



FAMILY STUDIES
SHORELINE STUDENTS

JAMES 1:1-11

TRIALS & WISDOM

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Family Study in the book of James!

Our hope is that these study guides will provide direction and opportunity for you to study the Bible with your students, either one-on-one or as a whole family.

The questions below are meant to provide a framework for your study. Don't feel like you have to get through all the questions in the study. Feel free to look ahead and pick out questions you think will help your students engage with the text.

Only the person leading the discussion needs to have these questions. The rest of the participants need only an open Bible and maybe a pen and notebook to write down thoughts they want to remember. There is no homework to do between studies, as all reading and discussion will happen during your family study.

Included with the questions are italicized notes that are meant to help provide some explanation of the text to help parents lead the discussion and answer questions that might come up. Parents are encouraged to read through these notes ahead of time and do whatever other study might help them prepare.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

As you prepare for this first study, the following resources may be helpful to your understanding of the book of James:

1. ***Help Me Teach the Bible: Dan Doriani on James - <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/podcasts/help-me-teach-the-bible/dan-doriani-on-james-2/>***

This podcast episode from The Gospel Coalition provides helpful insight about key aspects of the book of James.

2. **The Bible Project James Video** - <https://youtu.be/qn-hLHWwRYY>

This video from The Bible Project provides a good overview of the book of James, and it could be helpful to show it to your students at the beginning of the study.

BEGIN BY READING **JAMES 1:1-11** TOGETHER

NOTE: *After you read the passage together, pray, and then allow for a few minutes of silence so that you and your students can read over the passage again and start to think about it. This may feel awkward at first, but it's vital to allow for some reflection time before diving into the questions.*

When you're ready, begin the discussion by going through the following questions:

CONTEXT QUESTIONS

NOTE: *Context questions help us study what's going on around the passage. First, we want to look at the **historical context** of the book: when was this book written? Who wrote it? Why did they write it?*

*Second, we want to look at the **literary context** of the book: what kind of writing is this? What is its genre? Narrative, poetry, proverb, history, law, letter, etc.? What is happening before and after the particular section we are looking at? How does this section fit in with the flow of the book's story or argument?*

Since this is the first study, you might spend a little more time explaining the historical context to your students than normal. In the coming weeks the context questions will focus more on the literary context of each section, providing opportunity to review where you were last week before getting into that week's section.

The following questions and notes are meant to help you discuss the context of James 1:1-11 with your students:

1. **Who do you think wrote the book of James?**

NOTE: *The author of James identifies himself as "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." (vs. 1) Most commentators agree*

that this is James the half-brother of Jesus and leader of the church in Jerusalem. In 1 Corinthians 15:7, Paul tells us that the risen Christ “appeared to James, then to all the apostles.” James was not one of the original twelve disciples, but like Paul he had a personal experience with the risen Christ, was converted to faith in Christ at some point, and grew to become a leader in the early church.

2. Who do you think James is writing to?

NOTE: James identifies his audience as “the twelve tribes in the Dispersion.” (vs. 1) This is a complex term steeped in the history of Israel. “Twelve tribes” is short hand for Israel, God’s special people, and so James is likely writing generally to Jewish Christians.

These believers are “in the Dispersion.” Throughout Israel’s history they were scattered and displaced from the Promised Land in Palestine due to exile and oppression. James is writing to Jewish Christians who are scattered far away from Jerusalem, living among the nations. He is writing to believers who are part of God’s Kingdom but are dealing with the trials and temptations that come from living in the kingdom of the world.

3. What kind of writing is the book of James?

NOTE: The book of James is unique in that it opens like a letter, but the body of the book reads more like a collection of proverbs or wisdom sayings. The book is filled with commands and illustrations. It repeats key ideas and includes unexpected challenges. It is a letter written by a particular person to a particular audience at a particular time, but it includes divinely inspired and timeless words of wisdom and Gospel truth.

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

NOTE: Observation questions help us study what’s going on in the passage. These questions help us note specific features of the text that help us understand its meaning. We want to look for key or repeated phrases, surprising or striking statements, key illustrations, sections and subsections, and transitional words like “therefore,” “but,” “as,” etc. Observing and discussing these textual features help us grasp the flow of the author’s thought.

As you go through these questions, give your students time and silence to really look at the text to see what God is revealing to them

personally. Be patient with them as they seek to flesh out what they are seeing in God's Word.

