

Teaching Plan  
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: October 21, 2018

Lesson Title: "With Control"

Lesson Passage: James 1:2-17

ABOUT THIS LESSON

As is typical of personal correspondence, James includes a variety of topics in his letter. In the verses chosen for this week's lesson passage, it is very likely that he is responding to questions and concerns that have come to him from members of the congregation. He discusses the meaning of hardships in the lives of believers, the Christian's quest for spiritual wisdom and faith, the spiritual implications of poverty and wealth, the source of temptation and the consequences of yielding to it, and the dependability of God's gracious gifts.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

(1) Explain James's seemingly strange advice, "count it all joy when your faith is tested by various trials." (2) Explain the probable reason for James's argument concerning the origin of temptation.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

To introduce the lesson, refer to the well-known scene in the movie, *Forrest Gump*, in which Forrest (played by Tom Hanks) says, "*My mom always said life was like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get.*" Then use that to illustrate this comment on the arrangement of the biblical book of James: "Biblical scholars find it impossible to present a logical outline of James, because this is a personal letter, not a formal treatise. And, like our personal letters, it deals with a variety of subjects. We could rearrange the order of his thoughts without any loss of meaning."

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. *Note that, in 1:2-4, James tells his readers that even difficult experiences can produce constructive results.* (He is not referring to hardships of all kinds. Rather, he is commenting on the religious persecution that many followers of Christ were enduring, the unpleasant experiences that tested the genuineness of their Christian faith.): (1) The notion that "bad things" should be reserved for wicked people is unbiblical. Jesus suffered precisely because he was good. And God's people have sometimes actually welcomed suffering (*read Acts 5:41*). James is advocating this attitude in Jas. 1:2. (2) Testing can strengthen us (v. 3). The Greek term translated "temptations" in the KJV actually means "testing" in the sense that a young bird tests its wings. ILLUSTRATION: The rigorous training of an athlete is "testing" in this sense. The pain of practice brings "joy" in the heat of compe-

tion. This is the meaning of the popular saying regarding the rigors of athletic training, "No pain, no gain." (3) Testing builds endurance (v. 3). ("Endurance" is a better translation of the word rendered as "patience" in v. 3, KJV). The idea is not that of passively submitting to whatever comes; but, rather, "staying power" like that of a soldier who keeps on fighting in the face of overwhelming odds. (4) Testing promotes growth in the Christian life (v. 4). In this verse, James uses three terms to describe characteristics of Christian maturity: "perfect," "entire" and "wanting nothing." "Perfect" means, literally, "having achieved the purpose." "Entire" means "complete," "nothing lacking." "Wanting nothing" means "having no deficiencies."

3. *Focus on the next point*, what James has to say about the relationship between prayer and the gift of wisdom (James 1:5-6): (1) "Wisdom" in v. 5 means moral and spiritual knowledge, not factual or scientific knowledge. ILLUSTRATION: Science tells us how to create and use nuclear energy; but wisdom tells us whether to use it in given circumstances. (2) God is the source of this wisdom (read Prov. 1:7). (3) Since God is the source of wisdom, the obvious way to acquire it is to pray for it. Solomon prayed for this kind of wisdom (2 Chron. 1:8-12). QUOTATION: "Christian prayer is not an attempt to change the mind of God, it is the opening of the heart to the transforming influence of the Spirit of God" (Burton Scott Easton).

4. *Interpret what James says about the origin of temptation in Jas. 1:13-15*: (1) Ask someone to read v. 13, then suggest that, apparently, some Christians were blaming God for their moral failures. But James says flatly, in v. 13, that God is not the source of temptation. God can neither be tempted nor does He tempt anyone to sin. QUESTION: What, then, is the meaning of the petition in the Lord's Prayer, "lead us not into temptation" (Matt. 6:13)? EXPLANATION: The meaning of this petition is, "Let us not be *tested* (not 'tempted') beyond our ability to resist." (2) The temptation that leads to sin originates from desires within a person. (The verb "enticed" in v. 14, RSV, refers literally to luring a fish with bait.) (3) *Suggest this as a possible rendering of v. 15*: "When someone obeys his evil desire, then he commits a sin. And when a person keeps on sinning, then he will die spiritually (or eternally)."

5. *Comment on James 1:16-17*: James adds this sharp warning in order to keep his readers from wrong ideas about the source of temptation, sin, and death. God is not responsible for them; He gives only good gifts to the people of the world. In contrast to the heavenly bodies, He never changes, and never leaves us in darkness.

#### CLOSING THE LESSON

*To conclude the lesson, refer to the affirmation in James 1:17*: God, "the Father of lights" (i.e., Creator of the heavenly bodies, the sun, moon and stars) doesn't dangle temptations before His people; rather, He gives "good and perfect gifts" (v. 17).

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