# THE ROAD TO CHRISTIAN MATURITY LISTENING FOR GOD THROUGH JAMES 1:1-12

## Summary

The road to Christian maturity is not an easy path. It takes us through the difficult and unpleasant experiences of our human existence. Some of these experiences may be daily struggles of life shared by all humanity, but other experiences go beyond the ordinary, and these we may find difficult and even unbearable. Regardless of the size of our struggles, we have the choice to allow them to hinder us or help us in our spiritual growth. The outcome depends on the way we encounter trials

Trials of life, if encountered with uncertainty and wavering, will result in a defeated Christian life. This option will take us nowhere. Trials of life, if encountered with commitment and trust in God, will foster spiritual growth. This second road leads to a deep, satisfying life. James helps us discover this road to Christian maturity through today's reading.

# PREPARATION Focus Your Thoughts

How do you respond to the struggles of life? What is the level of your perseverance?

When you pray, do you pray with confidence that God will answer your prayer, or do you pray with uncertainty about God's answer?

# READING HEAR THE WORD

James the Just, brother of Jesus, applies in this letter the foundational teachings of Jesus to specific situations that his audience faced in the middle of the first century. The suffering of the Christian community is a key concern in this book of the Bible. James's goal is to challenge his audience to persevere in the midst of trials and to stand firm in their trust in God.

In this opening section, you will encounter the following words and phrases:

Servant: Though a leader, James sees himself as a slave called into the service of God.

The 12 tribes of Israel: James uses this term to describe believers.

Pure joy: A joy that is deep and overflowing.

*Trials:* The experience of suffering and hardship in life.

Perseverance: A firm, consistent display of faith and commitment.

#### THE ROAD TO CHRISTIAN MATURITY

Wisdom: A gift from God that gives a person the ability to discern God's plans.

Believe: The commitment to trust God.

*Doubt:* Wavering thoughts and actions despite a knowledge of the truth.

Crown of life: Eternal life.

Look for these phrases as you read James 1:1-12.

## MEDITATION TENGAGE THE WORD

## Meditate on James 1:1-4

James calls his readers to have deep and overflowing joy when they face difficult situations in life. He reminds them that perseverance is necessary for their development as whole persons. What kind of trials does James refer to? Why does James think it is possible for a believer to have deep joy in the midst of life's adversities?

Read the verse below from Paul's letter to the Philippians. What do you think was the source of Paul's rejoicing? Why did he challenge his readers to always rejoice? How difficult is it to rejoice in light of the trials James mentions? Why?

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!
—Paul (Phil. 4:4)

Perseverance is a rare character trait in our day. Why do most people lack this character trait?

James indicates that perseverance is a process—a character trait developed over time. How can perseverance be developed in the life of a Christian according to James?

According to verse 4, we are to lack nothing. What do you lack in your life? What do you need to do to gain what is lacking in your life?

## Meditate on James 1:5-8

James reminds his readers that they should ask God for wisdom to withstand trials. Wisdom is a true display of the generosity of God. It is a gift wrapped with the presence of the Holy Spirit who comforts and sustains the people of God in their trials. When faced with trials, what does your first response tend to be?

James challenges his readers to ask for wisdom from God with an unwavering attitude. What do you think James meant by "he must believe?" What is the difference between honest doubt and doubt that is a hindrance to faith?

Read the quote from F. Mussner on page 17 and reflect on the root cause of a person's inner conflict between the trust and distrust of God. Now reflect on a time or an event when you had the greatest difficulty trusting God. How did you overcome that situation? The doubter is "one who lives in inner conflict between trust and distrust of God."

—F. Mussner, quoted by Peter H. Davids

## Meditate on James 1:9-11

James speaks about the poor and the rich. The present condition of the poor is deplorable, whereas the present condition of the rich is comfortable. Why do you think James speaks of the poor and the rich in this text? How do these verses relate to the preceding verses?

Read the quote from Jesus. Then read its context, Luke 18:18-25. Think about James's statement in light of the story of the rich ruler in Luke's Gospel.

How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!

—Jesus (Luke 18:24)

Those who are preoccupied with their present circumstances may never truly know the joy that lies ahead. Yet the road to maturity invites us to have a broader perspective. What are the things you are preoccupied with these days? How do you see yourself? Are you poor or rich from God's perspective?

#### Meditate on James 1:12

God promises His children that perseverance through trials leads to the reward of eternal life. James's words here are a pronouncement of blessing and an invitation to those who become bogged down by the pressures of life and give up too quickly. What do you see as James's invitation to you in this verse? How would you explain the promise in this verse to someone who is struggling to maintain faith?

# PRAYER ASK AND LISTEN

Seek the face of God. Ask, "Lord, what are You saying to us today?"

James invites Christians to receive God's gift of wisdom—the Holy Spirit—to help us withstand the trials of life. Pray silently for God's gift. Pray with the certainty that God not only hears, but will answer your prayer.

# CONTEMPLATION REFLECT AND YIELD

How would your life be different if you were totally committed to trusting God in the middle of trials?

Do you see the present realities of your life with the broader perspective of God's will and purpose for your life? Are you open to the gift God has for you?



## GROUP STUDY

- What do you think is the true measure of a mature Christian?
- How do you handle the trials of life?
- Has there been a time when you tried to handle a trial on your own strength? If so, what happened?
- Has there been a time when you asked the Holy Spirit to help you during a trial? If so, what happened?
- What lessons have you learned from each of those experiences?
- What are the keys to persevering during the trials of life?
- God calls us not only to trust in Him but to lead others into a trusting relationship with Him. Think of someone you know who is easily dragged down by the struggles of life. Make a commitment to seek out that person and help him or her develop a stronger faith in God.