PRESSURE POINTS
Pressure. It’s everywhere.

- Coaches and players are under pressure: “Win or else!”
- Business leaders face the pressure to make a profit.
- Teenagers feel the pressure to follow their peers.
- Couples endure the pressure of raising children, balancing budgets, and trying to hold their marriages together.
- Doctors prescribe medication like never before to help stressed people deal with the pressure of life.

Pressure is nothing new. James, the half brother of Jesus, wrote to Jewish Christians in the first century who faced intense pressure. They had been dispersed because of persecution, and they faced increasing pressure to let faith live only in their heads instead of being lived out in their lives. They faced the pressure to wilt in times of trial and the pressure to compromise when facing temptation. They faced the pressure to cave in to prejudicial preference when welcoming people into their gatherings and to let their tongues wag out of control. They faced the pressure to demand their own way and the pressure to retaliate when mistreated.

James beckoned these first believers to let the pressure push them deeper in their journey with Jesus. And James invites you to open your life to the truth of God’s Word and learn how to deal positively with the pressure points of life. Pressure doesn’t have to dismantle your faith. Let pressure lead you to experience the presence and power of God like never before.

Chip Henderson

The six-week study “Pressure Points” was developed and written by Dr. Chip Henderson, Senior Pastor at Pinelake Church in Brandon, Mississippi. Chip is a graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and has been married for 21 years to Christy. They have three children. He is an avid hunter, runner, and triathlete. Chip is the co-creator of the L3 Journal and the author of the young adult study Samson: A Life Well Wasted (LifeWay).

Chip’s hope is that as you engage in this study, you will avoid the pressures that mess up our lives.
SESSION 1

THE PRESSURE OF TRIALS
**The Point**
Joyful trust in God will see you through all trials.

**The Bible Meets Life**
No one lives a problem-free life. You have surely heard the phrase, “When life gives you a lemon, just make lemonade.” But that’s a whole lot easier said than done. Thankfully, the Bible is full of people who were dealt hard hands in life, but through faith in God and through perseverance, set good examples for us and found a way to make sweet lemonade: Joseph, Ruth, Hannah, David, etc. These people found triumph in God, and so can you and your group members.

**The Passage**
James 1:1-4

**The Setting**
James wrote what is considered the earliest letter in the New Testament. He wrote to Jewish believers, providing practical principles for living the Christian life. From the earliest days of the church, believers have experienced trials that tested their faith, but we can rejoice in the midst of those trials because of the growth and endurance God is working into our lives.
James 1:1-4 (HCSB)

1 James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ: To the 12 tribes in the Dispersion. Greetings.

2 Consider it a great joy, my brothers, whenever you experience various trials,

3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

4 But endurance must do its complete work, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.
DISCUSS: Ask the opening question on page 9 of the PSG: “What pressures squeeze the joy out of life?”

SAY: “Many of us have heard the phrase ‘When life gives you a lemon, just make lemonade.’ But that’s a whole lot easier said than done.”

GUIDE: Call attention to “The Bible Meets Life” section on page 10 of the PSG. Invite the group to find hints about how people make lemonade in the midst of sour situations.

SAY: “God Himself will walk with us through each pressure that comes our way. He will give us power to live for Him and trust Him.”

GUIDE: Call attention to The Point at the top of page 10 of the PSG: “Joyful trust in God will see you through all trials.”

TRANSITION: We’ll study James 1 to discover a way to handle the pressure of trials.

ENHANCEMENT: Use Pack Item 1: “Pressure Points” to introduce this study.

PRAY: Transition into the Bible study by thanking God for His Word. Invite His guidance and understanding to embrace joyful trust in Him in all trials.
James 1:1-2

1 James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ: To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion. Greetings. 2 Consider it a great joy, my brothers, whenever you experience various trials,"

**READ:** James 1:1-2 on page 11 of the PSG.

**GUIDE:** Call attention to Key Word “trials” on that same page. Briefly note the different types of trials on page 12 of the PSG.

**DISCUSS:** Question #2 on page 12 of the PSG: “What keeps you from reacting with joy when the pressure of life feels overwhelming?”

**SUMMARIZE:** Joy is a command from God. It is also a careful and deliberate decision by us. We may not feel joy but we choose to “consider it a great joy.” To consider means to lead our mind, attitude, and actions in God’s direction.

