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**WHAT'S AN
IMPORTANT
LESSON
YOU'VE
LEARNED?**

**Faith on Display
in Hard Times**

The
POINT ➤

God uses trials to mature your faith.

➤ JAMES 1:1-12

¹James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ: To the twelve tribes dispersed abroad. Greetings.

²Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.

⁵Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly—and it will be given to him. ⁶But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord, ⁸being double-minded and unstable in all his ways.

⁹Let the brother of humble circumstances boast in his exaltation, ¹⁰but let the rich boast in his humiliation because he will pass away like a flower of the field. ¹¹For the sun rises and, together with the scorching wind, dries up the grass; its flower falls off, and its beautiful appearance perishes. In the same way, the rich person will wither away while pursuing his activities.

¹²Blessed is the one who endures trials, because when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.



FOR LEADERS (15 minutes)

THE POINT // GOD USES TRIALS TO MATURE YOUR FAITH.

LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING // PEOPLE

Because of Jesus, people can live with joy regardless of circumstances, as joy is rooted in an eternal perspective and not in earthly circumstances.

Message to Leaders

Because we live in a world that is under the weight of sin's curse, we will face all kinds of difficult things. Still, God has called us to live with joy. This is possible when we focus on God's blessings in our lives and on eternal life in heaven.

› Engage Option 1

Select two student volunteers to come up front to complete a workout routine consisting of lifting some weights, pull-ups, sit-ups, and so on. Ask students to describe how they feel immediately following the workout. Say, **“We are going to face some hardships in our lives, but God makes us stronger when we endure in our faith through those hardships.”**

› Engage Option 2

Decorate the room like a gym or weight room. Say, **“We’re often weak in our faith, but God uses the trials in our lives to make us stronger in our faith.”**

› Engage Option 3

Search the internet for “How to Trust God in Tough Times - Tony Evans.” Play the video as you begin the session. Say, **“When we work together with other believers and persist in our faith through trials, God strengthens and matures our faith.”**

NOTE: Always make sure you preview any video clip you show students and ensure it is appropriate for your church and ministry.

LEADER PACK ELEMENTS

If you have the optional Leader Pack, consider the following:

ITEM 1: Introduce students to the new unit by displaying the **Unit 1 Living Out Our Faith Poster.**



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

THE POINT // GOD USES TRIALS TO MATURE YOUR FAITH.



THE SETTING

James wrote this letter to address specific problems in the lives of believers. Because of persecution, these Christians were forced to live far from their homeland; they faced new pressures from the people in their new surroundings. James started his letter with words aimed at helping his readers learn how to deal with stress and pressure. By urging them to turn to God, he helped them see that the hardships they faced were used by God to help them grow towards spiritual maturity.

FACT:

All of our bones are pretty strong, but the weakest ones are our toes.² Be careful not to stub your toe on the dresser in the middle of the night. It might just break!

The road has not always been easy for Dave Dravecky. While a pitcher for the San Francisco Giants, doctors found that he had cancer in his pitching arm.¹ To fight the cancer, Dave had a difficult surgery, but he was determined to keep pitching and wouldn't let anything stop him. Just ten months after surgery to remove the tumor, Dave Dravecky won the first game of his comeback. Five days later, however, while throwing a pitch, Dave snapped a bone in his arm and fell to the ground in pain. He'd never pitch again.

Because of the cancer and treatments, Dave's arm wasn't able to hold up to the stress of major league pitching. Eventually, doctors amputated Dave's left arm to save his life when radiation and other surgeries failed to stop the cancer.

Dave was living his dreams—until he lost it all. It's difficult to think of joy in these kinds of circumstances. Yet James wrote that believers should have joy, even in our trials. He was not teaching that the trials themselves are something to be happy about. What he was saying is that, even in the toughest of circumstances, joy is available because of our relationship with Jesus.



IMPART (30 minutes)

THE POINT // GOD USES TRIALS TO MATURE YOUR FAITH.

JAMES 1:1-4

*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ: To the twelve tribes dispersed abroad. Greetings. Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing. **JAMES 1:1-4***

After a brief introduction, James got straight to the point. He called his readers—and us—to face our various trials with great joy. To be a joyful Christian is not a suggestion. Instead, it is a command. Happiness is easy when good things happen (see the connection?) in our lives. But joy is different. It isn't based on circumstances, but upon God's goodness and confidence that He will fulfill His eternal promises.

