

[James 1:9-18](#)

Trial or Temptation?

Topics: [Firstfruits](#), [Father of the heavenly lights](#), [Tempted](#), [Crown](#), [Trial or Temptation?](#)

There is really no break in James's train of thought between [1:8](#) and [1:9](#); we divided the section only to keep the lessons at manageable lengths. So, read all of [1:2-18](#) in preparation for this lesson.

Rich and poor ([1:9-11](#))

Study Skill—Context

It is important to study verses in context rather than seeing them as isolated statements. In nearly every book, the author is following a train of thought. Each statement is meant to contribute to a larger, whole message.

For example, since [1:2-4](#) and [1:12-18](#) are clearly about trials and temptations, it is reasonable to infer that [1:5-8](#) and [1:9-11](#) are on the same topic. The context (trials) suggests that James intends praying for wisdom ([1:5-8](#)) to be a way of dealing with trials while our faith is being tested. Likewise the context suggests that James means [1:9-11](#) to be examples of trials we may face.

It is sometimes harder to trace James's train of thought than it is to follow Paul's logic in his letters. However, try to keep these two questions in mind whenever you study a passage of Scripture:

1. What is the author saying in this passage?
2. Why does he say it here? (That is what does it have to do with what comes before and after?)

There are certainly times when a writer breaks off abruptly and begins on a totally new subject but those are the exception. Reading passages like [James 1:5-11](#) in context helps us to see more fully what James is getting at.

1. What is the "high position" in which the brother without wealth should take pride ([James 1:9](#); [James 2:5](#))? (Optional: See [Luke 6:20](#); [Col. 1:27](#).)

2. In what "low position" should the rich believer take pride ([1:10-11](#))?

3. How is each person's position potentially a trial that can bring perseverance and maturity?
the humble brother's high position

the rich brother's low position

A blessing ([1:12](#))

4. What promises encourage us to have joy ([1:2](#)) amid trials ([1:12](#))? (*Optional: See also [Matthew 5:11-12](#); [Hebrews 10:34](#); [Hebrews 12:2](#); [1 Peter 1:6-7](#).*)

Crown ([1:12](#)). Victorious athletes and military leaders were crowned with garlands of flowers or wreaths of leaves. A different word was used for a king's crown. The victory crown for the Christian who perseveres is eternal *life*.

5. Summarize the results of trials that James names in [1:1-12](#) ([1:3-4](#), [12](#)) and how we should therefore respond to trials ([1:2](#), [5-11](#)).

results

response

Temptation ([1:13-18](#))

James is interested in practical faith, but he knows that the practical must be rooted in true beliefs. When trials come from without, we may be ruined by not understanding God's single-minded, loving purpose to mature us ([1:1-12](#)). Likewise, when evil tempts us, we may wrongly believe that God is out to get us or that "the devil made us do it." Once again, godly practice can be grounded only in a true perception of God's nature and our own.

Tempted ([1:13-14](#)). Remember that although *temptation*, *trial*, and *testing* all reflect the same Greek word-group, the Bible distinguishes among them. God led Israel into the wilderness to test the people's faith ([Exodus 20:20](#); [Deut. 8:2](#), [16](#)), and God also tested Abraham's faith by commanding him to sacrifice his son ([Genesis 22:1](#)). The Spirit of God led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan ([Matthew 4:1](#)). Satan tempted Jesus to evil, but God permitted it for good—as a test and refining of Jesus' faith ([Hebrews 2:10](#), [18](#); [Hebrews 4:15-16](#); [James 1:2-4](#)). Job had the same experience ([Job 1:6-2:10](#); [Job 42:1-6](#)).

6. God is never the source of temptation to evil ([1:13](#)). Of what things is He the source ([1:5](#), [16-18](#))?

7. From what you know about God's nature, why is it impossible that God could be responsible for your being tempted to do evil? (*Optional: See [1 John 1:5](#); [1 John 4:8-10](#).*)

8. a. What is the real source of temptations to sin ([1:14](#))?

b. What is the ultimate result ([1:15](#))?

c. The truth of [1:15](#) is an unavoidable law, as certain as the law of gravity. Think about the source of life. Why must desiring evil lead to death? (*Optional: See [Isaiah 59:2](#); [1 John 1:5-7](#); [1 John 5:11-13](#).*)

9. God is the source of "every good and perfect gift" ([1:17](#)). What gifts would be helpful in dealing with one's evil desires? (See, for example, [James 1:5](#); [Luke 11:11-12](#).)

