

connect 360

BIBLE TEACHING GUIDE

The Making of Authentic Faith

WISDOM THAT WORKS

A STUDY OF JAMES

Ed Jordan * Emily Martin
Scott Rhodes * Randy Johnson
Don Garner * Bob Moore
Tom Howe * David Strawn



GC2
PRESS

Dallas, Texas

The Making of Authentic Faith: Wisdom That Works (A Study of James)
Connect 360 Bible Teaching Guide

Copyright © 2021 by GC2® Press.

All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America.

No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever
without written permission except in the case of brief quotations.

For information, contact

GC2 PRESS, 7557 Rambler Road, Suite 1200, Dallas, TX 75231-2388.

GC2® is registered in U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

CONNECT 360 ALL THE BIBLE FOR ALL OF LIFE®

is registered in U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in lessons 1-2 are taken
from the 1995 update of the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © The
Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977,
1995. Used by permission. NASB refers to this edition of the New American
Standard Bible®.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in lessons 3-13 are taken
from the Holy Bible, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright
1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved
worldwide.

GC2® Press Leadership Team

Executive Director, BGCT: David Hardage

Associate Executive Director, BGCT: Craig Christina

Treasurer/CFO, BGCT: Ward Hayes

Director, Center for Church Health, BGCT: Phil Miller

Publisher, GC2® Press: Bob Billups

Marketing Coordinator, GC2® Press: Stan Granberry

Publishing Specialist, GC2® Press: Nancy Feaster

First edition: September 2021

ISBN - 978-1-948618-46-5

How to Make the Best Use of This *Teaching Guide*

Leading a class in studying the Bible is a sacred trust. This *Teaching Guide* has been prepared to help you as you give your best to this important task.

In each lesson, you will find first “Bible Comments” for teachers, to aid you in your study and preparation. The three sections of “Bible Comments” are “Understanding the Context,” “Interpreting the Scriptures,” and “Focusing on the Meaning.” “Understanding the Context” provides a summary overview of the entire background passage that also sets the passage in the context of the Bible book being studied. “Interpreting the Scriptures” provides verse-by-verse comments on the focal passage. “Focusing on the Meaning” offers help with the meaning and application of the focal text.

The second main part of each lesson is “Teaching Plans.” You’ll find two complete teaching plans in this section. The first is called the “Discovery Plan,” which emphasizes discovery learning techniques; and the second is called the “Discussion Plan,” which provides questions and suggestions for dialogue about the Scriptures. Choose the plan that best fits your class and your style of teaching. You may also use and adapt ideas from both. Each plan is intended to be practical, helpful, and immediately useful as you prepare to teach.

The major headings in each teaching plan are intended to help you sequence how you teach to follow the flow of how people tend to learn. The first major heading, “Connect With Life,” provides ideas that will help you begin the class session where your class is and draw your class into the study. The second major heading, “Guide Bible Study,” offers suggestions for helping your class engage the Scriptures actively and develop a greater understanding of this portion of the Bible’s message. The third major heading, “Encourage Application,” is meant to help participants focus on how to respond with their lives to this message.

As you begin the study with your class, be sure to find a way to help your class know the date on which each lesson will be studied. You might use one or more of the following methods:

- In the first session of the study, briefly overview the study by identifying for your class the date on which each lesson will be studied. Lead your class to write the date in the table of contents in their *Study Guides* and on the first page of each lesson.
- Make and post a chart that indicates the date on which each lesson will be studied.
- If all of your class has e-mail, send them an e-mail with the dates the lessons will be studied.
- Provide a bookmark with the lesson dates. You may want to include information about your church and then use the bookmark as an outreach tool, too. A model for a bookmark can be downloaded from www.gc2press.org under the “Teacher Helps” tab.
- Develop a sticker with the lesson dates, and place it on the table of contents or on the back cover.

