



# Real *Life* Christianity

Demonstrating Real Faith in a Real World

Sample Copy

Teacher's Edition

An 13-Week Study in the  
Book of James

Sunday School Lessons  
by Dr. Marty O. Wynn

13 Bible Lessons  
*from the*  
Book of James

Written By:  
Marty O. Wynn, D.D.  
Pastor - Community Baptist  
Church Columbus, GA 31909

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## Lesson #1

### *An Introduction to the Study of the Book of James*

#### **Theme**

James has been called the most practical book in the Word of God. It takes the principles of God's Word and plants them fresh into our everyday lives. This book has been titled by someone as "*Christianity in Overalls*." One writer referred to James as, "The Proverbs of the New Testament."<sup>1</sup> This book takes the Christian life and puts it where the "rubber meets the road!" Phillips states, "The letter of James calls us from a phony piety to a tough faith."<sup>2</sup>

What James presents is the call for a Christianity that is evidenced by works. Some people have attempted to use this book as proof that it is faith plus works that save. However, the Scriptures will never contradict themselves. The Word of God very clearly teaches that it is grace alone that saves (cf. Eph. 2:8-9). Concerning this point, it was John Calvin that stated, "Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone!" Therefore, the theme of this book is ... Developing a faith that will withstand testing, and is evidenced by working. It could be said that James is about *working faith!*

#### **Background**

The early church had just been formed (Acts 2) and now they were under heavy persecution (Acts 8:1; cf. I Pet. 1:6-7). The first verse of the Book of James describes the people to whom this letter is written as "*the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad*." Persecution was heavy against these early church believers. The book of Acts refers to them as people of "*that way*" (Acts 19:9, 23; 24:22), or those of "*this way*" (Acts 9:2; 22:4). The persecution included Saul's arresting people of "*this way*" (Acts 9:2). It was a time when Emperor Nero was unleashing havoc on the Christians. One of Nero's favorite tortures was to use those he arrested as human torches in his gardens. He would tie them to stakes, saturate their bodies in oil and, at sundown, set them on fire.

The *Hall of Faith* chapter in Hebrews 11 describes the martyrdom of many of these early believers. Verses 36-37 record, "(36) *And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: (37) They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented.*" Paul Rader stated, "*These early Christians lived on the threshold of Heaven, within a heartbeat of home, no possessions to hold them back.*" How true!

**TEACHER'S NOTE:** *Foxes Book of Martyrs* and other resources may be helpful for sharing testimonies of those who have been persecuted for their faith in Christ. It should also be pointed out that many people today erroneously believe that it was "easier" for people of James' day to serve God, because they were "Bible Characters." Remind your students that in the Bible days there were no such thing as "Bible Characters." They were living history as normal human beings. They were flesh and blood like believers today,

<sup>1</sup> Ron M. Phillips, *The Royal Law of Royal Living* (Huntsville, AL: Evangel Publications, 1986), 9.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p.9.

and they felt pain, struggled with life, experienced joy and endured suffering like people of today.

Many of these Christians were probably wondering if following Jesus was worth it. After all, Jesus was not visibly present anymore, and to claim to be His follower meant certain persecution. Therefore, this letter is written to tell them to keep their faith and “hang in there,” because the Judge is coming (5:9)! When the Judge comes, all will be made right!

### **Date**

It is generally agreed that James is probably one of the earliest New Testament books written. The date of its writing is around A.D. 45.

### **Writer**

There have been several possibilities offered as to which writer wrote the Book of James. The Bible mentions James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John (Matt. 4:17-22). We also see James, the son of Alphaeus (Matt. 10:3), and James the brother of one of the Judas' (Luke 6:16). In addition to these names, there are some liberal-minded people who maintain that James is simply a false name given by the real writer. However, most conservative scholars agree that the James of this book is the half-brother of Jesus. There is a James who was the half-brother of Jesus (cf. Matt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3) and the brother of Jude, who wrote the book which bears his name.

Prior to the resurrection of Jesus, James was not a believer (Jn. 7:5). He, along with the other siblings of Jesus, thought He might be “beside Himself” (i.e., insane; see Mk. 3:21). Jesus did appear to James after the resurrection (Lk. 24:34) and James, either then or prior, became a believer. This is the same James who became the senior pastor of the church at Jerusalem (cf. Acts 12:17; 21:18). It is this same James who is the human instrument the Holy Spirit used to pen the Book of James.