The following questions are meant to help you make observations of James 1:1-11 with your students:

- 1. What are some words or ideas that surprise or stand out to you as you read this passage?**
- 2. What are some illustrations or images that strike you as you read this passage?**
- 3. What are some questions that come to mind as you read this passage?**

RESPONSE QUESTIONS

NOTE: *Response questions help us study where the passage leads us. This is the practical section of the discussion, where we dig into the text and reflect on how it challenges us, what it calls us to do, and, most importantly, how it points us to Christ.*

The following questions and notes are meant to help you discuss with your students how to respond to James 1:1-11:

- 1. How do you usually respond to trials? What surprises you about what James says about trials?**

NOTE: *It's important to note that when James says "trials" here, he is referring to anything that tests our faith. This includes hardship, persecution, temptation, and any other pain or challenges we may face in life. When you think of this kind of testing don't picture a test one might take in school, that they can either pass or fail. Picture someone who is working out or going through physical therapy, exercising and testing their muscles to help them grow.*

James calls us to count it joy when we face these trials, because these tests are like personal trainers who work on us to help us become more steadfast and strong as followers of Christ. We don't rejoice in the trials or the pain itself, but what it produces in us. James reminds us that "the testing of your faith produces steadfastness." (vs. 3) The trials we go through test our faith, reveal its genuineness, and grow in us strength and consistency as we walk with Christ.

The ultimate goal of this steadfastness is that “you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” (vs. 4) The word “perfect” here means “complete” or “full.” James is saying that the testing of our faith produces strength and consistency that grows us into full maturity as Christians.

2. Why is wisdom so important? Where does wisdom come from?

NOTE: *If the goal of Christian maturity means to be “lacking in nothing” (vs. 4), then it quickly becomes clear that we lack a lot, especially in our response to trials. James therefore follows his call to count it all joy when facing various trials with a reminder of how we can gain wisdom. Wisdom here is the ability to see things as God sees them, to see the eternal perspective above and beyond our trials: that God will use them to make us steadfast and grow us to maturity in Christ. We need this wisdom, this perspective, if we are going to count it all joy when we face various trials.*

The good news is that if we lack this wisdom and perspective, God is gracious and “gives generously to all without reproach.” (vs. 5). So all we need to do is ask and God will begin to give us wisdom. The only thing stopping us is our own doubt and insincerity. James says that one who doubts is “double-minded” (vs. 8), literally divided in mind and soul. When we come to God asking for wisdom, do we do so wholeheartedly, fully trusting in Him to provide? Or do we approach God tepidly, doubting His generosity and sufficiency?

3. What does James tell poor and rich people to do in vs. 9-11? Why is this important?

NOTE: *In vs. 9-11, James gives a real life example to illustrate what he has said so far: the trials faced by the poor and the rich. Our faith is tested when we struggle both with poverty and with materialism and greed. And so James calls both the poor and the rich to respond to these trials by “boasting,” i.e. “counting it all joy.” (vs. 2). The poor, who are constantly faced with their poverty and humiliation, are called to rejoice in the exalted status and riches they have in Christ. The rich, who are easily tempted to trust in the temporary benefits of their riches, are called to remember the humiliation and spiritual poverty from which Christ has rescued them. In this way, by remembering the grace of God in Christ, both are given the wisdom to rejoice and grow towards maturity in the midst of trials.*

CHRIST CONNECTION

NOTE: *Anytime we open the Bible we want to look for ways that it points us to Christ. This can be tricky in a book like James which is full of commands. At first it might seem like James is giving us a list of things to do, and our job is to try to do them to the best of our ability. But if we respond in this way we will quickly become frustrated at our own inability to live up to these commands, and so we will be left with nothing but discouragement.*

Instead, as we discuss these commands with students, it's important to be honest about how far we fall short of keeping them. This idea is clear in the transition from vs. 4 to vs. 5.

James ends vs. 4 by saying that once steadfastness has had its full effect we will be "lacking in nothing." But then he pivots to say "If any of you lacks wisdom" in vs. 5.

In this transition James gives us a clear picture of our human nature. We know where we are supposed to be, but we also admit how far we fall short from that goal. We are called to be full and complete, but really we are broken and divided sinners, double-minded, and unstable in all we do.

We haven't gotten to the heart of James 1:1-11 until we recognize the reality of our spiritual brokenness and failure. Once there we are reminded that on our own we will never reach spiritual maturity. But we have a God who is generous, "who gives generously to all without reproach." (vs. 5)

The greatest gift our generous God has given us is His Son. And Jesus is the only man who ever lived who truly lacked nothing. He was perfect and full and complete. And yet He went to the cross and took on our brokenness and spiritual poverty, so that in Him "you may be filled with all the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3:19)

As you discuss the above questions with your students, be sure to draw out how far we fall short from the kind of spiritual maturity to which James calls us. And then remind your students that it is only in Christ that we find true fullness; only in Christ that we are able to count it all joy when we face trials because He faced our ultimate trial for us. Remind them that when we fix our eyes on Jesus we see the eternal wisdom and plan of God who is able to use even trials to make us mature in Christ.