Here are some steps you can take to help you prepare well to teach each lesson and save time in doing so:

1. Start early in the week before your class meets.
2. If your church’s adult Bible study teachers meet for lesson overview and preparation, plan to participate. If your church’s adult Bible study teachers don’t have this planning time now, look for ways to begin. You, your fellow teachers, and your church will benefit from this mutual encouragement and preparation.
3. Overview the study in the *Study Guide*. Look at the table of contents and see where this lesson fits in the overall study. Then read or review the study introduction to the book that is being studied.
4. Consider carefully the suggested Main Idea, Question to Explore, and Teaching Aim. These can help you discover the main thrust of this particular lesson.
5. Use your Bible to read and consider prayerfully the Scripture passages for the lesson. Using your Bible in your study and in the class session

can provide a positive model to class members to use their own Bibles and give more attention to Bible study themselves. (Each writer of the Bible comments in both the *Teaching Guide* and the *Study Guide* has chosen a favorite translation. You're free to use the Bible translation you prefer and compare it with the translations chosen, of course.)

6. After reading all the Scripture passages in your Bible, then read the Bible comments in the *Study Guide*. The Bible comments are intended to be an aid to your study of the Bible. Read also the small articles—"sidebars"—in each lesson. They are intended to provide additional, enrichment information and inspiration and to encourage thought and application. Try to answer for yourself the questions included in each lesson. They're intended to encourage further thought and application, and you can also use them in the class session itself. Continue your Bible study with the aid of the Bible comments included in this *Teaching Guide*.
7. Review the "Teaching Plans" in this *Teaching Guide*. Consider how these suggestions would help you teach this Bible passage in your class to accomplish the teaching aim.
8. Consider prayerfully the needs of your class and think about how to teach so you can help your class learn best.
9. Develop and follow a lesson plan based on the suggestions in this *Teaching Guide*, with alterations as needed for your class.
10. Enjoy leading your class in discovering the meaning of the Scripture passages and in applying these passages to their lives.

Premium Commentary. Plan to get the additional Bible study comments available online. Visit our website, call 1-866-249-1799, or e-mail gc2press@texasbaptists.org to order the *Premium Commentary*. It is available only in electronic format (PDF) from our website. The price of these comments is \$8 per person. A church or class that participates in our advance order program for free shipping can receive the *Premium Commentary* free. Call 1-866-249-1799 or see www.gc2press.org for information on participating in our free shipping program for the next study.

Premium Teaching Plans. An additional teaching plan is also available in electronic format (PDF) by visiting our website or calling 1-866-249-1799. The price of these plans for an entire study is \$8 per person. It is available only in electronic format (PDF) from our website. A church or class that participates in our advance order program for free shipping can receive the *Premium Teaching Plans* free. Call 1-866-249-1799 or see www.gc2press.org for information on participating in our free shipping program for the next study.

FREE! Downloadable teaching resource items for use in your class are available at www.gc2press.org. Watch for them in the “Teaching Plans” for each lesson. Then go online to www.gc2press.org and click on “Teaching Resource Items” under the “Teacher Helps” tab for this study. These items are selected from the “Teaching Plans.” They are provided online to make lesson preparation easier for handouts and similar items. Permission is granted to download these teaching resource items, print them out, copy them as needed, and use them in your class.

Writers for this *Teaching Guide*

Ed Jordan wrote the Bible Comments for lessons one through four. Dr. Jordan is a graduate of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary. He has written and edited a 52-lesson curriculum for new church plants, and two hermeneutic books. He writes a weekly award-winning column for the Idaho State Journal and the Gloucester Gazette-Journal, a quarterly column for the Danville Register and Bee's Southern Virginia Living Magazine, and a weekly blog for the Baptist General Association of Virginia (BGAV.org). He and his wife live in Virginia where he serves as pastor of the Gwynn's Island Baptist Church in Gwynn, Virginia.

Emily Martin wrote the Teaching Plans for lessons one through four. Emily is a professional writer, specializing in business and Christian communication. She and her husband have a son and a daughter and are members of the Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas. She has written numerous teaching plans for the Connect 360 Bible study curriculum.

Scott Rhodes wrote the Bible Comments for lessons five through seven. Dr. Rhodes grew up in the church, accepted Christ as a seven-year-old, and spent 27 years in local church ministry. Scott is married to Kris, and they have two sons: Jonathan (21), and Jeremiah (18). He loves spending time with his family and also enjoys college football, especially Baylor football. Scott is a lifelong learner, and his formal education includes a B.S. and M.S.E. from Baylor University and an Ed.D. from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Scott's current hobby is, along with Jeremiah, trying to learn to smoke great Texas barbecue.

