

DISCUSSION GUIDE :: SESSION 1

LIVING WHAT WE BELIEVE
ENDURANCE UNDER TRIALS
JAMES 1:1-8
01/29/2017



MAIN POINT

Our faith enables us to endure and persevere in the midst of trials.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Discuss examples of endurance outside of the Christian faith—things that require physical or mental endurance.

Share an example of a time when you had to endure something and what that experience was like for you. What motivated you to endure during that time?

All of us have faced, and will face again, trials of various kinds. James wrote to early Christians and to us as well, providing instructions for facing trials. He teaches us how we can endure and persevere in the midst of trials, and how we can experience God working through the difficult times in our lives.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 1:1-4.

According to James, what should be a Christian's attitude when facing trials? How often is this your attitude in your own hard times?

When you have experienced trials in your life, did you consider it all joy or become depressed and discouraged? Allow people to recount recent trials and what they learned or how they developed through those experiences.

James advised those facing trials to approach them with joy. When trials are rightly faced they are avenues to spiritual growth; when faced wrongly they become temptations to evil. James did not say trials should make us happy or that we should look forward to them. Rather, James wrote with a deep realization that life's pressures have a way of strengthening our character and faith. In other words, they help us develop perseverance.

What are some verbs that describe your present level of faith? Why these?

Why is perseverance important? What reward comes with persevering in the faith?

Perseverance or “endurance” is not the goal, but the means of reaching the goal. The goal is to become mature and complete. A physically mature adult who behaves at the level of a young child is not a mature adult. Likewise, a Christian who is mature in the knowledge of the Scriptures but whose behavior does not match his or her profession of faith is not a mature Christian.

Read Romans 5:3-5. What two things did Paul say we can rejoice in because of God’s grace? Which of Paul’s stated reasons for rejoicing is a little tougher for you to swallow? Why?

How can a believer’s Christlike endurance of suffering offer a testimony of hope to others?

What incident in your life can you look back on and see the truth of verses 3-5?

Christian joy runs deep and endures because its source is the ever-flowing stream of God’s grace. This is why both Paul and James could state that we as believers also rejoice in our afflictions. Paul’s statement doesn’t imply that we somehow enjoy suffering. Rather, it means that we have confidence God will use even our afflictions to bring about His good purposes in our lives. For this confidence we need look no further than the example of Jesus. He willingly bore the most horrendous pain and suffering with a view that His death and resurrection would open the way to our salvation (see Heb. 2:10; 12:2).

In what specific ways does suffering provide an opportunity for believers to show they believe in Jesus and rejoice? How is Jesus’ life a model for this?

How can testing or trials actually strengthen a believer’s faith?

Endurance is self-authenticating; we grow in endurance by staying the course of faith and not being swayed by trials. Proven character follows naturally from the believer who has remained faithful through trials. Enduring trials causes us to grow in faith, and such growth is a testimony of faith’s authenticity.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 1:5-8.

How do you define “wisdom”? How is it related to enduring trials?

Heavenly wisdom, the internal and practical means to endure, is particularly needed when we face trials. Difficult times often visit us suddenly and without warning. Our natural reactions could be distress, grief, perplexity, confusion, disappointment, or hopelessness. Without wisdom, we do not have God’s perspective on our trials, a perspective that helps us get through the dark days of difficulty. When we find that we lack wisdom, we should turn to God for it. To access this wisdom, we must ask. God gives generously without finding fault.

What does James teach us about the nature of our prayers for wisdom?

How will God respond to us when we pray by faith for God’s wisdom?

We must come to God in faith, trusting that He will grant us the wisdom we need. We should not expect results when we exhibit a faith mixed with doubts. When our faith wavers in such a manner, we are like a wave in the ocean that is driven and tossed about at the mercy of the wind. The wave moves one way one minute and another way the next minute according to the movement of the wind. The imagery is that of vacillation and instability.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

When have you experienced difficulties and been encouraged to continue to have faith because you trusted God's promises?

What has helped you see God's hand and feel His love during times of affliction in your life?

How can you share the faith and hope you have with someone you love or care about this week?

When have you prayed for and received God's wisdom? What do you do when you pray but still have doubts?

PRAY

Spend some time in silent prayer, reflecting on the truths of this passage and how they compare to the perspective you have on life. Pray for God's supernatural courage and strength to endure. Close by praying aloud over your group, challenging them to apply what they've learned as they go out into the world this week.

COMMENTARY

JAMES 1:1-8

Verse 1 identifies the author and the readers. Most commentators agree that the author is James the brother of Jesus, a leader in the Jerusalem church. The use of servant indicates James's humility and total devotion in service to his Lord. As a "slave" of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, James's words bear authority, for he does his master's bidding and speaks as His representative (2 Pet. 1:20-21). The 12 tribes in the Dispersion refers symbolically to Jewish Christians scattered abroad.

Trials are of many kinds, but believers can triumph over them. Verse 2 presents a command concerning trials: Count it all joy . . . when you meet trials of various kinds. We should look at trials as an occasion for joy because of their potential for producing something good in us. This calls us consciously to develop a positive attitude toward trials, quite contrary to our normal response. Similarly, Hebrews regards trials as the discipline a Father gives to help us share in God's holiness (Heb. 12:10).

Verse 3 explains how believers can show pure joy as they face trials. We are to realize that God intends the testing of our faith to produce perseverance. Without these trials, some character would be undeveloped. God also uses trials to purge and remove defects from immature faith. Perseverance suggests endurance or stamina. Verse 4 presents the spiritual outcome or result of a perseverance which attains its appointed role within the believer. A believer with perseverance is perfect. This does not mean sinlessness or moral flawlessness. It describes maturity, the state of being fully developed. Complete pictures someone who possesses all the spiritual traits needed for moral completeness. People who endure trials with faith in God can develop every trait needed for spiritual victory.

Verses 5-8 outline our resources for facing trials and explain how to get them. Christians need wisdom and faith as they encounter trials. We are encouraged to pray for wisdom and to pray with faith. To James and to Jews, wisdom was much more than knowledge and intelligence. Wisdom was a spiritual trait which developed from a wholehearted love for God's ways. With wisdom Christians can understand how their trials merged into God's plan for their lives. They have the commitment to His will necessary to assure that they follow God and not wander from the path of His plan. But how do Christians get this wisdom? They must ask God for it.

Verses 6-7 deal with the need for faith in prayer. Whoever asks God for wisdom must believe and not doubt. Faith is a complete commitment to God in trusting obedience. Two reasons to encourage faith are presented. First, a doubting person is spiritually unstable like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. We must endure in the confidence that God will answer our request according to His will. Second, doubters should not even imagine that

God will answer their prayers. Faith alone opens the door to God's limitless treasury of wisdom. Verse 8 provides an additional description of the spiritual makeup of a doubter. The doubter is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does. Doubters display no stamina in their commitment to the Lord. One moment they are inclined to obedience; another moment, they follow their own ways. Failure to endure with faith in prayer is an indicator of the doubter's general character.

READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

James 1:19-27