**DISCUSS:** Question #3 on page 13 of the PSG: “What emotions did you feel during your most recent trial?”

**DO:** To explore how joyful trust in God could see us through feelings like those we experienced in our most recent trial, guide group members to complete “Here Comes the Trial” in the “James 1:1-2” section on page 13 of the PSG.

**Here Comes the Trial:** A loved one has been diagnosed with a serious illness.

1. Joy and trust in God could benefit me by:___________.
2. Joy and trust in God could benefit this loved one by:___________.
3. Joy and trust in God could benefit others by:___________.

**TRANSITION:** Next we’ll discover that God is actively involved with us. He does not leave us alone in our trials.
James 1:1-2 Commentary

James was one of Jesus’ biological brothers (Matt. 13:55; Gal. 1:19). He did not believe in Jesus as Messiah during His earthly ministry (John 7:3-5). After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to James (1 Cor. 15:7). Then he believed. Later James wrote the letter we are now studying. By the time of the council described in Acts 15, James seems to have become the recognized leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13-21).

He was known as “James the Just” because of his reputation for piety, purity, and steadfastness in obedience to God. He died as a martyr in A.D. 62. James began his letter by identifying himself as a *slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*. James had gone from believing, “Jesus is the brother I grew up with in Nazareth,” to “He is the Lord Jesus Christ and I am His willing slave.”

Jesus’ resurrection spoke powerfully to James! Jesus’ resurrection speaks powerfully to us also, even when we are under the pressure of trials. Jesus, the Sufferer, endured the trial of the cross knowing God was working out great purposes. For the joy set before Him, Jesus endured the cross (Heb. 12:2). Jesus’ resurrection shines light on the path through trials.

James wrote to the twelve tribes dispersed or scattered abroad. These were Jewish believers who gathered in house churches in cities and towns throughout the first-century world. James probably called them the twelve *tribes* to signify they were the renewed Israel enjoying and expecting fulfillment of God’s promises in Christ. James and these believers knew about *trials*. As with every generation since, first-century believers faced hardships. “Trials” translates a Greek word that, depending on its context, refers either to hardships that test us or to inner urges and enticements to sin. In James 1:13, the verb form refers to enticement to sin. In James 1:2 the word refers to hardships that test us. James and his fellow believers had probably lived through the early persecution of the church in Jerusalem and beyond (Acts 6:8–8:4; 9:1-2). Many knew humble circumstances socially and financially (Jas. 1:9). Some experienced oppression and mistreatment by powerful people (2:6). They were familiar with sickness (5:14) and other afflictions. Years after he wrote his letter, James faithfully faced trial of martyrdom.

James commanded his fellow believers to **consider it** a great *joy* when they went through various trials. James did more than suggest *joy*—he commanded it! This probably challenges every one of us. Is it even possible to be honest about the difficulty of a great trial yet have great joy at the same time? Yes. Because joy is based in God, not in circumstances. Paul was in prison and yet rejoiced (Phil. 1:14-18; 2:17-18). He rejoiced in sufferings (Col. 1:24). He said to rejoice always (1 Thess. 5:16). The young believers in Thessalonica received the gospel with joy even though they suffered severely for doing so (1:6). Peter said to keep on rejoicing as we share the sufferings of Christ (1 Pet. 4:13).
James 1:3

knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.”

READ: James 1:3 on page 11 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Point out the “James 1:3” section on page 14 of the PSG. Note the quote from paragraph 3: “Trials aren’t a test of your personal strength or wisdom; they test your faith in God to see you through.”

SUMMARIZE: Recap the first three paragraphs on page 14 of the PSG emphasizing that faith must be exercised during trials. God is in the process of developing our endurance and “staying power.”

GUIDE: Call attention to the four bulleted statements at the bottom of page 14 of the PSG. Note that God is not passive, but active in each of these statements. He does not leave us alone in our trials.

- You are a child of God so you have faith.
- You have a faith worth developing and refining.
- God will strengthen and prepare you.
- You have the assurance of the presence of God.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 14 of the PSG: “During your most recent trial, how did you see God walking with you?” Be sensitive to the fact that some group members may be in the midst of a difficult trial right now.

