

Pray Together

Use the first few minutes of your time together to lead your group in a focused prayer time.

- **Praise:** Spend time praising God for who He is.
- **Repent:** Take a few moments to silently confess any sin that is lingering in your heart.
- **Ask:** Verbalize your needs and the needs of others to God.
- **Yield:** Surrender your will to God.

Read Together

How would you describe the depth of various relationships in your life? Your relationship with your mother or father? Your spouse? Your child? A partner? A friend? Neighbors? Co-workers? If you describe any of these as “strong” or “very strong”, chances are at some point you encountered something that tested the depth of your relationship.

Regarding these testings in relationships, author Jon Acuff says, “When things are going well, you might not have a good sense of how strong or weak the relationships are. You don’t really have to know because easy times don’t test the strength of a relationship any more than calm seas test the strength of a boat.” Difficulties are the proving grounds for strong relationships. Our response during these hard times demonstrate growth and maturity in our relationships.

In the same way, trials or times of suffering prove the strength of our relationship to God. James, the brother of Jesus, writes to a group of Christians who had scattered from Jerusalem as a result of intense persecution (Acts 7:1-8:3). James says suffering can have a positive outcome: spiritual growth.

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4)

Are you facing trials and temptations? Difficulties in life? Suffering? Hurt? Pain? These will test the depth of your relationship to Christ. “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.” (James 1:12)

Discuss Together

Use these questions to engage in an informative and impactful discussion.

- Throughout Scripture we see that a tested faith is a strong faith. Read the following passages and summarize what each teach about a tested faith.
 - Romans 5:3-5
 - 2 Corinthians 1:3-5
 - James 1:5; 3:17-18
 - 2 Peter 1:5-9
 - Hebrews 5:7-10
 - Romans 8:18-24
- Depending upon your translation of Scripture, James addresses his letter to the twelve tribes “in the Dispersion” or “scattered abroad” or “scattered amongst the nations”. This scattering is a direct result of intense persecution of Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 7:1-8:3) which continued in the places the Christians settled. It is against this backdrop of exile and hardship that James begins his countercultural message, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.” Is James simply being naive or excessively optimistic (e.g., “no pain, no



gain” or “what doesn’t kill you only makes you stronger”)? What makes James’s message unique from one that would appear on an inspirational poster or something that could be classified as a “Pollyanna philosophy”?

- When James refers to “trials”, he is referring to difficult, challenging, or even painful experiences that ultimately prove the intentions of a person’s heart. One New Testament scholar expands on this:

James’s hearers were undergoing trials in the permissive will of God to prove the genuineness of their faith. Such trials come close to the cross-bearing Jesus required of His disciples (Matthew 10:38; 16:24). There would be trouble for them as they lived for Him and His Gospel. These trials involved persecution “because of righteousness” (Matthew 5:10; 1 Peter 3:14).

What might trials or “cross-bearing experiences” have looked like for James’s audience of 1st century Christians? What do trials or “cross-bearing experiences” look like in our 21st century North American context? Have you been persecuted for righteousness’ sake?

- Think to a specific trial that God strengthened you to persevere. How did the testing of your faith produce steadfastness for Christ? During the trial, what did you learn about Christ and your faith in Him? How did you bear the cross of Jesus during this trial? How has God grown your faith in Christ since this trial?
- “Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire” (James 1:13-14). How can Christians go on the offensive against temptations, sin, spiritual warfare, and evil desires? Who can help you remain accountable to Christ? How might your spiritual life look differently if you had the ongoing accountability and fellowship of a Discipleship Group?
- How has God used trials in your life to be a Gospel witness to those who are far from God? How has God used trials in your life to strengthen other Christians in their times of hardship?

Do Life Together

These questions are designed to be asked in a smaller group of 2-4 people. The smaller setting will provide better opportunity for authentic responses. In your smaller group time, take notes to help others remain accountable to their answers. Grow together!

- How is God calling you to “grow up” in Christ this week?
- How can Jesus redeem this area? How has Jesus proven that in Scripture?
- Who will keep you accountable to this commitment this week?

Pray Together

James 5:13 says, “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.” If you are suffering through some trial or difficulty, pray that God will strengthen you to persevere. If someone you now is suffering, pray for them. Pray specifically that God will show you how to minister the Gospel to them. “The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” (James 5:16)

