

# JAMES

MARK IT UP

## James 1:1-4 **LEADER'S** Discussion Guide

Week of 2/13/22

Some of you may like to overachieve, but *we recommend only asking 2-3 of these!* A longer, deeper conversation over fewer questions is usually better than trying to answer them all.

**Icebreaker:** Can you think of examples from life where trials or tests can produce something good? What are some of them?

There are many examples, but we could include physical fitness and athletics where we intentionally break a sweat in order to obtain a greater strength, cardiovascular stamina, or skill. With education, we grow the most when we stretch ourselves in difficult reading, writing, calculating, and discovering. At work, a team we're part of may achieve a great feat by taking on a project that calls for a maximum effort from everyone. All of these examples can also lead to a longer and/or more fulfilling experience of life.

**Getting Started:** Read James 1:1-4 as a group.

**1.** We may not be as familiar with who James was as we are with other New Testament authors like Paul and Peter. Look up Mark 6:1-3, John 7:1-5, and 1 Corinthians 15:3-8. What can we learn about James from these verses?

There are 3 primary candidates for who this "James" is:

1. James the brother of John and son of Zebedee: Acts 12:2 records his death in AD 44—likely too soon after Jesus's death and resurrection for him to have written this book, and the NT doesn't mention him again following his death.
2. James the son of Alphaeus: He's a minor character in the NT and was likely not prominent enough in the early church to have written this book.
3. James the brother of Jesus: The verses tell us that James is a younger brother of Jesus, that he did not initially believe that Jesus was the Messiah, but that he had a supernatural encounter with the resurrected Jesus that presumably was the experience that brought him to faith.

**2.** "Dispersion" in verse 1 means that James is writing to people "scattered" across the Mediterranean region. What kind of challenges can you imagine these early Christians faced as they sought to follow Jesus within an empire known for its pagan, un-Christian beliefs and customs?

*Building Christ-centered communities of people  
fully devoted to loving God and loving others.*

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We can imagine the tension they must've experienced between being good citizens of the empire and being true to their Christian faith. Paganism was so ingrained into the culture that worship of the Greco-Roman pantheon was often a "patriotic" duty and display of loyalty to the empire. Societal pressure would have been strong to go along with these customs.

*Application:* Can we relate to similar challenges today? If so, how?

We are of course suggesting we can! If you're not seeing it, think of areas where we experience or at least perceive a pressure to "go with the flow" of society in ways that would require us to compromise our faithfulness to the Lord.

**3.** In verse 2, James commands his audience to count or "consider" trials as pure joy!? What's his rationale in verses 3-4 for this perspective?

These verses tell us that the trials test our faith in a way that can produce steadfastness, which in-turn can lead to spiritual maturity. This growing maturity is something we are meant to experience in this life; however, its fullness or completeness will come only in the life to come (see Philippians 3:12-16).

James's words are a bit ironic here because the word "count" is an intellectual idea rather than an emotional one. Joy, though, is something we often think of as an emotion. Altogether, James is calling us to make a decision to find joy in trials even if our emotions are protesting against it.

Finally, we should be clear that James is not calling us to celebrate the trial itself, but rather the outcome of what God can use that trial to accomplish. Car accidents, cancer, disabilities, loneliness, financial struggles, etc. are not great...but they can lead to something great as we adopt the perspective James is calling us to.

*Application:* Think of a recent trial you've faced. Now, try applying the lens James is describing in these verses. Can you see how the outcome of the trial could actually become a cause for joy? Talk about it with the group.

If you have an example, this may be a good time for you to answer first to get the ball rolling.

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**4.** Trials can produce endurance, which in-turn can lead us to being “perfect and complete, lacking in nothing”—a description commentators relate to maturity in faith and character.

*Application:* What difference does it make in our life that trials are a tool God uses to bring about something good rather than something outside God’s control and to be avoided at all costs?

This is a more abstract question, but it’s also an invitation to reflect on and marvel at God’s sovereignty and grace that we find in unlikely places. What if trials were only bad and God was not able to use them to produce maturity in us? What if we should instead make it our life’s purpose do everything we can to avoid every trial?

We should be able to experience a level of peace if we know that even life’s trials are part of God’s arsenal of tools that are shaping us and causing us to become who he made us to be. We aren’t called to seek trials out, but neither do we need to walk through life carefully attempting to shield ourselves from every problem.

**5.** Look up Matthew 5:11-12, Romans 5:3-5 and 1 Peter 1:6-7. What do you see in these passages that is similar to James 1:2-4?

This should be self-explanatory, but it’s a good way to see a similar perspective offered by Jesus, Paul, and Peter.

*Application:* Pray together as a group that you would have the perspective James is calling for in these verses as you encounter your own trials.