When tough things happen in our lives, it's natural to react negatively. The human tendency is to respond with anxiety, fear, or anger. Maybe we find ourselves whining or complaining, or we become edgy with the people in our lives and treat them harshly. Out of genuine concern for people in the church, James taught that we need to think about our trials in a uniquely Christian way: not reacting negatively, but choosing to respond with great joy.

The phrase "trials" refers generally to challenges that we all face. More specifically, however, James is addressing trials believers experience because of persecution for their faith (5:10-11). Jesus said that, in this world, when we follow after Him, we will face trouble (see John 16:33). James isn't saying that trials are loads of fun. They're not! Instead, trials help us to know that our faith is real—genuine faith helps us to respond well through hardship. Further, God uses trials to strengthen our faith. Like a refiner's fire which burns away impurities and produces pure gold, trials serve to purify our faith in Christ.

The refining activity was not so that people would move from unbelieving to believing. James assumed his audience was comprised of believers, which is one reason he referred to them as his brothers and sisters. The refining activity moves faith from an idea to an action. While faith includes correct thinking, it also requires right actions. Trials can certainly correct our thinking, but James was focusing more on how they correct our living. Trials expose where our behavior falls short of what we believe, allowing us to live out our faith.

God's ultimate goal in testing us is that our faith becomes mature and complete. Through the trials we experience, He is developing endurance in us. We sometimes call it perseverance, faithfulness, or steadfastness, but it is God's work of developing our spiritual muscles and the resolve to stand firm in our faith.

Joy in trials is not natural. In fact, it might seem downright ridiculous to most. And, from an earthly perspective, it might be. However, God has called us to live in ways that don't make sense to the world. When we choose to trust in Jesus, joy is available—even in the hardest times.

DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE (P. 6)

- 1** What are some common trials and difficulties we might experience in today's world?
- 2** What benefits do we gain through experiencing trials? How have trials helped you to grow in your faith?



IMPART

THE POINT // GOD USES TRIALS TO MATURE YOUR FAITH.

JAMES 1:5-8

Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly—and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord, being double-minded and unstable in all his ways. JAMES 1:5-8

Steadfastness and perseverance are needed, but they are not enough. We also need wisdom. Trials might sometimes tempt us to see suffering as punishment for wrongdoing. And to make matters worse, our friends might sometimes hint (or even outright declare) that we deserve the hardships we experience. This is exactly what happened to Job. He had three friends who, when they heard about the disasters he'd experienced, came to his side to comfort him (Job 2:11). But then they started talking, and they blamed Job for his problems. According to his friends, Job's suffering was his own fault. He deserved what he was getting (see Job 4–25).

Job's friends were outspoken with their criticism. However, even if the accusations are more subtle or implied, it can be easy to get the message that suffering is our own fault. The truth is, sometimes we suffer because of the bad choices we make, and at times our trials are the result of sinful choices which God uses as corrective discipline. But not all trials are God's disciplining us, and it takes wisdom to know the difference.

Even when we devote ourselves to obeying God, we will still experience hardship because we live in a broken world which is under the curse of sin. As Jesus said—the people of the world were opposed to Him, and we can expect opposition and persecution as well. Therefore, we should expect—even when we follow Jesus—to face hard times.

God has promised to generously give wisdom—specifically to understand and navigate our trials—to those who trust Him and who ask for it. Believers don't need to be timid because God has invited us to approach Him boldly. But we must understand that God calls us to ask with unwavering faith. When people focus too much on the ways of the world—which are constantly changing—it's easy to be tossed back and forth like a tiny boat lost in a stormy sea. Trusting in God and asking in faith requires that we focus on God's unchanging character and not the unstable world. When we ask for wisdom with this kind of faith, we can be assured that He will provide it. God is a generous giver of wisdom. He is faithful. And when we faithfully follow Him, He will give us the wisdom needed to live well through trials.

God is a generous giver of wisdom. He is faithful. And when we faithfully follow Him, He will give us the wisdom needed to live well through trials. #BSFLFaithLivedOut

DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE (P. 7)

- 3** How can we know if we lack godly wisdom? How can we grow in wisdom?
- 4** What keeps us from seeking God's wisdom when we face trials?
- 5** What do these verses teach us about God?



