



LESSON 38: GROWING FAITH

DAY 1: JOY IN TRIALS (JAMES 1:2-4)

Did you know that when you workout, you are actually damaging your muscle fibers? In order to build muscle, your body repairs the muscle fiber that was damaged during the workout, and in doing so, thickens and increases the number of muscle protein strands. While some damage ultimately leads to stronger muscles, you can also overextend your body beyond its limits and do more harm than good.

Read James 1:2-4. James, the brother of Jesus, wrote these words for *when* we face trials, not *if*. Suffering and challenges are a fact of life for everyone, but there are also challenges unique to Christ-followers. According to James, we should accept these challenges with joy, as if scoring an A on a test or scoring the winning touchdown, because suffering is a part of God's strategy to strengthen and develop our faith.

If we respond to obstacles and opposition in life with bitterness and resentment, then we are allowing ourselves to be harmed by something God intended for our good. Remember: there is no evil, no pain, and no hardship that is so big that God cannot use it for His glory and our good. Trust the process.

DAY 2: THE CROWN OF LIFE (JAMES 1:12)

Olympic champions today receive medals made of bronze, silver, and gold for winning in their individual events. Originally, when the games first began in 776 BC, winners of the Olympic games received a wreath made from the branches of an olive tree.

Read James 1:12. Elsewhere in Scripture, we read that believers will suffer, and that those who suffer for Christ are blessed. In today's passage, however, we see that there is a key component to the blessedness of the suffering believer: we must *endure*. In the Olympic games, endurance refers to athletes' determination to reach the finish line no matter what, never giving up or losing hope. The same is true for the believer, except on an infinitely greater scale. For the suffering believers who endure, their rewards aren't medals or wreaths of olive branches; instead, our reward is the crown of life, an eternity spent knowing God and enjoying Him forever.

What's the most difficult part about enduring when times are tough? How might our understanding of the priceless reward to come help us to endure during life's most difficult circumstances?



LESSON 38: GROWING FAITH

DAY 3: TEMPTATIONS (JAMES 1:13)

Entrapment is a word used when someone in law enforcement tricks an individual into committing a crime. Entrapment can't be used against someone in the court because the "guilty" person would have never committed the crime if they had not been tricked into the act by the police officer. Essentially, the law can't convict someone of a crime if the law is responsible for initiating the crime in the first place.

Read James 1:13. We know from Scripture that God often *tests* His people. James, however, was not referring to tests when he wrote today's passage. Tests are meant to strengthen God's people. Instead, James was referring to *temptations*, which are different from tests in that they are the enemy's method of weakening believers and causing them to sin.

God will test His people in order to create opportunities for our obedience. However, God does not tempt us, because to do so would make Him an accomplice in our sin. This can't be, because He is without sin.

DAY 4: EVIL DESIRES (JAMES 1:14)

Have you ever watched *Animal Planet* and seen one of the big cats hunting? If so, you've likely seen lions prowling for prey in tall grass. A pride of lions can actually take down a 13,000-pound elephant! Maybe you've seen leopards, who are nocturnal and hunt at night. They often hunt prey up to three times their size and can drag a 300-pound kill up into a tree!

Read James 1:14. Notice that James was not referring to the sins of others and their effects on us. Rather, he was pointing to the sin inside of each of us, the evil desires within every believer that tempt and entice us. Every person battles against his or her inclination to sin. No one is beyond temptation—even Jesus was tempted—but temptation becomes sin when we give into these evil desires that entice us.

The enemy is not only outside, prowling in the tall grass and lurking in the night. Evil desires still exist within the believer, threatening to lead us astray. Why do you think we're sometimes quicker to blame the sin in others for our mistakes than the desires in ourselves?



LESSON 38: GROWING FAITH

DAY 5: EVERY GOOD GIFT (JAMES 1:15-17)

There have been many great advances in technology over the past several decades, and many of these advances have served to help society. However, another outcome of these advances has been to make people feel like they *need* things they don't actually need. For example, it's well-documented that many people are addicted to social media and rely on it for a sense of self-worth.

James 1:15-17. James wrote that we should not be deceived. Deceived by what? Don't be deceived into thinking God tempts us, but also don't be fooled into thinking that *good* has any source other than God. Sin can't produce the good outcomes it falsely promises. We can uniquely and wholeheartedly trust in God for every good and perfect thing, because He alone never changes.

The ever-changing products, trends, and technologies can have positive roles in our lives, but they'll never meet the needs of our hearts and they will never make us whole. Only our unchanging God can completely meet the needs of our hearts with the good and perfect things He provides.