JAMES
Week 1: Persevere in Your Faith

This includes:
1. Leader Preparation
2. Lesson Guide

1. LEADER PREPARATION

LESSON OVERVIEW
In his letter, James quickly begins with a teaching that’s counterintuitive: In the midst of trials, find joy. He encourages his readers to persevere because it helps produce spiritual maturity. In this first lesson, we’ll see how James offers wisdom and guidance about conquering trials and temptations, and we’ll discover how he challenges and reminds Christians to live out what they believe.

LESSON OBJECTIVES
1. WHAT: Even though life is hard, God equips us to persevere and uses tough times to help us grow.
2. WHY: The difficult times and temptations ought to be opportunities to grow spiritually.
3. HOW: This lesson will encourage your students to rely on God at the first sign of trouble and temptation.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE
James 1:1-18

SECONDARY SCRIPTURES
Philippians 3:12-14 and James 1:19-27

TEACHING PREP
The short overview below is designed to help you prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with your teenagers, you’ll definitely want to refer to it as you lead your small group lesson.

Read James 1:1-18.

This opening chapter in James’ letter provides a wealth of wisdom and practical advice for Christians. You could spend several weeks with students in just this one chapter, so this week’s lesson is an overview of the main ideas from this passage.

James’ writing style is pointed and intentional. He addresses several issues facing first-century Christians that remain relevant today, such as how to care for those on the margins of society, how to persevere when things get tough, and the importance of praying for each other.

Being a teenager is hard. Being a Christian teenager can be harder. Parents and other adults expect young people to make choices that sometimes run contrary to what the culture says you should do. In his letter, James acknowledges that we all face situations that require perseverance, and he encourages us to focus on why making God’s choices is worth it and how to make those choices.
If your teenagers have a relationship with Jesus and want to grow spiritually, hold them accountable—talk about how God wants us to respond to his love by the way we live our lives. Emphasize grace and forgiveness, but also talk about how Christians are called to live lives that honor God through our actions. Being disciplined and making intentional choices to get sin out of our lives is biblical and important—these are choices that grow from our love of God because of his love for us!

If you have teenagers who have not yet decided to follow Jesus, use this as an opportunity to share with them how God desires to give us full, complete, meaningful lives and how sin gets in the way of that.

THE BEFORE & AFTER [optional]

Text Message Questions
We’ve provided a couple of different text message questions to send out to your students prior to your meeting. Feel free to use one or both of the questions below. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.

- Facing something hard today? Tell us about it at small group tonight.
- How do tough times teach priceless lessons? Share your thoughts at small group tonight.

Parent Email
We’ve provided you with an email below that you can send to your parents following the lesson. Our hope is to encourage parents to continue the conversation at home. Feel free to edit and customize the email to fit your ministry needs.

Dear parents,

This week we started a new small group series on the book of James in the New Testament. It’s a letter that James, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote to Jewish Christians in the first century. It’s full of practical advice on how to live daily as a Christian.

Chapter 1 focuses on how to persevere through temptations and trials in a way that honors God. Our groups discovered that faith grows by living it out in everyday challenges, finding strength through prayer, and preparing for pressure moments.

I’d encourage you to talk with your student this week about James 1, and maybe even share some of the struggles you faced during your teenage years. You also could use these questions to fuel dialogue:

- What kinds of “trials” do most teenagers experience, and how can these trials fuel spiritual growth?
- How does wisdom help us persevere through difficult situations?
- Some people would say Christians have a reputation for being hypocrites. What do you think James might say about this, based on what you read and discussed in your small group?

If your child identifies specific issues, ask if you can pray for the difficulties, asking God to give your teenager wisdom and perseverance through the mucky waters of adolescence. Also take time to thank God for how he is working to complete your teenager’s faith. Thank you for your time, your vulnerability, and your prayers!
JAMES
Week 1: Persevere in Your Faith

2. LESSON GUIDE

GETTING THINGS STARTED [optional]
As you begin your small group, welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

Sometimes the best strategy in life is to just persevere. We take what life throws at us, we work hard for a goal, we endure a series of difficult situations—whatever it is, we simply learn to practice perseverance. In many ways, practicing perseverance is a lot like the process of training for an athletic competition, as we see in this clip from Rocky (rated PG).

[NOTE: If you find Rocky to be an outdated reference for your students, choose a training scene from a more recent sports movie. If you need suggestions, check out http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_sports_films for ideas. Be sure to adjust the questions after the video clip if you use a different movie.]

Start the DVD at 1:30:30, as Rocky starts jogging. End the DVD at 1:33:00, as Rocky stands at the top of the steps.

