

Discussion Guide

questions to help start or continue conversations about faith

Discussion Guides accompany the weekly message.

Come, Eat, Play

There is a story I once read about a little boy who buried his little feet in the soil of his mother's garden. And when his mother found him there, she said, "What on earth are you doing?" Without pausing, (for he had thought his plan through, as only little boys do), the little boy responded, "Mommy, I am trying to grow to be a man." To this response she laughed out loud and with a big cheerful smile she said, "My dear child, you can never grow bigger by trying. Come on inside, eat plenty of good food, and enjoy many hours of play, and soon enough, you will grow to be a man without even trying."

The book of James, and the entire Bible can sometimes feel daunting. But I think there is a good lesson from this little boy about how we are meant to approach the Word of God. Come, Eat, Play.

Remember what Jesus said: "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30, NASB)

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never be hungry ... just as the living Father sent me and I live by the Father, even so whoever takes me for his food and is nourished by me shall live through and because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven ... he who takes this bread for his food shall live forever." (John 6:35a, 57-58 AMP)

Jesus said, "I came that they may have and enjoy life and have it in abundance." (John 10:10b, AMP) And in the book of Psalms we are instructed, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart." (Psalm 37:4, NASB) Enjoying the life that Jesus gives and delighting yourself in the Lord is the secret fertilizer for growth. How many have come to the Lord and are fed by Him, but then religion, and trying to grow, seems to get in the way, and growth remains elusive?

You must play! The promised desires of your heart mean that as you delight yourself in the Lord, as you spend seasons of play and enjoyment with Him and in Him, He will place His desires for your life in your heart. And from this place, you will be led in paths of joy and peace and growth. He will grow you in ways that you never imagined. He will grow you in ways that you never believed possible.

So if you desire to continue to grow in the Lord until you are perfect and complete in the Lord, come to Him, be fed by Him, and delight yourself in Him. And most of all, stop trying.

The Bible says it this way, "Cease striving, and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10, NASB) As you do this, you just might hear the Father whispering, "My dear child, you can never grow bigger by trying. Come on inside, eat plenty of good food, and enjoy many hours of play, and soon enough, you will grow to be the person I intend you to be without even trying."

As we embark on a study of the book of James, where is your head and heart? Are you trying to do everything found in this book? Or are you ready to come to the Lord as you are, to be nourished by Him and to delight yourself in Him?

Passage: Read James 1:1-18

Observation (look at the text)

- What spiritual growth and development themes do you observe in the first 18 verses of James 1?

Interpretation (Understand what it means):

As a small group (or on your own), take some time to study, review and discuss (or journal on your own) a few of the following spiritual growth and development themes found in James 1 that are most meaningful to you right now in your walk with the Lord.

- v.1 & v. 18 Belonging to God and to Jesus Christ / Identity in Christ (see also Psalm 100:3; Romans 14:8; Isaiah 43:1; Galatian 2:20)
- v.2-3 Faith in Difficulty (see also John 16:33; Philippians 3:10; Psalm 73:26; Psalm 91; Nehemiah 8:10)
- v.3-4 & v.12 Endurance/Perseverance (see also Romans 5:3-5; Galatian 6:9; Philippians 3:13-14)
- v.5 Wisdom (see also Proverbs 3:7; Proverbs 2:6; Ephesians 5:15-16; James 3:17; Proverbs 16:16)
- v.6-8 & v.16 Faith and Doubt (see also Proverbs 3:5-6; Daniel 1:8; Joshua 24:15; Luke 8:40-56; 2 Timothy 1:7)
- v.9-11 Finances (Poor & Rich) – (see also Matthew 6:25-34; Philippians 3:7-9; Philippians 4:11-13)
- v. 12 & v.17 Spiritual Blessings (see also 2 Peter 1:3; Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Corinthians 12:1-7; 1 Corinthians 9:24-25)
- v. 13-15 Temptation (see also 1 Corinthians 10:12-13; Matthew 26:41; James 4:7; Ephesians 6:11-15)

- v. 5 & v.12 & v.17 The Goodness of God (see also Psalm 145; 1 Chronicles 16:34; Psalm 25:8; Psalm 23; Mark 10:18; Matthew 7:11; Psalm 34:8; Psalm 107:8-9; Psalm 31:19-20)
- v.17 The Immutability of God / God does not change (see also Psalm 102:25-27; Hebrews 13:8; Hebrews 1:12; Jude 1:25; 2 Corinthians 1:20)
- v. 18 New Birth (see also John 3:1-18; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 6:1-12; Colossians 1:24-27; Colossians 3:1)

Look again at the spiritual blessings of God in verse 12. We often think of blessings as earthly things we can hold and touch and see and accumulate. What is the blessing of God for those who patiently endure? How does this knowledge help to count troubles of all kinds as joy?

Application (Apply the Word of God to life):

The book of James is a handbook for living a victorious Christian life. None of us yet are perfect, complete, and in need of nothing. But Christ in us, the hope of glory, gives us the power to live this way. The key to effectively and victoriously applying the book of James to our daily walk with the Lord is found in James 1:1 and James 1:18. If you are a follower of Jesus, you belong to Jesus, you have new life in Jesus, and you are His prized possession. Consider the words you speak and think and pray over yourself and over your life daily. Do these words include phrases like:

- "I am a servant of God and of Jesus Christ."
- "My life in Jesus is full."
- "Lord, Thank You! I am Your prized possession."

Except for in seasons of rapid spiritual growth, God does not work in our lives on multiple spiritual growth themes (like those found in James) at the same time. Instead, He works with us little by little. (Exodus 23:29-30)

- Where is God working with you right now in your spiritual growth and development?
- Share with your small group or, on your own, write in a prayer journal about the victories you are experiencing in Christ. Give God glory for these victories.
- Are you facing any challenges or struggles in your spiritual growth and development? Share these challenges with your small group, or a trusted friend, and ask them to pray with you as you come to Jesus, are nourished by Jesus, and delight yourself in Him. Write about these challenges in a prayer journal and give them to the Lord. As James says, "let it grow." You are the Lord's prized possession, and He does not want you to struggle, but instead to be set free and live a full life in Himself.

