



LEADER'S NOTES

For use with the discussion guides drawing on the Sunday messages.

January 23, 2005
James 1:1-12

OVERVIEW

As we begin our study through the letter of James, it is important for us to keep in mind what James has in mind. He is interested in helping Christians who are facing difficulties know how to live out their faith in practical, day-to-day ways.

The opening section seems to set the tone for what we will be exploring in his letter. He is writing to those who are "dispersed" (having been scattered because of the persecution that began in Jerusalem) and his first concern is to counsel them as to how to live in the midst of the trials they are facing.

DISCUSSION

You can begin by opening up the discussion to how we all typically respond to difficulties. (There seems to be a wide-spread (although mistaken!) notion that walking with Jesus means that our lives should be just getting better and better.)

Reading James 1:1-12, it becomes clear that although those early Christians may not have had our same perspective about the "better" life, they still struggled with how to respond to difficulties. James writes about making a determination to see things through the lens of joy (1:2) no matter what. Apparently that didn't come any more "naturally" to them than it does to us. He has to remind them that if they are struggling to "find joy" in the midst of trials, God can give them the wisdom needed to live in joy.

He offers them two reasons for "considering it joy." In verses three and four, he helps us see that whatever trials we may be facing God is using to change us. We are being shaped by the trial in such a way that we "endure" in the difficulty and come out "perfect and complete." Those words speak of fullness and wholeness and maturity. The trials are working in us to "grow us up" to be more the people God wants us to be.

The other reason is found in verse twelve. There, James tells us that the Lord will reward those who grow up through the trials they face. Now, keep in mind that James is not primarily concerned with "getting saved" (i.e., what it takes to get to heaven), but how to live in the face of the difficulties we encounter in life. He isn't teaching that only those who endure trials in a particular way will ultimately make it to heaven.

Consider this. James appears to affirm the following things:

1. Every believer will face trials.
 2. God is working in these trials to bring every individual believer to maturity.
- The question for James doesn't seem to be whether either of these two things will happen in a believer's life. The question seems to be whether we will experience life, in the midst of these certain trials, with joy and faith or not.

BIG IDEA

No matter what comes our way, our God is at work in us—and that is the reason for our joy!



DISCUSSION GUIDE

A small group resource for the church drawing on the Sunday messages.

January 23, 2005
James 1:1-12

A weekly discussion guide designed to aid you to hear the Word, understand what you hear, and take it to heart.

What is your typical "first response" when you are facing some unexpected challenge or difficulty in life?

When you do turn to God in prayer to talk with Him about difficulties, what is the first thing you typically ask Him to do about some difficulty you are facing?

James writes his epistle to Christians who are facing difficulties. They are under persecution and have been "dispersed" from their homes in Jerusalem and scattered throughout the region. Read what he has to say to these Christians in hard places in James 1:1-12.

In this section, James offers two reasons (verses 2-4 and then verse 12) for "considering it all joy" when we are faced with trials or difficulties. What are the two reasons he presents?

What do you think about his reasons? Are they meaningful to you? Why or why not? Which is the more compelling reason to you for rejoicing in the midst of difficulties?

Apparently, it is possible for a Christian to face a trial and find it hard to "find joy" in the process. What advice does James offer for those who are facing trials and who do not know how to endure?

How is James' advice of praying for God to grant wisdom different from how we tend to pray in the midst of trials? Why do you think we don't typically respond in prayer the way James calls us to?

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