Notice the two alternate progressions of life that James has described:

Faith—trials that test it—
perseverance—maturity ([1:2-4](#)).

or

Desire—temptation—sin—death ([1:14-15](#)).

We can go from tested faith to maturity, or from indulged desire to death. Each process is a slow, almost imperceptible series of choices made daily. Choices lead to habits, and habits set a character turned either toward or against God.

Father of the heavenly lights ([1:17](#)). Literally, "father of lights." The fact that God is the Creator of the sun, moon, stars and planets has several implications. They are some of His most splendid works, glittering examples of the "good and perfect gift[s]" He sends us. They are symbols of His truth and moral purity, as John says, "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all" ([1 John 1:5](#)). Yet they fall short of His perfection: eclipses and clouds shade their light, yet in God "is no variation or shadow due to change" ([James 1:17](#), RSV). Or, as the NIV reads God "does not change like shifting shadows" cast by the heavenly lights.

Firstfruits ([1:18](#)). Each year in Israel, the first sheaf of harvested grain (the firstfruits) was offered to God as a sign that the whole belonged to Him and would soon be gathered in ([Leviticus 23:9-14](#)). The firstfruits were first in quality as well as time.

10. What do you think "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth" ([1:18](#)) means? (Is James talking about natural birth [[Genesis 1:26-27](#); [Genesis 2:4-7](#)] or spiritual rebirth [[1 Peter 1:23-25](#)]?)

Study Skill—Summarizing and Outlining

If you summarize a passage after you study it, you may find yourself better able to grasp its main point now and remember it later. Try to use one sentence. Your [titles](#) on question 4 of lesson one may be helpful.

The next step toward organizing and remembering a passage is to outline it. Question 4 of lesson one is a broad [outline](#) of the whole book, you can add outlines for each passage that are as detailed as you like. You can make an outline as you go along or wait until you have finished the book.

11. From [1:1-18](#), how would you summarize the difference between trials and temptations?

Study Skill—Application

You may find the following steps helpful in planning an application:

1. Record the verse or passage that contains the truth you want to apply to your life. If the passage is short enough, consider copying it word for word, as an aid to memory.
2. State the truth of the passage that impresses you. For instance: *"God is completely dependable, like an unchanging light ([1:17](#)). He is absolutely holy and good. He is responsible for the good things in my life, including trials that lead to maturity, but I am responsible for entertaining temptation to sin ([1:13-14](#))."*
3. Describe how you already see this truth at work in your life. For example: *"God has given me physical life, eternal life and the ability to resist temptation. He enabled me to overcome self-pity during the illness I had several years ago. He enabled me to forgive my parents for the ways they treated me as a child."*
4. Tell how you fall short: or want to grow in relation to this truth. (Ask God to help you see yourself clearly.) For example: *"I tend to blame God for my weaknesses because I feel guilty about giving in to my desires. I focus more on my faults and desires than on the good things God gives. In particular, I blame God for the situation at work that makes me often irritable, even at my spouse."*
5. State precisely what you plan to do about having your life changed in this area. Ask God what you can do. Don't forget that transformation depends on His will, power, and timing, not on

yours. Diligent prayer should always be part of your application ([1:5](#)). For instance: *"I will confess to my spouse the guilt and anger I have been feeling and the wrong ways I have been treating him/her. I will thank God each day this week for all the good gifts He has given me. I will ask Him to help me not to give in to the temptation to lash out at others or to nurse anger inside. To accomplish this, I will need to spend at least a half hour in prayer each day, focusing intently on who God is, as described in [1:13-18](#)."*

6. Plan a way to remind yourself of what you have decided, such as putting a note on your refrigerator or desk or asking a friend or relative to remind you. You might also want to ask that person to pray with you about your plans.

12. What one insight from [1:9-18](#) seems most personally significant to you right now?

13. How do you see this truth already affecting your life?

14. How do you fall short or need to grow in this area? (Be as specific as possible.)

15. What can you do this week to act on this insight?

16. How can you make sure you remember to do this?

17. If you have any questions about [1:9-18](#) or this lesson, write them here.