ASK:
- What do you think motivated Rocky to push through to the end?
- How did this example of perseverance impact you as you watched? Why do examples of perseverance impact us so much?
- How is athletic training similar to spiritual growth?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: The spiritually beneficial way we respond to tough times in life isn’t too different from the way an athlete develops muscles or a musician masters an instrument. Our response to the pressure of a difficult situation can increase our faith, our trust in God, and our understanding of what it means to follow Jesus.

If you came up with an opening activity, movie clip, or game that worked well with your group, and you’d like to share it with other youth workers, please email us at ideas@simplyyouthministry.com.

TEACHING POINTS
The goal of the Teaching Points is to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. The main points we have chosen here are (1) Growing in faith is a process, (2) Find strength through prayer, and (3) Prepare for pressure points.

Remember: All throughout these lessons, it’s up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use, and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.

Read James 1:1-18 together as a group. Consider allowing one or more of the teenagers to read the text.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Let’s spend a few minutes digging deeper into the words James wrote here in chapter 1 about persevering in our faith.
1. Growing in faith is a process

**ASK:**
- Look closely at verses 2-4. In your own words, explain the process of growth James is describing here. What are some parallels or analogies to the process he describes?
- Why is perseverance important? How can a Christian find the motivation to preserve?
- What kinds of "trials" do most teenagers experience, and how can these trials fuel spiritual growth?
- What do you think a "perfect and complete" faith looks like? What people do you know who have a mature Christian faith? What have you learned from them?
- Think about your life. When has God taught you something powerful during or after a difficult situation or season? What was the experience, and what did you learn from it?

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** James offers a pretty clear description of how our faith grows during tough times. Difficult situations test and challenge our faith, which means our faith has the opportunity to get stronger through our commitment and endurance. As our endurance increase, our faith becomes more and more mature—eventually reaching the point where it is "perfect and complete, needing nothing."

2. Find strength through prayer

**ASK:**
- Read James 1:5-11. How does wisdom help us persevere through difficult situations?
- Talk about a time you faced a tough situation and prayed about it. How did God respond your prayer, and how did you grow spiritually through this experience?

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Prayer is simple communication with God. It doesn’t need to be fancy or long. It ought to be real and a regular habit. Prayer is an opportunity for us to verbalize to God the pain and stress and troubles we’re experiencing. God already knows what’s happening in our lives, but when we tell him about our challenges, we build our relationship with him. When we pray, we can find answers and wisdom and strength.

3. Prepare for pressure points

**ASK:**
- Read James 1:12-18. What are some misconceptions people have today about the source and cause of temptation?
- Think about a time you recently faced temptation. What was the source of this temptation? What were you tempted to do—and did you do it? How did you handle the situation, and what did you learn from the situation?

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** It’s always good to remember that God isn’t the source of our temptation. Yes, God allows us to endure difficult situations. But God doesn’t tempt us to sin or doubt or walk away from our faith. Those things come from the enemy, Satan, who would like nothing more than to knock people off course spiritually.
ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION [optional]

ASK:
1. Read James 1:19-27. In this passage, James uses the metaphor of a mirror to talk about obedience. Using your own words, explain what he is communicating through this metaphor.

   When we experience a tough situation, we can either do the "right" thing, which is sometimes more difficult and takes more effort, or we can take the easy way out. What’s the benefit of doing the right thing, and why is it often so tough to do? Be as personal and as specific as possible; don’t settle for an easy answer that sounds good.

2. Read Philippians 3:12-14. How would you describe the attitude Paul is talking about in these verses?

3. What do you think is required of a Christian who perseveres to reach the "goal" Paul talks about in this passage from Philippians? What steps or choices or habits might be needed?

4. For your own life and the hard stuff going on this week, what do you need to forget? What do you need to focus on?

APPLICATION

ASK:
1. What are some recent "tough times" you've had to endure? How did they challenge and stretch and grow you?

2. What challenging time are you experiencing right NOW? What do you think God might be teaching you?

3. Talk about how you have cared or could care for the "orphans" and "widows" in your world. What are some ways our small group or youth group might do this?

Pair up with another person in the group for these questions:

ASK:
1. How are you putting your faith into practice? What are two examples of how you've done this recently?

2. How have you experienced God strengthening you through prayer? How can I pray for you?

3. What pressure points have caused you problems recently? How can we help each other?

Follow James’ advice and have your teenagers pray for wisdom for the other students in the group. Encourage your students to call, text, or email each other during the week to pray for and encourage one another.
SUMMARY
End your small group lesson here. Provide your teenagers with a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) the content of this lesson, (2) the dialogue that took place during the lesson, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles your teenagers are facing, and (4) the big picture of your youth ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.

FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]
Encourage and/or challenge your teenagers to memorize the verse below.

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing (James 1:2-4).