JAMES 1:9-12

Let the brother of humble circumstances boast in his exaltation, but let the rich boast in his humiliation because he will pass away like a flower of the field. For the sun rises and, together with the scorching wind, dries up the grass; its flower falls off, and its beautiful appearance perishes. In the same way, the rich person will wither away while pursuing his activities. Blessed is the one who endures trials, because when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. **JAMES 1:9-12**

Appearances can be deceiving. If you saw a homeless man dressed in tattered, filthy clothes sitting on the sidewalk and then a well-dressed businessman walks past to get into his expensive sports car, who would you think was facing a difficult trial? It would seem that the desperate poverty experienced by the homeless person would be a far greater trial than anything the rich man could be experiencing. However, a surface-level glance might not reveal the things really happening in their lives. A deeper look at their hearts might reveal that they both experience riches related trials: one because he has no money and the other because he has too much. Poverty and riches can both be a trial. As Proverbs 30:8-9 teaches: “Give me neither poverty nor wealth; feed me with the food I need. Otherwise, I might have too much and deny you, saying, ‘Who is the Lord?’ or I might have nothing and steal, profaning the name of my God.”

Poverty is a trial for obvious reasons. People have basic needs—clean water, nutritious food, adequate shelter, and warm clothing—that must be met to live in a healthy way. If these are lacking, people suffer. Yet James commanded the poor believer to boast in exaltation. What do the poor have to rejoice about? How in the world are poor folks exalted? Later, James would answer in this way: “Didn’t God choose the poor in this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?” (James 2:5). When viewed through the lens of faith, poverty is a constant reminder of our dependence upon God for all good things. If we are poor, there are nonstop opportunities to exercise faith.

Wealth can also be a trial. James did not instruct the wealthy to boast in their wealth. Instead, the wealthy boast in humiliation. Wealth has many practical advantages, such as not needing to worry about life’s basic necessities. However, earthly resources are temporary, and we will take no earthly possessions to our graves. The rich are never to boast about what they have because, just like the grass and flowers, their wealth will wither and pass away. All people have deep needs which money can’t meet, and the rich person must choose humility as an expression of faith in God.

The ultimate reason to celebrate for both the poor and the wealthy is not found in this life, but in the life to come. The trials we face in this life are temporary, and just as wealth fades, so do our problems. But faith endures. In this world, trials strengthen our faith, and through faith we have access to God’s gift of eternal life.

DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE (P. 7)

- 6** What can we do today to prepare for trials that might come tomorrow?
- 7** How does focusing on eternity change the way you respond to trials?
- 8** If an unbeliever asked you why you still believe in God after a season of hardship, what would be your answer?



LIVE IT OUT (10 minutes)

THE POINT // GOD USES TRIALS TO MATURE YOUR FAITH.



GOD
JESUS
HOLY SPIRIT
BIBLE
SALVATION
CREATION
CHURCH

PEOPLE

FAMILY
COMMUNITY
& WORLD

LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING // PEOPLE

Because of Jesus, people can live with joy regardless of circumstances, as joy is rooted in an eternal perspective and not in earthly circumstances.

Because we live in a world that is under the weight of sin's curse, we will face all kinds of difficult things. Still, God has called us to live with joy. This is possible when we focus on God's blessings in our lives and on eternal life in heaven.

>CHRIST

Jesus faced trials like no one else ever has or will, yet He remained faithful through it all. We are called to follow Jesus, not only in the ways He lived, but also in His attitudes and perspectives.

Read Hebrews 12:2.

9 Why did Jesus endure the cross?

10 What was the joy that was set before Him?

Read Luke 9:23.

11 What are practical ways God is calling you to take up your cross?

12 Why is this a necessary part of following Jesus?



LIVE IT OUT

THE POINT // GOD USES TRIALS TO MATURE YOUR FAITH.

> COMMUNITY

There are reasons for the struggles we face. For one, God uses them to grow us in maturity and lead us to trust Him. Further, as God comforts us, we learn how to comfort others.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:4.

13 How has God comforted you in tough times (i.e., through His Word or the comfort of a friend)?

14 This week, how might God use you to comfort someone else facing struggles?



> CULTURE

We live in a broken world, and we can see signs of this brokenness all around us. People everywhere are facing challenges, and many don't understand why.

15 This week, identify a non-Christian friend facing a difficult struggle. Express genuine concern and offer comfort. Look for opportunities to share that Jesus is the answer to our hardships. Make sure you're sensitive to your friend's perspectives and don't over-spiritualize or minimize their real-life experiences.