



## Study Series

James: Week Two

### Bible

James 1:12-18 (NIV)

**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 him.

**13** When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;

**14** but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire

and enticed. **15** Then, 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. **17** Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. **18** He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

# Sermon Summary

In this section of James' letter he is still dealing with the crisis of faith that his readers are experiencing. The blessing for those who endure (v. 12) links back to the opening exhortation to consider tests of faith as pure joy, as these trials, if endured, will lead to maturity. To those who endure God will give the crown of life; the crown that is given to those who love Him. This connects enduring trial with loving God to which we'll return in a bit.

In typical fashion James seems to shift to a new topic in verses 13-14. To understand how this advances James' thought we need to pause for a moment and consider the Greek (the original language of the New Testament). There are five occurrences of the English word "tempted" in verses 13-14 and four of them are translations of a single Greek word. This term is used thirty-nine times in the New Testament and is translated in three different ways depending on context. In some instances it is translated as "tried" (see Acts 16:7), sometimes as "tested" (see Matthew 16:1), and sometimes as "tempted". This suggests a slightly different translation of these verses is possible. As Douglas Moo (a commentator) argues, it might be best to translate verse 13 this way, "When tested, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone." This nuances the verse and makes good sense of the context. It also makes sense of the wider context of Scripture where God tests his people (see for example Genesis 22:1; Exodus 16:4; 20:20). There is, however, an important difference in outcome between a test and a temptation. The outcome of a test is to see what something or someone is made of and to enable growth or development of that someone or something. A temptation on the other hand is... well, James tells us what temptation leads to: sin and death. Neither of these things come from God. In the midst of a test of faith (which may be sent by God or at least allowed by Him) the desired outcome is only ever our growth and maturity, in love. James is not interested in giving us a theological formula for temptation, sin, and death (though there are some interesting things to explore here too), he wants to point out the vast difference between what temptation leads to and what God's gifts lead to.

James goes on to describe the sorts of things God gives in verses 16-18. Only good and perfect gifts come from God and where temptation gives birth to sin and death, God gives birth to the church as a foreshadowing of the coming harvest (First fruits were the early harvest, promising more to come).

The desire of God to provide all we need to mature and learn to love Him more is the ultimate reason for joy in the midst of trials. As far as James is concerned we ought to look

*through* trials to the maturity to come, and *in* our trials, look to God, who walks with, and sustains us. All we need comes from our Heavenly Father who desires us to grow in our love of Him and to become mature in that love. What an amazing grace.

## Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

Have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

1. Opening Discussion: Think of a time in the past when you have experienced a test in life, this may be an exam for something, or a season you look back on and describe as 'testing.' What was the value of that test, what has happened or changed since then? Take some time to share those tests and their value with the group.
2. Get comfortable, and unhurriedly read James chapter 1:12-18. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there are words or phrases that 'jump out at you'. What are they? (Try to resist the urge to explain *why* it jumped out – this is about creating space for often familiar passages to say something new to us, allowing God to show you something). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to that word or phrase. Take some time to share what you've been lead to.
3. Marc lead us through a perhaps more helpful translation of verses 13 and 14, and in particular the word 'tempted.' What does a shift in translating the first occurrence of 'tempted' to 'tested' do to your understanding of this passage?
4. In brief, Marc described the outcome of testing as growth, whilst the outcome of temptation is ultimately death. Even though these outcomes are in opposition to one another, there are still temptations that exist in the midst of testing. What kinds of temptations or desires might entice us away in the midst of testing?
5. James directs us to look through (or beyond) trials and tests to the crown of maturity, and within them to God, which helps us to consider them pure joy. What can we do to actually help make this a real life practice, and not a clichéd '*Christian*' answer to sometimes painful testing?
6. Enduring tests and trials ultimately leads to the maturing of our relationship with, and love of God. What tests are you facing in your life right now that might enable this kind of maturing?

# *Prayer*

Take some time to reflect on your answers to question 6, pray for each other that the Holy Spirit would help us look through the trial, look to God, and find joy in the midst of testing as He moves us towards maturity in our faith.