Randy Johnson wrote the Teaching Plans for lessons five through seven. Randy is a graduate of Howard Payne University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he received a Master of Divinity from the School of Theology. He is now retired after completing thirty-eight years of full-time Youth Ministry. He served at Monterey Church in Lubbock, Texas, the First Baptist Church of Bryan, Texas, and for twenty-eight years at the

First Baptist Church in Richardson, Texas. Randy and his wife, Carol, have two adult daughters and four grandchildren.

Don Garner wrote the Bible Comments for lessons eight through ten. Dr. Garner teaches Old Testament and Biblical Archaeology at Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tennessee. He has served various Baptist churches as pastor, interim pastor, Bible teacher, and retreat leader. He has written a number of lessons for the Connect 360 Bible study curriculum.

Bob Moore wrote the Teaching Plans for lessons eight through ten. Dr. Moore is a graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.A. in Religious Education) and Dallas Baptist University (Ph.D. in Leadership Studies). He has served churches in Texas as a minister of education for 23 years after a long career in the corporate world. Bob and his wife, Patsy, have been married for over 50 years and have 2 grown children and six grandchildren. They reside in Seguin, Texas, and are members of First Baptist Church where they co-teach a young adult Sunday School class.

Tom Howe wrote the Bible Comments for lessons eleven through thirteen. Tom serves as the Associate Director of Missions for Texas Baptists (BGCT). Prior to this new position, he served as the Senior Pastor of Birdville Baptist Church in Haltom City, Texas. Dr. Howe is a graduate of East Texas Baptist University (B.S.), Beeson Divinity School at Samford University (M.Div.), and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (D.Min.). He and his wife Amy have three children: Julia, Rhett, and Grant.

David Strawn wrote the Teaching Plans for lessons eleven through thirteen. Dr. Strawn has served churches ranging in attendance from 25 to over 1000 in over forty years of ministry. He now serves as President of The Ministry of Education, his non-profit consulting ministry focused on helping smaller churches with their Christian education programs. He is also a Distinguished Fellow at the B.H. Carroll Theological Institute where he teaches Christian education and administration classes and supervises doctoral students. He also writes for a variety of Christian educational publications including curriculum materials for children and adults. His wife, Kathy, is a former schoolteacher whose ministry is now a full-time curriculum writer.

The Making of Authentic Faith: *Wisdom That Works* A Study of James

<i>How to Make the Best Use of This Issue Teaching Guide</i>	3
<i>Writers for This Teaching Guide</i>	7
<i>Introducing GC2 Press</i>	11

DATE OF STUDY

LESSON 1	_____	Learning to Endure JAMES 1:1-12	12
LESSON 2	_____	Overcoming Temptation JAMES 1:13-18	25
LESSON 3	_____	Just Do It! JAMES 1:19-27	38
LESSON 4	_____	Playing Favorites JAMES 2:1-13	50
LESSON 5	_____	Making Faith Real JAMES 2:14-26	62
LESSON 6	_____	Taming the Tongue JAMES 3:1-12	73
LESSON 7	_____	The Right Kind of Wisdom JAMES 3:13-18	84
LESSON 8	_____	It's Hard to Be Humble JAMES 4:1-12	95
LESSON 9	_____	Back to the Future JAMES 4:13-17	106
LESSON 10	_____	The Trouble With Money JAMES 5:1-6	117

LESSON 11	God’s Waiting Room	129
	JAMES 5:7-11	
LESSON 12	Faith in Action	140
	JAMES 5:12-18	
LESSON 13	Our Rescue Mission	151
	JAMES 5:19-20	
 <i>Prayer for This Study</i>		162
<i>How to Order More Bible Study Materials</i>		163
<i>Ministry Promotions</i>		165

We've Changed Our Name!

BaptistWay Press **has now become GC2 Press.** The name change reflects the alignment with our state convention's (BGCT) recently updated mission statement. **GC2** is a movement of God's people to share Christ and show love. Our driving passion is to follow the Lord's call to fulfill the Great Commission "to share Christ" and the Great Commandment "to show love." The Great Commission and the Great Commandment form the two "GCs," or **GC2**.

GC2 Press will continue to publish the undated **CONNECT 360** quarterly Bible study curriculum. **Connect 360** has gained a reputation for solid biblical teaching and will continue to be published as an undated quarterly study available in book form and/or digital downloads. **Connect 360** is currently being distributed in 38 states and 16 countries and has been translated into seven different languages.

