

DEPENDABLE OR DOUBLE-MINDED?

James 1:1-18

No pain. No gain. Or so the saying goes. Athletes remind themselves of this to get their best possible performance. Sometimes they have to go through grueling training. Without it, there is no improvement. James suggests it is the same for Christians.

Group Discussion. “Getting in shape is simple. Just eat right and exercise regularly.” Why do you find this easier said than done?

Personal Reflection. Think about when you have been in great shape physically. How does this compare and contrast to being in good shape spiritually?

In this study we will look at the importance of perseverance when we face trials and temptations. *Read James 1:1-18.*

1. What are the different situations described in this passage in which you see the need for Christians to persevere?

2. How do you respond to the idea that we should “consider it pure joy” whenever we “face trials of many kinds” (v. 2)?

3. How are perseverance and maturity developed in us by enduring trials (vv. 3-4)?

4. What difficult experiences have increased your perseverance and maturity?

5. How might trials expose our need for God's wisdom (v. 5)?

6. Under pressure, how does the faithful Christian (vv. 5-6) contrast with the person described in verses 6-8?

7. In the context of trials and perseverance, why does James contrast rich and poor Christians (vv. 9-11)?

8. In what ways do you tend to rely on your possessions?

9. How are temptations different from trials (vv. 2-16)?

10. What role does God play when we face trials and when we face temptations (vv. 2-16)?

11. How is God the ultimate example of goodness and dependability (vv. 16-18)?

How is this a source of joy and hope for you?

12. Think of trials or temptations you are currently facing. How can this passage encourage you to depend on God?



Talk to God about your trials and temptations and your need for his wisdom in those situations. Ask him to help you to learn to persevere and to be like him in his goodness and dependability.

NOW OR LATER

One of the best ways to appreciate God's dependability is to recall the different ways he has shown his faithfulness in the past. Make a list of the ways you have seen God's reliability at work. Take time to thank and praise him for his steadfast love.

WORDS, WORDS, WORDS

James 1:19-27

We all do it. It's as common as flies around a horse. While someone else is talking, we're thinking about what we're going to say next instead of considering what is being said to us. We know others are worth more care and attention. But the habit is hard to break. God wants us to slow down and listen too. But even when we've really listened to him, we're still not done.

Group Discussion. Really understanding each other is tough even when we understand the words people use. Remember the dictionary game? Each person makes up a definition of an unusual word and writes it on a piece of paper. The leader writes down the real definition and then reads what everyone has written. Each person in the group tries to guess which one is right. Try one or two rounds with some of the following words: *oviparous*, *foraminifer*, *isochroous*, or *bersagliere*. (The real definitions are in the leader's notes—no peeking!)

Personal Reflection. Think about a specific situation in which you were not pleased with how you listened to someone else. Think of another situation in which you were not pleased with how someone listened to you. Why is it so difficult to be a good listener?

This study gives us practical help on listening to others and to the Word as well as help on how to put the Word into practice. *Read James 1:19-27.*

1. What do you learn about what God desires from us from these verses?

2. How can being quick to listen and slow to speak help us be slow to become angry (v. 19)?

3. How could the commands in verse 19 affect the way your small group or Christian fellowship interacts?

4. When have you experienced the truth that “man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires” (v. 20)?

5. James tells us that God’s Word was planted in us. What weeds can choke that Word and keep it from growing (v. 21)? Explain.

6. In your own words explain how the person who merely listens is different from the one who puts God’s Word into practice (vv. 22-25).

7. Why is there a tendency for Christians to listen to and yet not to follow God’s Word?

| How can you avoid this tendency?

| **8.** According to verses 26 and 27, how do people who think they are religious differ from those who are truly religious?

| **9.** Based on what you've read in this chapter, do you think James would be satisfied with good works apart from our listening to and receiving God's Word? Explain.

| **10.** Give some specific examples of how your religion could become more "pure and faultless" in the sense James has in mind in verse 27.



Ask God to help you become a better listener and doer of his Word.

NOW OR LATER

There is so much to listen to all around us. Take blocks of time over the next few days or weeks to discover what voices and messages are on your mind. Jot them down. Ask God to help you deal with those that distract you from him. Ask him to help you clear your mind and to focus on his Word.

WHO'S THE JUDGE?

James 2:1-13

Labels are found in more places than on soup cans. We put them on people all the time. Funny or dull. Smart or thickheaded. Friendly or cold. There are all kinds of ways we can categorize people. And our categories can have a profound influence on the way we treat people.

Group Discussion. What kinds of things make you favor one person more than another?

Personal Reflection. Take time to think about the judgmental thoughts and words you have had this week. Confess them to God. Allow yourself to experience his mercy.

As you might suspect, James has a few words to say about favoritism. *Read James 2:1-13.*

1. What are some results of showing favoritism (vv. 4, 6, 9, 13)?
2. Why should believing in “our glorious Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 1) keep us from showing favoritism?
3. How would you react if someone came into your church who wore sloppy clothes, was dirty, or had body odor (vv. 2-4)?

4. Why do many people give preferential treatment to those who have money?

5. Verse 5 says God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith. Is God guilty of showing favoritism in this way? Explain.

6. Is it easier to have faith when you are poor than when you are rich? Explain.

7. From a practical standpoint, why was it foolish for early Christians to favor the rich over the poor (vv. 6-7)?

To what extent is James's description of the rich valid today?

8. How can "the royal law" (v. 8) guide our treatment of both poor and rich?

9. How do verses 9-11 emphasize the seriousness of treating people unequally?

10. In what sense is violating one law as serious as breaking every law?

11. What happens to those who show mercy and those who do not (vv. 12-13)?

12. The cross is the ultimate example of mercy triumphing over judgment. How has the mercy you have received there affected the way you interact with others?



Think of ways in which you show favoritism. Ask God to help you change your attitudes and actions.

NOW OR LATER

Who are some people who you avoid or look down on? In what specific ways could you reach out to one such person, do a favor for him or her, or show others kindness? Bring these ideas to God and make a commitment about which one you will follow up on.