

Small Group Guide

FAITH WORKS: FAITH PERSEVERES

The Church at Brook Hills, Dr. David Platt

August 16, 2009

James 1:1-18

This guide is designed to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and owning the truths of God's Word. There may be questions you do not want to use, and there may be instances when you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on their relationship with God. Your role is to facilitate this experience, not complete the discussion guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool rather than a rigid teaching task list.

Connect . . .

Use one or both of the following options to introduce the discussion time to follow.

Option 1

Ask each group member to share one thing—such as an activity, place to go, or thing to eat—that always makes them feel happy. After each person shares, ask the group these questions: Why do you feel that way afterwards? What are the differences and similarities between feeling happy and experiencing joy?

After each person has shared, explain that today's message will look at the reason why even trials should have an element of joy in them for a believer.

Option 2

Invite volunteers to share one goal they have for this year. Then, ask them to think back to five years ago and share one goal they had at that time. Continue to go back in five year increments through elementary school or kindergarten, keeping the mood lighthearted. Point out that as we grow, our goals for living change.

Emphasize that while our goals for living may change, the one consistent goal God has for our lives is to conform us into His image. Today, we'll look at how He has designed the trials of life to do just that.

Review the Message . . .

The author of James is likely Jesus' half brother, who was a known leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15 and 21). The book was written predominantly to Jewish Christians who were likely once associated with the church in Jerusalem. These believers had been scattered during a time of persecution, which is why James starts with the theme of trials and suffering from the very beginning.

Ask a volunteer to read James 1:1-18.

FAITH PERSEVERES

James 1:1-18

Why James?

- **To examine the relationship between faith and works.**
- **To explore the impact of our faith on...**
 - **Life in this world.**
 - **Life in Birmingham.**

Discussion . . .

- The title of this series, "Faith Works," can mean a few different things. What meaning do you see in the series title?
- When we study faith and works, there is a difference between following God's commands and being bound by legalism. Why do you think some people err too heavily on either faith OR works instead of seeing the two as inseparable?
- The believers in today's passage were experiencing suffering from the persecution they faced for their faith. Why do you think it was important for them to hear this message about the relationship between faith and works?
- How should the mission of reaching unreached people in the world with the gospel fuel both our faith and our works?

Application . . .

- Do you see faith and works as being at odds with each other, or going hand in hand? Why?
- How have your works increased because of your faith in Christ?
- How has your faith increased as you've been faithful to obey God?

Why Trials and Temptations?

- **God is sovereign over our trials.**
 - **We learn to grow in His likeness.**
 - **We learn to trust in His wisdom.**
 - **We learn to rely on His resources.**
 - **We learn to live for His reward.**

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Discussion . . .

- Read James 1:2. How does this verse seem unreasonable from a human perspective?
- Read James 1:3. How does the “because” in this verse give believers a new perspective on the purpose of trials? How does that same word (because) remind us that God is sovereign over our trials?
- Read James 1:4. If God’s goal for us is to make us into His likeness, how do trials fit into His plan for our lives?
- Read James 1:5-8. How do trials help us to trust in God’s wisdom over our own wisdom?
- Read James 1:9-11. Why are wealth and poverty both subject to God’s sovereignty over trials? How does this encourage both the wealthy and the poor?
- Read James 1:12, Matthew 5:3-12 from the Sermon on the Mount, and 2 Corinthians 4:17-18. How do these verses change what we live for on earth?

Application . . .

- In the trials you are facing, how does the statement, “God is sovereign over our trials,” change the way you view your life right now?
- Trials are inevitable and God intends for them to deepen our faith. Identify one trial you are facing right now. How does knowing that truth change the way you view your struggle?
- Do you see God as the One to whom you can go for wisdom? If so, how has going to Him for wisdom made a difference in the way you live?
- Review the list of things we learn through God’s sovereignty over our trials. Which one of the benefits (growing in His likeness, trusting in His wisdom, relying on His resources, living for His reward) most encourages you right now? How have you experienced other benefits on the list at different places in your life?

- **We are responsible in our _____ temptations _____.**
 - **The origin of sin...**
 - **God is perfectly _____ sinless _____.**
 - **We are utterly _____ sinful _____.**
 - **The anatomy of sin...**
 - **Step One: _____ Deception _____.**
 - **Step Two: _____ Desire _____.**
 - **Step Three: _____ Disobedience _____.**
 - **Step Four: _____ Death _____.**

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Discussion . . .

- Read James 1:13-15. How do these verses place the responsibility for sin solely on our (humanity's) shoulders?
- Read through the "anatomy of sin". Then read Genesis 3:1-7. How does Adam and Eve's sin illustrate the progression of sin?
- Why is it significant in verse 13 that God "cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone"? (We have no one to blame for our sin but ourselves.)

Application . . .

- God does test His people, but He does not tempt His people to turn away. How would you describe the difference between the two?
- When have you experienced a time when you faced God's testing rather than a temptation? What were the results in your life?
- God is sovereign over our trials, yet we are held responsible for the choices we make when we are tempted. Why is it important for each believer to own his or her sin instead of trying to shift the blame elsewhere?

- **God is faithful for our salvation .**
 - His goodness is unchanging.
 - His goodness is undeserved.
 - His goodness is unending.
 - He has saved us from our sin.
 - He will see us through our sorrow.

Discussion . . .

- Read James 1:16-17. How does God's faithfulness to our salvation, which includes His unchanging, undeserved, and unending goodness, offer hope to us when we face trials and fall to temptation?
- Why is verse 18 foundational for understanding of God's grace?
- Consider the word "firstfruits" in verse 18. How does that word look toward the future hope we have in Christ?

Application . . .

- How have you experienced God's goodness in the midst of your trials and temptations?
- Why does having an understanding of God's unending goodness—an eternal perspective—allow you to face trials with greater joy?

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- The final two sub-points, that God has saved us from our sin and will see us through our sorrow, are the essence of James 1. In light of James 1:2, how does this truth allow you to consider your trials a joy?