TRANSITION: One way to have an attitude of joy during any trial is to focus on what God will do during and after the trial.
James 1:3 Commentary

We have a definite reason for joy in our trials: the testing of your faith produces endurance. The hardships we all face aren’t the end of the story. The testing process purifies and strengthens its object. Metal workers use fiery furnaces to refine and shape metal. The goal is for the metal to meet standards of purity and strength for its intended use. Similar to metal undergoing the testing process during trials, faith and trust is already in us; the trials burn out the dross and impurities. Faith is confidence in and dependence upon God. Faith prods us to obey God no matter the pressure or no matter how draining the difficulty. The wisdom He gives (Jas. 1:5) helps us to trust and yield to His loving heart (Rom. 8:28-30).

We already trust that God’s Word is true and we already depend upon Him. If we did not, we would not be Christians at all. Yet, our trust can be purer and deeper, less contaminated by pockets of selfishness. In 2 Corinthians 1:8-10, Paul described a trial he experienced and what he learned in it. He did not name the trial explicitly as persecution, threats, illness, or something else. Whatever it was, the trial was severe.

Remember that Paul was an apostle, a man of faith who preached and taught about faith. Still Paul went through a terribly difficult trial. My friends whose college-age son died a few years ago have experienced trials. In the furnace of emotional pain they leaned upon God who is with them, upholds them (Isa. 41:9-10) and promises that victory, not death, is the final word for their son (1 Cor. 15:54).

We have been speaking of faith as trust in God. We need to add that it is active trust in God. Faith expresses itself actively in deeds of obedience (Jas. 2:18-26). Trials make it more difficult to obey. During them we’re pressed, weary, and spent. Without burning off the dross our faith would be soft and weak. With purified faith we are strengthened for whatever life brings next. Peter and John experienced this in Jerusalem soon after Jesus’ resurrection. They spent a night in jail because they preached Christ (Acts 4:3). The next day they stood firmly for Christ even when pressured by threats not to preach Christ any more (vv. 17-22). When Peter and John returned to their friends, they joined together in prayer (vv. 23-31). They prayed in faith for the boldness they needed to continue preaching. Filled with the Holy Spirit they went right on preaching the Word. More persecution followed, and again they obeyed God. This brings us to the matter of the endurance the testing of faith produces. Endurance is a necessity of true Christian faith. If we are true believers, we endure to the end (Matt. 24:13). We do not believe for a while, then stop; trust for a while, then turn away; obey for a while, then go our own easier way.

Endurance makes us think long-term. We do not go through a single trial or two and then declare, “I have made it.” Our next verse points to the goal at the end of a long process.
James 1:4 (HCSB)

“But endurance must do its complete work, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.”

**READ:** James 1:4 on page 11 of the PSG.

**GUIDE:** Note the goal, the future state God is building in us, by pointing to these statements in the “James 1:4” section on page 15 of the PSG:

- Perfect - Having reached its end; complete, mature, fully developed.
- Complete - Fully developed; running at full capacity with nothing unused.
- Lacking nothing - Nothing left out or left behind. You are fully equipped and prepared.

**DISCUSS:** Question #5 on page 15 of the PSG: “How have you been encouraged by the endurance of others during trials?”

**SUMMARIZE:** Recap the “James 1:4” section on page 15 of the PSG. Include these summary statements:

- Endurance takes time.
- I can resist the work of endurance or I can allow God to complete me.
- God is working in and through my life.

**TRANSITION:** Let’s find how to make lemonade when life hands us lemons.
James 1:4 Commentary

God intends for endurance to do its complete work in us. Sometimes trials come like ocean waves. My sons are NCAA® athletes. The conditioning work they go through individually and with their teams is intense and challenging. The “testing” process builds endurance. The result is they are stronger, faster, and tougher than they were a year ago. In the coming year, Lord willing, they will progress further. It is a long process. My athlete sons do their best training when they are with their teams. They train harder and progress further when they work alongside their teammates.

Christians can be teammates to one another. In writing and sending his letter, James was one believer coming alongside others to encourage them to continue steadfastly in faith for the long haul. After receiving James’ letter, the believers surely read it aloud and repeatedly during their gatherings. Then they probably encouraged one another to endure. God intends something very similar for us. God gives us help through other Christians. God often gives wisdom (Jas. 1:5-8) and strategies through fellow believers. By His wisdom we discern whether to wait or act, whether to be silent or speak, and what to say or do when it is time. We can become God’s hands and feet in giving practical help as brothers and sisters faithfully endure trials. We can also help one another stay focused upon the goal of our trials. According to James, the culmination or end goal of the endurance process is for the believer to be mature and complete. What type of maturity or perfection is in view here? Is it maturity in faith we are able to realize in this life? Or, is it perfection that will only come beyond the present age? Mature or perfect translates teleios. James used teleios elsewhere of God’s good and perfect gift (Jas. 1:17), the perfect law of liberty (v. 25), and the perfection of not stumbling at all in what a person says (Jas. 3:2). In each case, absolute rather than partial perfection was James’ meaning. Thus, in the second portion of James 1:4, James probably intended to lift his readers’ eyes toward the full maturity of our hearts, minds, and souls as God’s ultimate goal for us.

