

Join us in being on mission with God!

**OUR VISION**

To continually mature and grow as a united body of Jesus-imitators who live out God's greatest commandment to "Love" by exalting God and serving one another, and His greatest commission to "Go" by reaching into and shaping our local, regional, and global communities.

## "God's Agenda in Adversity"

*James 1:1-12*

### Getting Started

*After an introductory time, discuss the following questions in your group or class.*

When you purchase an electronic device or a home appliance, many vendors will want to sell you a contract to add a level of insurance to the product. You may even receive solicitations to buy repair insurance on your car or other products you own. We protect valuables in special containers or safety deposit boxes. If we own a home, we insure the building and the contents to minimize our potential loss. We use GPS devices to plot a trip, even to find locations along the way. We consider getting flu shots—especially in light of the H1N1 strain. We hire a tax professional to fill out our taxes so we don't make a mistake and trigger an audit.

Christians pray for safe travel, sunny days for weddings, fresh snow for skiing, and lots of fish when we put the line in the water. We ask God to help strained relationships heal, to open doors for witnessing, and to spare us from costly or life-threatening diseases.

Many of us work diligently to minimize or avoid hardships in life. It's natural for us to wish for a life without adversity, distress, difficulty, and challenge. But despite our dislike for adversity, God permits some of it into our lives anyway. We've all tasted it in the past. Some of us are going through it now. We'll taste more of it in the future. So what are we to do?

**Q:** Identify some of the unpleasant circumstances God orchestrated in the lives of those he loved. I've started the table for you. Finish the column to the right.

Abraham and Isaac	Challenged to believe that God could raise Isaac from the dead.
Sarah	Infertility
Rachel	(See Gen. 19:31)
Joseph son of Jacob	
Moses (multiple times)	
Balaam	(See Numbers 22)
Daniel	
Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego	
David (before being king)	
Esther	
Joseph and Mary	
Paul	(See 2 Cor. 12:7)
Hezekiah	(See 2 Kings 20:1-6)
12 Disciples	(See Matt. 8:24)
Early church	(See Acts 8:3)



**James 1:1-12**

<sup>1</sup> James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings. <sup>2</sup> Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, <sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. <sup>4</sup> Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. <sup>5</sup> If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. <sup>6</sup> But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; <sup>8</sup> he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does. <sup>9</sup> The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. <sup>10</sup> But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. <sup>11</sup> For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business. <sup>12</sup> Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

**Thinking about Adversity**

Some of the adversity we see in the lives of those in the Bible is critical to God's clear plan. God wanted the nation that would come from Abraham to start with a supernatural conception—Abraham would father a son at age 100.

1. In what way was the adversity Abraham and Sarah endured as infertile parents required in order for God to glorify himself?  
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2. What are some of the other personal cases of adversity that God either designed or allowed in order to record miraculous work in the Bible? (Hint: Think of situations like 1 Kings 17:17.)  
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3. Adversity touches those who are indifferent to God or those who don't believe he is involved in life today. How would you expect their attitude toward adversity to be different of that of the people in questions 1 and 2?  
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4. How does our modern 'entitlement mentality' shape our attitude toward adversity? What do you think tends to be our first response when adversity comes our way? Why is this our common reaction today?  
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**A bit of background**

To best understand James' counsel on facing adversity, you must understand something about him and the audience to whom he writes. Most conservative scholars believe that the author of this letter is James the half-brother of Jesus, son of Joseph and Mary. This was the most popular view through the 16th century as well.

1. Why is it unlikely that the author was not James the brother of John? (See Acts 12:2.)  
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Another candidate among the twelve disciples is James the son of Alphaeus. But we know nothing about him.

2. Assuming the author was Jesus' half-brother James, what attitude would he have had about Jesus before the crucifixion? (See John 7:5.) How might this have shaped his understanding of faith later in life?  
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## God's Agenda in Adversity

3. According to verse 1, who is the audience? What might their situation have to do with responding to affliction? (See Acts 8:1; 11:19; 1 Peter 1:1.)

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4. Why do you think James addresses the believers as the “twelve tribes”? What does this imply about their background?

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### Responding to Affliction

Verse 2 speaks of thinking about facing trials as a joy. At first this sounds somewhat masochistic—as though we like or enjoy misery. It's a call to a radical attitude. Viewing something as a joy is a choice. Children are good at en-joy-ing things adults don't value much. (Example: staying up after 9:00 PM, spending a quarter in a candy machine, playing with a yo-yo.)

1. What are some of the things in life that children sometimes see as a joy simply because they choose to?

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2. What are some of the things you may enjoy now that you did not consider a joy earlier in your life?

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3. The bible connects a trial with the testing of faith. What is the link between the two?

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4. When directed by the Spirit, this testing produces a byproduct in verse 3. It's called *perseverance* (NIV) or *endurance* (NASB). Define those words below:

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5. Why is it difficult to develop *perseverance* or *endurance* apart from testing?

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6. Over the course of time, perseverance produces something else according to verse 4. What does it generate?

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7. Verses 5-7 are a bit of a tangent. They remind us that as God uses trials in our life, we need an additional resource from Him. What is it we need in order to view the trial with joy and allow it to teach us perseverance?

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Reaching Up and Reaching Out

HARVEST EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

524 River Hills Dr. P.O. Box 291

Phone: 515-733-5360
Web: www.harvestefree.org
E-mail: office@harvestefree.org



8. How does verse 5 describe the attitude God has toward us when we ask for wisdom (and other things)? Why is it important to remember that this is how God views our pleas?

Two horizontal lines for writing.

8. James likes word pictures. One of the first ones he uses is in verse 6. Describe an experience you've had with water and waves.

Two horizontal lines for writing.

9. What is the point of comparison between doubt and wind-tossed waves?

Two horizontal lines for writing.

10. When our minds are full of doubt, what can we expect of the Lord? How does Mark 9:24 and Matthew 17:20 encourage us?

Two horizontal lines for writing.

Verses 9-11 don't seem to connect with the topic of affliction either. They are linked because they talk about the way we view ourselves and what we expect from life when we face a trial.

11. Verses 9-10 speak of two counter-intuitive attitudes we should adopt throughout all of life (as well as when we face trial). What attitude are we to have if we are in humble circumstances? (This speaks of having few or limited resources.)

Two horizontal lines for writing.

12. What attitude should we have if we seem to have sufficient or abundant resources in the face of a trial?

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13. How do these opposite attitudes help us learn from trials, persevere, and become more complete or whole in Christ?

Two horizontal lines for writing.

14. Verse 12 speaks about an added benefit for those who by God's grace persevere under trial. When we pass the test, what else does God give to us? What do you think he means by this metaphor? [We obviously don't earn our salvation.]

Two horizontal lines for writing.

15. Why is it important that the promise is addressed "to those who love him"?

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