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small group material



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Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Labourers

CONSIDER IT JOY • Trials

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

James 1:1-18

There are several perspective changes essential to persevering through trials. These perspectives are not just “positive thinking” but an accurate appraisal of our circumstances in light of one unalterable fact: God, our Father, loves us, shepherds us, is sovereign over our circumstances and from Him flow “every good and perfect gift” (1:17,18).

How Do I Know When I'm in a Trial?

James mentions that there are “trials of many kinds” (1:2). Peter stresses this same thing: “you may have had to suffer grief in *all kinds of trials*” (1 Peter 1:6). God wants us to recognize that trials come in all colors, shapes and sizes. While that may seem obvious, it's anything but when you're the one eye-deep in trials.

Trials are a traffic jam, and it's the bumper-to-bumper issues and conflicts of daily life that are usually the cause. As a result, we tend to see them as “natural” or “random” events and not “God ordained” tribulations – whatever they look like. The text is telling us: don't look for trials to drop out of heaven in some kind of spiritual gift wrap; God will typically use the existing furniture of our lives to manufacture them. Nothing for the believer is random. If there are difficult or constraining circumstances that are a source of struggle, then consider that struggle a trial. And then consider it a joy because God allowed it in order to grow and mature you.

Consider It Joy?

The study touches briefly on the difference between considering something a blessing and actually being thrilled by it – Awesome, *another trial!* We can recognize the spiritual blessings that come from the trial; we can draw comfort from God's hand in it and even be thankful for it, but joy is not happiness (at least as our culture defines it). Here's why this is important. Christians can handle a trial successfully and yet feel like a failure for not being happy. The definition of joy is not “chipper” or “perky.” Rather it is a sense of confidence and peace amidst constraining circumstances.

How Do Trials Actually Change Me?

James says that we can have joy in trials because “we know” the benefit that comes from “the testing of [our faith].” I'm not sure we do know that. I'm not sure James even thinks we know that. Rather it's a conventional way to articulate, “here's what you need to know but probably forgot.” And what we need to know is how God uses trials to transform us.

In the study, the group will look at 1 Peter 1:6-7 to expand their understanding of what is meant by the “testing of faith.” In the passage, Peter describes the gold smelting process, where heating up gold causes its impurities to float to the surface. Once on the surface, the dross (as it is called) can be scooped away, resulting in a purer, more valuable, piece of

What's the Big Idea?

Because of the gracious and unchanging character of God, believers are called to experience joy and steadfastness in the midst of trials.

What's the Problem?

In trials, we're inclined to become frustrated with our circumstances and believe that God is either against us or disinterested. We are all prone to:

- Disregard God's perspective of trials and our circumstances. (5-8)
- Look around and wish that we had it as good as the rich. (9-11)
- Allow a trial to turn into a temptation by not trusting God in the midst of it. (12-15)
- Believe trials aren't good, and therefore, God isn't good. (16-18)





gold. While the metaphor is probably self-explanatory, I'll feel better if I explain it.

The result of trials (the heating up of our lives) is to accomplish a purer and stronger character and faith. Trials bring to the surface weaknesses in character, such as pride, self-reliance and the like. Once on the surface, we (us and God) can begin to deal with them and, in time, see them extricated from our lives.

But it's not just wrong behavior that surfaces. Underneath wrong behavior is typically a layer of wrong beliefs about God and ourselves. For example, we might begin to believe that God doesn't love us, that He's angry with us or that our suffering has no purpose. In fact, these wrong beliefs are exactly what James is seeking to address in this chapter.

It's in the heat of trials that these deficiencies in faith and character surface. And once surfaced, God can begin to purify our hearts and motives and actions.

Why Do I Need Trials?

Trials produce spiritual maturity, which is why they are a blessing. James describes a progression where trials produce perseverance and perseverance, maturity. The goal of trials is not to make us more persevering. A higher pain threshold is not our goal. Rather, perseverance is the vehicle by which we get to the goal, which is a mature character and faith. That's motivating.

God's Character: The Source of Our New Perspective

The heart of the passage is found in 1:17-18 where the character of God is the grounds for these radical and motivational perspectives on trials. How do I know that trials aren't random circumstances? Because our Father is unchanging in His love for us and from Him flow "every good and perfect gift." How do I know my trials aren't punishment dispensed in anger? Because our Father is unchanging in His love for us and from Him flow "every good and perfect gift." How do I know that God isn't tempting me to sin? Because our Father...

God's loving, gracious and unchanging nature is set in contrast to the apparently random, destructive, hopeless and shifting troubles of life (as well as our natures). Because of God's nature and our relationship with Him, randomness is transformed to intentionality; destructive events and circumstances become formative and transformational; hopelessness loses its "lessness" suffix; and apparent judgment is rightly seen as loving discipline. This is not really a "fresh" perspective on our trials, simply the accurate one. The extent that this is a new perspective to us is the extent that we've believed lies in the midst of our struggles.

And so, from James 1, here's what we know about God in the midst of our trials: He is intentionally involved, not passively removed (1:4); He is generous, not angry with us (1:5); He will exult the humble, not play favorites (1:9); He will reward with the crown of life those who persevere (1:12); and ultimately, as believers we are now and forever the objects of His love (1:16-18).