For more information, please go to our website at www.gc2press.org.

lesson 1

Learning to Endure

MAIN IDEA

God will give Christians the strength to take difficult times and turn them into times when faith grows.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Can God use me even though I have been through some tough times?

TEACHING AIM

To challenge adults to understand that trials increase their faith



Bible Comments

Understanding the Context

The book of James is a letter that most commentators affirm was written by James the Just, the younger brother of Jesus. James was the pastor of the Jerusalem church, and a notable leader of the early Christian Movement. James was martyred in A.D. 62, according to Josephus, so the book was written prior to that date. Most likely the book was written between A.D. 45 and 50, as surmised by its largely Jewish cultural perspective present in its content.

The book is considered by some to be the New Testament's book of wisdom literature, paralleling the style and practical content of pithy, wise teachings, which characterized Old Testament wisdom literature such as Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Wisdom is the practical, ethical application of God's truth and timeless principles. Others consider the book a compilation of short sermons, which James packaged into a letter. It is probably both: it is wisdom literature in nature, which presents brief, sometimes step-by-step practical teachings that encourage the readers to live God's values in practical ways in their relationships with others.

The message of this letter was likely written primarily to the Christians who had been dispersed from Jerusalem and scattered throughout the surrounding regions of Asia-Minor after the stoning of Stephen, and the accompanying persecution of Christians (Acts 7:54—8:4). Many of those people who were scattered were mostly Jews who had become Christians. Many had likely been active in the Jerusalem church, so it is understandable that Pastor James would write a letter to them, to encourage them to remain faithful to God and to their faith in the midst of trials and tribulations.

Today this book still encourages us to live out our commitment to Christ, wisely and faithfully. When we encounter trials and testing of our faith, and we all do, James gives us good solid advice for how to endure, and benefit from, those trials. He calls us to live out the values of Christ in all our relationships, both inside and outside the church.

Interpreting the Scriptures

The Testing of Our Faith (1:1-2)

1:1. Even though James was Jesus' brother, he identified himself as a bond-slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. He served God (the God of Judaism) and the Lord Jesus Christ (the same God), who is Messiah.

The "twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad" can be taken literally as Jews living abroad, or metaphorically as Christians who are the new people of God, whether Jews or Gentiles. These Christians were living in challenging circumstances in foreign, perhaps hostile, cultures.

1:2. The Greek word here "if" means "if, and you will" encounter various trials. Face challenges and tests with joy since it's a chance to discover God in new ways. Finding joy in the face of persecution reminds us of Jesus' promised blessings in Matthew 5:10-12.

Life is full of tests, challenges, and trials. But what is tested and survives is improved. Just as when we were toddlers, we wobbled before we walked, so our faith will be challenged and tried, but will grow stronger through the process.

In the Greek, the verb "encounter" describes being faced with something unexpected. The phrase "various" is literally "multi-colored, or multi-faceted." Trials come in many shapes and forms, which test our abilities, faith, identity, skills, etc.

The word "trials" generally means things that put people to a test. Trials test us (1:2-12). When trials draw us away from God, then the verb form of the same Greek word means "to tempt" (1:13-15). Some things put your faith to the test, some stretch you, challenge you, discourage you, or tempt you to doubt God.

Sometimes our faith is probed by things outside us, like peer pressure, organizational policies, or persecution. Sometimes the trials come from inside, as our ego challenges our decisions to do God's will, instead of doing our own selfish will.

Trials come in many forms, but don't forget that God's grace and strength also come in many manifold ways (see 1 Peter 4:10...same Greek word multi-colored or multifaceted). With every trial, God's grace comes with it (1 Corinthians 10:13). Greet your trials with joy, because that special kind of joy can work as an antidote to trials. James was echoing Jesus from Matthew 5:10-12, *Blessed are you when you are persecuted...for yours is the kingdom of Heaven...Blessed are you when men reproach you...for great will your reward be in Heaven. Trials prove you are in God's kingdom.*

The Purpose and Products of Tested Faith (1:3-4)

1:3. The purpose of our faith being tested is to produce greater endurance or perseverance. Faith is like a muscle; it gets stronger through repetitive use. The Greek word combines traits of both perseverance and endurance. Perseverance is the willpower to keep going, while endurance is the physical capability to do it; both are necessary to succeed.