It is interesting to note that when James identified himself in the first verse, he simply stated that he was “*a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.*” He made no pretense and he did not try to magnify himself by stating the physical relationship that existed between himself and Jesus.

Although the Bible does not tell us how James died, historical tradition states that James was an early church martyr. Wiersbe states, “The story is that the Pharisees in Jerusalem so hated James’ testimony for Christ that they had him cast down from the temple and then beaten to death with clubs. The story also relates that James died, as did his Savior, praying for his murderers, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, Volume 2* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), 334.

**Lesson #2**  
*Responding to Trials (Part #1)*  
 James 1:1-12

Teacher Note: Be sure to review the “Introduction” material (pages 4-5) at the beginning of this lesson.

Introduction

The early church was having a difficult time understanding why they were having such trials after they gave their lives to Christ. There are many Christians today who never accomplish anything for Christ because they become discouraged from improper response to trials, troubles and testing. Such an improper attitude is an example of *reacting, rather than responding*.

A trial will do one of two things...Either it will, (1) Drive you closer to the Lord, or (2) Drive you away from the Lord. A trial will not leave you the same as you were! In chapter one, James deals the proper way to respond by examining the Christian life in relation to **trials**, **temptations**, and **testimony**. This lesson will deal with the first...Trials.

**I. The Promise of Trials** (v.2).

Definition: The word “*temptations*,” as used here, does not mean a tempting to sin. It is from the word, πειρασμός (pi-ras-mos), and means “a testing by fire.” In other words, it is a trial that is uncomfortable for the Christian, but it is needful. Although both words are from the same root word, this one is a little different from the word “*tempted*” found in verses 13-14. In those verses, the word is πειράζω (pi-rad-zo) and means a “tempting” to sin. We will examine that word in the next lesson. However, examine the comparison chart below between the two usages of these words.

<b>Two Uses of the Word the Root Word — <i>Peirasmos</i> (πειρασμός)</b>		
To Test	<i>Meaning</i>	To Tempt
God	<i>The Source</i>	World/Flesh/Devil
To Perfect Us	<i>Purpose</i>	To Cause Us to Fall

A. They are definite.

1. Trials will come.

Notice the word, “*when*.” In other words, it is not a matter of “if,” but “when” the trials will come. Our response to the trial, when it comes is to “*count it all joy*.” Why? Because, as someone has said, “*A faith that cannot be tested; cannot be trusted*.” However, it is possible to rejoice in trials. James says to “*count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations*” (v.2).

✠ **ILLUSTRATION:** It is possible to rejoice in times like this. Peter and the apostles rejoiced over the fact that God had counted them worthy to suffer shame for His name (Acts 5:41; 16:25).

2. Trials will come to everyone.

✠ All Christians will suffer at some time (cf. II Tim. 3:12; I Pet. 2:21; Heb. 12:8).

—II Timothy 3:12 —“*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*” (emphasis added). According to this verse, if we never suffer, then it is apparent that we are not “living Godly.”

—I Peter 2:21 —“*For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps*” (cf. Php. 1:29). According to these verses, if we never suffer, then it is apparent that we are not following in the steps of Christ.

—Hebrews 12:8 —“*But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons*” (emphasis added). According to this verse, if we never suffer chastisement for our sinful living, then it is apparent that we are not saved.

- B. They are different.

1. Different in their appearance.

Notice the word, “*divers*” (i.e., various, or of various sorts). Trials come in all shapes and sizes. If it were always one trial, we could get used to it and easily recognize it when it came. The real test comes in our ability to trust the Lord through all types.

2. Different in their approach.

Different tools have different purposes. As we will see in the next point, God also uses the various “tools” of trials to accomplish different things in our lives.

## II. The Purpose of Trials (vv. 3-4).

- A. Molds us in maturity in Christ.

1. Problems produce patience (v.3, “*the trying of your faith worketh patience*”).

Notice that it is not a wistful hope, but it is a confident knowledge (“*Knowing this*”). As we pass through the furnace of affliction, we can **KNOW** that it has an end and purpose.