James 1:9-12 teaches us to endure present trials with a view toward the final state awaiting us. If we are impoverished now, we can rejoice we are really exalted with Christ Jesus (v. 9). We can await the disclosure of our high position when God gives us the “crown of life” in the end (v. 12). By faith we press toward the goal. God finally will complete His work in us when Christ comes and transforms us into the likeness of His own glorious body (Phil. 1:6; 3:14-21). Unless the Lord comes (Jas. 5:8) before we pass away from this earth, death will be the final trial we must endure. James endured trials for three decades as a believer in Jesus. Then, in A.D. 62, he faced the final trial of martyrdom. Though the details of his death are not completely clear, the tradition is that the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem pressured James to deny Jesus publicly. James seized the moment and confessed boldly that Jesus was exalted at God’s right hand and would come again in power and great glory. He lost his life but honored His Lord.
LIVE IT OUT

**READ:** Call for three volunteers to read one of the suggested ways to apply this study in the “Live It Out” section on page 16 of the PSG. The three are:

- **Choose a joyful attitude.** Evaluate how a joy-filled attitude could alleviate the pressure you feel from life.

- **Share your story.** Explain to someone how, during a previous trial, God strengthened you through the difficult time.

- **Help someone who is struggling.** Find someone who is going through difficulty. Be available to listen, encourage, and help them.

**GUIDE:** Lead group members to consider which of the three suggested responses to the Bible study they will carry out this week.

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**Wrap It Up**

**READ:** Call for a volunteer to read the last two sentences of the “Live It Out” section on page 16 of the PSG: “Despite life’s circumstances, God gives us the capability to turn sour into sweet. **Now go make lemonade.**”
Weathering the Storms of Life

A highway sign on Wyoming’s South Pass flashed a warning: INCLEMENT WEATHER. NO UNNECESSARY TRAVEL. My husband, Shane, drove while our 6-month-old, Ellie, and I were nestled peacefully in the backseat. It seemed implausible to me that on a quiet spring day, a sudden snowstorm could besiege a stretch of that sunny mountain pass. Shane’s words assured me, “It will be all right.” But those five words were his last. In an instant, I was stripped of all that I treasured: my beloved spouse, my delightful baby girl, my health, my financial security, and my ministry.

To continue reading “Weathering the Storms of Life” from HomeLife magazine, visit BibleStudiesforLife.com/articles.
Pressure Points

Over the last six weeks, as we’ve faced common pressure points seen in the Book of James, the ultimate goal has been for all of us to develop into people who know Christ and His gracious work, who are contributing servants in the community of faith, and who are effectively engaging the culture without losing distinction.

Christ

No one faced greater pressure than Jesus Christ, who faced incredible trials and temptations. However, Jesus endured the extreme trial and agony of the cross with joy, knowing what it would accomplish for us (Heb. 12:2). And because He never gave in to a single temptation, He was able to bring us forgiveness for our sins and empowerment to stand against temptation.
“Helping you move from where you are to where God wants you to be.” This is your passion for your class or group. Yet helping different individuals each take their next step to grow as disciples is challenging. The Transformational Discipleship Assessment (TDA) is a quick and easy tool to help you discover how you and the members of your group are doing in eight essential areas of discipleship. The TDA provides next steps to help your group move from where you are to where God wants you to be. The assessment is online which allows each group participant to take it in the comfort and privacy of their home, office, or even on their mobile device. Discover more at: TDA.LifeWay.com

The body of Christ can truly impact the culture with their treatment of people who are different from them socio-economically, politically, and ethnically. A love for Christ that is expressed in love for all people can transform a society. The meekness and strong resolve of those who endure injustice patiently is a strong witness to the group or culture that oppresses them.

Society can be transformed by the quiet witness of those who endure opposition yet continue to love those who are against them.

Because anyone can become a part of the family of God, we are to treat all people with the same love we express to Christ. Consequently, when we stand together, we support and encourage each other in the midst of whatever pressures we are facing.