The word endurance or perseverance is a word picture of a person carrying a heavy load, working hard to keep going against the wind, uphill. Faith that has not been developed or exercised generally falters, whereas faith that has been proven through trusting God is ready to trust God again. Testing reveals to us and to others, that faith in God really does produce amazing results.

1:4. If your faith is to actually complete its work, you must not give up. In 1:4, we see three byproducts that God-empowered endurance produces. Endurance helps us: to be perfect (to reach our end goal, our full potential), to be complete (whole with nothing missing), and to be lacking nothing (leaving nothing stranded behind). We are to let endurance do its whole work in us, so we can become more and more mature, and eventually reach our full potential.

In regard to the importance of faith being tested, each time we trust God, we discover that He is always faithful, which then leads us to love and trust Him even more. This is the major product of our faith being tested. The more

we love Him, the more we trust Him, and His faithfulness encourages us to love Him more.

There is no shortcut on the way to gaining perseverance and endurance except by carrying the load and continuing your journey toward completing the goal.

The Promise of Faith's Testing (1:5-8)

1:5. We need wisdom in times of trial. Wisdom is the practical skill of seeing things through God's eyes, doing things God's way, and making our faith effective in life's scenarios. The Greek "if" in verse 5 would read in English: "if, and you do." Wisdom is always needed when we're under duress or stress. Anytime we are dealing with things beyond our strength, knowledge, or control, we need God's advice and assistance.

So, when you lack needed wisdom, ask God to give it to you, and He will! God wants you to act wisely, so He will provide direction. You need not beg, and God will not chide you for earlier decisions, nor badger you for explanations. God wants you to live by His advice, so ask Him for wisdom on what to do, and how to do it, and He will graciously give it.

1:6. Effective prayer is asking God to do what He has promised to do, which allows believing without doubting. Faith trusts God. We see in verse 5 that God promises to give you wisdom, and faith believes God will do what He promised. So ask in faith, with no doubting that God will do what He promised. Doubt undermines faith.

1:7. To doubt is to be torn in two directions, thereby making no progress. A double-minded person is like a cork riding on a wave; one moment it is being carried toward the shore, the next being carried away from shore. Our faith needs to be anchored in the trustworthiness of God, so whether we are up or down, we are connected to Him, and have confidence in His steadfast character.

1:8. As our faith goes, so goes our entire lives. Being indecisive in faith makes us unstable and shiftier in other areas of our lives as well. Being steadfast in faith leads to confidence in many aspects of our lives.

The Paradox of Tested Faith (1:9-12)

1:9-11. This passage occurs in the midst of a section on enduring trials, so it should be understood in that context. Whether you are in a position considered by others as “low” or as “high,” your external status is irrelevant. What is important is your own attitude. If you are in a “low” position, be joyful in facing your trials, for this life is short, but life eternal is long. If you are rich, be a humble servant of Christ, for your wealth is short-lived, and so is this life. The rich and the poor are all on the same level in Christ’s eyes, and both face equally difficult trials that test their faith.

Regardless of earthly status, trials come to all, and those trials negate any artificial distinctions that separate people. Blessings in eternity are related to our personal faith relationship with God in this life, living wisely, and persevering in obedience to God. As we do this, we reach our full potential, earthly status notwithstanding. All people are to love God, trust God, go forward on the God-given road, regardless of the trials and difficulties.

1:12. The goal of all of our lives is to be the person described in this verse. It is a beatitude, reminiscent of our Lord Jesus. My paraphrase of 1:12 is: “Happy and honored is the person who remains faithful in carrying his or her load until their journey’s end, no matter how difficult. Once you come through the tests of this life, as through the refining fire that remove impurities from gold, you will receive the winner’s trophy, a crown consisting of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

The test is: How much do we love Him? Our trust in Him, and our willingness to tenaciously carry on under heavy loads for Him, is an indicator of our love for Him.

Focusing on the Meaning

All of us are given one life to live. God has placed potential within each of us. None of us have any idea what we are capable of accomplishing under the guidance and power of God working in and through our lives.