And, that, my brothers and sisters, is why we consider trials an absolute joy.

What's Our Response?

You want the group to consider it pure joy when they go through trials by:

Considering God's unchanging nature. Everything shifts like shadows – our feelings, commitment, circumstances – but God is unchanging in His commitment to us. The same God who allowed the present trial is the same God who died for our salvation.

Considering God's loving purposes. He allows trials in order to perfect our faith and make us mature and lacking in nothing. God tests us for growth. Everything He gives to us, including trials, are for our good.

Considering God's provisions. We must look to God for wisdom in our trials (His word) and we must look to His power (His Spirit) to joyfully endure.

Considering God's forgiveness. Don't blame God, Satan or others for your sin. Don't seek to justify it, but confess it and repent of it. All of us have allowed our trials to become temptations. In light of this, we need to believe Christ has paid for our sin, forgiven us and that His love for us remains unchanging.

What Are the Questions?

James 1:1-18

LAUNCH

Being completely honest, what is your knee-jerk reaction when you experience circumstances that just don't go your way?

EXPLORE

Read James 1:2-8.

1. How does James describe trials? Why is this significant? How do you know when you're in a trial?
2. What words does James use when describing the result of trials? In your mind what are the hallmarks of a mature Christian? Of an immature Christian?
3. What is there to "rejoice" about, and what does James mean by rejoice?
4. Refined faith, perseverance, and maturity – why are trials the ideal vehicle for producing these things? What trials has God used to develop these in your life?

Read 1 Peter 1:6-7.

In this passage Peter explains how God uses trials to transform us. He compares the testing of our faith to the process of refining gold: as gold is heated, impurities are brought to the surface and removed.

5. What wrong thoughts, "doubts" and ideas about God tend to surface in the midst of a trial? Which are reflected in James chapter 1?
6. What character weaknesses have surfaced in your life, as you've gone through trials?
7. When God wants to turn the heat up on your life, what does He tend to do?

Read James 1:9-18

8. James mentions that we can often lack wisdom in trials. But godly wisdom isn't Oprah wisdom. How does godly wisdom differ from worldly wisdom when it comes to trials?
9. What do these verses about the rich and poor have to do with a godly perspective on trials?
10. According to James, what are we tempted to say during a trial? What other things are we tempted to say? What do you say?
11. Why does James put the blame on us for temptation instead of Satan?
12. Assuming that you do, why do you blame God for your trials and temptations? In your mind, what's His fault? Why do we need a place to lay blame?
13. In what ways have you experienced this temptation/sin process that James describes...recently.
14. In 1:16-18, what are the important things we need to see about God's character?
15. God's character is in contrast to "shifting shadows." Where do you see, and how to you experience constant shifting in your life?

APPLY

16. As so much of seeing our trials rightly depends on seeing God rightly, how did Christ manifest these qualities of God, so that we might see and believe?
17. How has this passage realigned your perspective on trials? What will be the most difficult truth for you to hold on to when you're immersed in a trial? Where is your heart most resistant to God's plans for you?
18. The book of James climaxes in 4:5-7. How does this passage give you hope in your struggle to remain steadfast to Christ?

What Are the Answers?

1. Trials are “various” or literally, they are “multicolored.” We shouldn’t be looking for something overtly spiritual (see notes). They are also described as “tests,” something that pushes us to our limits.
2. James uses the words: Steadfastness (perseverance), perfect (mature), complete, lacking in nothing. In Discussing the “maturity” question it’s important the group has a picture of what this looks like.
3. See notes under “Consider it Joy.”
4. Because only in trials do we become aware of our deficiencies in character, self-reliance, and faith. Trials bring these to the surface, and the crisis makes us desire change.
5. Questions like: How come other people have it better? Why is God tempting me? Is God angry at me? Am I being punished? Thoughts like: God doesn’t care or understand, there’s no point to this.
6. Allow the group to discuss.
7. Allow the group to discuss.
8. Wisdom from God sees God in and through the trial and the trial produces a God-dependence while a worldly perspective produces a self-dependence in the trial.
9. It’s easy to think that the rich don’t have the trials and struggles that rest of the world has. We envy and become bitter in our hardship.
10. James says that we are tempted to say, “I am being tempted by God.” Discuss other ways we can blame God.
11. Stop blaming and take responsibility.
12. Blame allows us the justification to get angry. It also can give a sense of control for things out of our control.
13. Discuss. Trials become temptations when I take my eyes off of God and begin to pout, complain, grow bitter, throw a fit, flee, escape, etc.
14. He’s the giver of good things – like the character He is producing in us. He doesn’t change. He produces new birth in us while on our own, we allow evil desire to give birth to sin and death.
15. Our emotions, desire to do good, circumstances, commitment, etc.
16. While, in a sense the character of God is hidden, it’s revealed in His word and manifest in Christ.
17. You want people here to lay hold of the specific ways they lose perspective of their circumstances and God’s character.
18. God’s Spirit will energize and empower us. As we humble ourselves and submit to whatever God’s plan is for us, He gives us grace to endure.

Memorize

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.

James 1:2