

New Testament Application, Part 2

By Greg Smith

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Use an online or a printed Bible encyclopedia such as the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* at <http://www.biblestudytools.com/encyclopedias/isb>. Look up the entry for “James, Epistle of.” Prepare to share the background, author, audience and message of the book of James.

Assignment Two

Use an online or a printed Bible dictionary such as *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* at <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries>. Look up the words *test* and *steadfastness* (or *endurance*) from James 1:3. Prepare to share what these words mean and how these two words relate to each other in James 1:3. Share some other biblical passages where these same terms are used to describe perseverance or endurance under suffering.

Assignment Three

Use a printed study Bible or an online resource such as <http://www.openbible.info/labs/cross-references>. Use the Scripture cross-reference tool for James 1:2–4. Study other biblical passages where the concepts of “testing of faith” and “perseverance/steadfastness” are discussed together. Prepare to share observations and insights that might offer hope and encouragement for a believer who is experiencing the testing of faith.

Scripture to Memorize

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:2–4

Session Goal

Consistent with God’s Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand how to use basic Bible study resources for an inductive Bible study.

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In his free time he loves going on camping adventures with his wife, Ellen, and two kids, James and Hannah. He also loves singing, playing guitar, and watching hummingbirds in his backyard. Please feel free to contact him at gsmith@swbts.edu.

It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

It has been a tough year for Bill. His neighbor constantly criticizes Christians for believing the Bible. His boss gave him a book to read that praises depraved activities. His soccer buddy yells at him when he misses a few practices in order to attend church events. Some of his so-called friends now ignore him because of some stands he has taken for his faith. Bill has invited you to lunch. In advance of your conversation, you study the opening verses in James so you can offer him encouragement from God's Word. Do you feel prepared to do that?

Read James 1:1–4 out loud.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week may now share how the use of a Bible dictionary provided valuable background information on the book of James—especially the author, audience, historical context, and basic message of the book.

Studying the Passage

Verse 1. James, a servant of God. This James is the brother of Jude and half brother of Jesus (both having the same mother: Mary). **To the twelve tribes in the dispersion.** James wrote to Jewish Christians who were scattered geographically and were experiencing persecution.

Verse 2. Count it all joy. James began his letter with a message of encouragement. Regardless of the details of their experience, James exhorted his audience to take on a gladness of heart. **trials of various kinds.** The idea that James introduced here is better understood as a “trial” or “experience” as opposed to the idea of “temptation.” Satan is the one who tempts, but God is the One who refines and authenticates the faith of His people. “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one.” (James 1:13).

Discussion Questions

Have you ever experienced a time of difficulty and suffering in your life? Describe it for the group. Was joy or gladness of heart at the top of your list of emotions? What are typical emotions for someone who is going through a difficult experience or trial? What are some of the challenges involved in offering encouragement to someone who is going through a trial?

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week may now share how the use of a Bible dictionary added to the study of the meaning and the relationship of the words *test* and *steadfastness* from James 1:3.

Studying the Passage

Verse 3. You know that. James offered the primary rationale for a believer's gladness of heart amid difficult times. **testing of your faith.** For James, the believer is privileged to know “insider information” regarding personal trials and the experience of persecution. God often tests, refines and proves as authentic the faith of the believer. **produces steadfastness.** James explained that the result of such trials is endurance in the faith life of the believer. Thus, perseverance generally leads to a deeper knowledge of God's presence and an ability to trust

Him more during difficult experiences that often come with living in a fallen world. For James, the reality of this truth ought to bring about gladness of heart for the one who walks by faith and trusts in the Lord.

Discussion Question

Think about a marathon runner in training and the Christian who walks by faith. What are the similarities between the two regarding trials, testing and endurance?

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week may now share how using a cross-reference tool led to comparing James 1:2–4 with other passages carrying similar ideas. They can share some truths that might bring gladness of heart to the one who is experiencing the testing of faith.

Studying the Passage

Verse 4. Full effect. James used some overlapping terms in this verse to emphasize the single idea of maturity or completion. Similar to the marathon runner in training who reaches a performance peak just in time for the big race, James suggested a similar scenario for the disciple who is seriously walking by faith. Christian maturity comes through the practice of walking by faith, even when the walk becomes difficult. Given the broader biblical context, the terms *testing* and *steadfastness* remind believers that they are running a race that has eternal implications and rewards (see James 1:12; 1 Peter 1:6–8).

Discussion Questions

Given the discussion of James 1:1–4, what kind of strategy would you use to encourage a fellow disciple who is suffering persecution or going through some kind of hard experience? On the other hand, what are some things sometimes said to encourage those suffering that are not biblically correct?

On Your Own

If you are not presently suffering or experiencing persecution, you will. Based on this study, what three thoughts will be most valuable to you the next time you find yourself walking by faith amid trials, difficulty and suffering? Write those three thoughts in the space below.

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to. . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Groups of disciples always are making preparations for evangelism, missions, and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

It may have surprised you to learn that Christian joy does not depend on your daily circumstances. James 1:1–4 tells us that we should have joy even when experiencing various trials. When a disciple is walking by faith, God builds qualities in him or her during times of persecution and suffering. Those qualities include endurance, patience, maturity, faithfulness and spiritual strength.

As an added bonus, your faithful testimony during persecution can help lead other people to place their faith in Christ. As they see your faithfulness under pressure, they cannot help but notice the genuineness of your walk with Christ and the truthfulness of the gospel.

You can also give and receive encouragement from other Christians who experienced joy in persecution. Sharing with other Christians your victories through trials offers great benefits. It is inspiring to read books that give testimonies of victories through times of persecution. *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* is a classic. Modern ones include:

- *In the Lion's Den: A Shocking Account of Persecution and Martyrdom of Christians Today and How We Should Respond* by Nina Shea
- *The Insanity of God: A True Story of Faith Resurrected* by Nik Ripken.

Follow up Question

What are some of your own experiences of trials in life, and how did those difficulties work to refine your faith?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.