The only way to reach our full potential is to enter into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and then daily live our life following the instructions and guidance He gives to us. This takes faith and commitment. It requires our relationship with Jesus to be one based upon love, because love can empower us through any difficulty.

All of us need to continually walk the path that God leads us onto, and carry the loads that God asks us to carry. All of us face trials, troubles, surprise interruptions, fatigue, and times of doubt. Often the road gets steeper and at times the load heavier, but this enables us to experience God deeper and to grow stronger.

We can't finish the journey if we give up, so we want to keep going. When we need God's advice and wisdom, and by faith ask Him for it, we receive it. After each victory and hard slog forward, we realize God is amazing and wonderful, and that by following Him we will reach our full potential in bringing glory to Him.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Blue, J. R. (1985). James. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, Vol. 2. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books), pp. 824-825.
- Bray, G. (Ed.). (2000). *James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), pp. 21-26.
- Burdick, D. W. (1981). James. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Hebrews Through Revelation*, Vol. 12. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House), pp. 174-177.
- Davids, P. H. (2011). *James* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.), pp. 39-43.

- Lange, J. P., Schaff, P., van Oosterzee, J. J., & Mombert, J. I. (2008). *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: James* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software), pp. 73-81.
- Lea, T. D. (1999). *Hebrews, James*, Vol. 10. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers), pp. 263-270.
- Moo, D. J. (2015). *James: An Introduction and Commentary*. E. J. Schnabel, Ed. Second edition, Vol. 16. (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press), p. 3.
- Morgan, C. W. (2010). *A Theology of James: Wisdom for God's People*. R. A. Peterson, Ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing), pp. 18-19.
- Osborne, G. R. (2011). James. In P. W. Comfort (Ed.), *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: James, 1-2 Peter, Jude, Revelation* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers), pp. 46-57.
- Plumptre, E. H. (1890). *The General Epistle of St. James, with Notes and Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 58-63.
- Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1999). *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers), p. 1665.
- Robertson, A. T. (1933). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Jas 1:19-27). (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press).
- Robertson, A. T. (Date: Not dated, Early to Mid-1900's). *Studies in the Epistle of James first published as Practical and Social Aspects of Christianity*. Revised and Edited by Heber F. Peacock (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press).
- Utey, R. J. D. (2000). *Jesus' Half-Brothers Speak: James and Jude*, Vol. 11. (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International), pp. 28-34.

Teaching Plan

DISCOVERY PLAN

Connect With Life

1. Ask if anyone in the class has experience with serious athletic training, especially with weigh-lifting. Then ask questions such as: *How do you improve your performance? Do you continue to increase the weight or difficulty? Does it sometimes challenge or even hurt to do so? What keeps you going? What do you say to yourself when you want to quit?*

Say: *Today we will see what the book of James tells us about learning and enduring under times of stress and difficulty.*

Guide Bible Study

2. Read aloud James 1:1. Prepare a short lecture introducing the book of James. You can use the information in Step #2 of the Discussion Plan below.
3. Have a volunteer read James 1:2-4. On the markerboard, write “Joy” at the top in the center and on the next level down, make two columns, labeled “Is” and “Is Not.” Have the class call out words and phrases that suggest what joy is and is not. For example, *Joy is...an inner confidence. Joy is not...having wealth.* You can also include thoughts about what gives people joy.
4. Ask: *Have you ever had a time of trial or pain when you were aware that it was building character? Was that helpful to you?*
5. Call attention to the sidebar, “What does it mean to be complete?” in the *Study Guide*. Ask the class to suggest other terms/synonyms to render the Greek term *teleios*. Examples include perfect, complete, mature, etc.

6. Divide the class into two teams. Assign one team to define or explain what wisdom is, and the other team to define or explain knowledge. Tell each team to focus on James 1:1-4, but they can use other Scripture if they like. Have each team present their findings.

