and the lost)?

3. How does the testing of our faith (trials) produce perseverance?
(It might be helpful to draw out the distinction between “testing” by God and “tempting” by evil, comparing these verses with verses 13-14.)
4. “Wisdom enables one to face trials with ‘pure joy’...it is not just acquired information but practical insight with spiritual implications.”¹ Wisdom is essential, and it is from God. Why do we often operate without it? What happens when we do?