Then, ask for volunteers to read Proverbs 1:1-2, 7; and Proverbs 2:1-11. Ask: *Does this change our understanding of wisdom? What do we conclude is the source of true wisdom?*

7. Fill a large bowl with water and float a cork on top. Have a volunteer on one side of the bowl say, "I believe God is good all the time," then blow on the cork. Then, have another volunteer on the other side of the bowl say, "I'm not so sure that God is good," and blow the cork in the opposite direction. Repeat this sequence a few times. Then say: *This is the image we get from James 1:6-7. If we are not certain in our faith that God is good and desires only what is good for us, we will be tossed about like this cork.*
8. Bring some magazines to class that have many advertisements. Distribute them out to individuals or small groups and have the class tear out ads or photos of material riches. These could include high-end clothing, jewelry, cars, food and beverages, vacation spots, homes, and furniture, etc. Allow each person or group to show what they found. Note in general terms the items on the markerboard. Then ask: *Which of these things have long-lasting value? Which of them are useful during a time of crisis? Which of them go with the owner after death?*

Then read James 1:9-11. Ask: *What does this tell us about the proper attitude toward earthly riches and the people who concentrate on accumulating them?*

9. Ask: *What are some examples of "crowns"?* (In ancient times, winning athletes received crowns made of laurel leaves. Kings and queens wear crowns. Beauty pageant winners wear crowns.) *What does a crown signify?* (Great achievement; great honor.) Then ask: *What does the "crown of life" signify?* (Great achievement and honor bestowed by God.)

Encourage Application

10. Ask: *What happens to Christians whose faith falters during times of crisis or pain? What does “faltering” look like?* Call attention to the sidebar “When praying for wisdom during trials” in the *Study Guide*. Read each line aloud together. Then ask: *How do these thoughts help us better understand how Christians should react in times of crisis or when their faith begins to fail?* Ask: *When we are enduring a difficult situation, does it help to know there is a purpose? How? What purpose does this passage in James tell us we can count on?*

DISCUSSION PLAN

Connect With Life

1. On the markerboard, write the words “Trials, Tests, Temptations.” Lead the class to brainstorm as many examples as they can and write the words and phrases.

Invite people to think of a difficult time, a past “trial.” Then ask: *Can you say you grew in maturity, wisdom, or faith through that time?* Say: *Today’s lesson will focus on enduring difficult times and achieving maturity in our Christian lives.*

Guide Bible Study

2. Introduce the book of James with some background: *Although there were other people in the early church known as James, the author of this book seems to have been a brother of Jesus. He was sometimes called “James the Just.” James later led the church of believers, primarily Jewish Christians, in Jerusalem. This book was probably written to Jews who had moved away from Jerusalem sometime between A.D. 48 and 52.*

3. Note that the word in verse 2 translated “trials” is the Greek word *peirasmos* [pay-rahs-mos]. It can mean test or trial; an attempt to learn the nature or character of something. It can also mean temptation, an attempt to make someone do something wrong. Point out that the same term *peirasmos* is used in the description of Jesus’ 40 days in the wilderness: Matthew 4:1; Mark 1:12-13; and Luke 4:1-2.

4. Say: *James talks about the wisdom that comes from God (verse 2). Are there any other sources of wisdom? That is, are there any other ways that knowledge is changed into wisdom?*

Lead a discussion to understand the difference between “knowledge” and “wisdom.” Use questions such as: *What are some examples of knowledge? What are some examples of wisdom? What are the opposites of knowledge or of wisdom? Are there different types of knowledge/wisdom? How do people acquire knowledge? How do people acquire wisdom?*

5. Ask a volunteer to read aloud Mark 9:17-24. Ask if anyone can relate to the feelings of the father in this story. Ask: *What do you think James would say to this man about dealing with his doubt?* Ask: *Do you think James is saying here that doubt is a bad thing for a Christian believer? Why or why not?*

State that James’ point is we must pray and petition God with assurance that He desires to help, and He has the power to help.

6. Have the class discuss answers to Question 2 in the *Study Guide*. Note that James was writing to Christian believers, not non-believers. Then ask: *Do you think this teaching from James would make sense to non-believers?*

7. Read James 1:9-11. Ask: *How can a “lowly brother” feel exalted as a member of the body of Christ?* (Every person is on the same level in God’s eyes. Everyone has a purpose in the body of Christ.)

Then ask: *How can a rich person stay humble as a member of the body of Christ?* (Every person is on the same level in God’s eyes. Remembering that riches do not last; they dry up and blow away like dead grass.)

Encourage Application

8. Ask for a volunteer to read the Beatitudes, Matthew 5:3-12. Ask: *Which of these beatitudes seem to describe what would be a hard time/trial/challenge for people?* Then ask: *How does Matthew 5:12 relate to James 1:12?*