

Small Group Discussion Questions

- Read James 5:7-12

Kid/Adult Questions

- What does it mean to be patient? When are the hardest times for you to be patient?
- Why are those times in particular so difficult?

Adult Questions

- What does James mean when he says to “Establish our hearts”?
- Why is the coming of the Day of the Lord such a powerful motivator?
- In this passage James encourages us to have patience and to be steadfast in the midst of our trial. What trials are you facing now?
- Take some time to encourage each other and pray for steadfastness in your trials.
- How are you at holding to your word?
- James talks about not “swearing” in the context of demonstrating our faith through our actions not just our words. In Christian circles we often “talk” about the importance of Bible studies, quiet times, and prayer but sometimes don’t demonstrate those values with our actions. Take some time to press into that by praying now in your group.

DAY ONE

Read James 5:7

I hate being sick during the summer. It's always worse when the sun is out and everyone is outside and you are feeling terrible and confined to your bed. A couple summers ago, I was recovering from a surgery during the summer and it felt like torture watching all my neighbors grilling outside and playing outside with their kids. I wanted to be healthy enough to run around and play but I wasn't allowed to do much during recovery. It was torture! My doctor kept telling me to be patient with the healing process and allow my body to recover properly or it would take much longer.

Often, we have the same response in the midst of spiritual trials. God is healing something in us and telling us to be patient with the healing work that is taking place, but we're so eager to get rolling again that we end up pro-longing the healing process.

In James 5:7, James changes his tone as he speaks to his spiritual brothers in Christ and reminds them to be patient in the midst of their suffering. Based on James' rebuke of the rich and wealthy in verses 5:1-6 it's likely that he is calling out to those facing financial trials, poverty and manipulation by the wealthy in the area. James' message to them is a reminder that the "Day of the Lord" is coming soon. It's a reminder that God is using our trials now to prepare for an eternity with him and that as difficult as they are now we can trust that not only are they temporary but God is so good that he can use them for our growth and development.

He provides the metaphor of a farmer to remind us of the confidence we can have in God's work and plan. Just like farmers can be confident that when they plant seeds, they will grow into trees and bear fruit. Apart from doing the work of plowing and planting, the farmer still has a LOT of trust in God's part to bring the sun and rain to grow the crop.

REFLECT

- What are some areas in your life where you are struggling with patience?

RESPOND

- Take some time to ask the Lord what He is trying to teach you in the midst of your trials.

Lord, help me to trust you with my development and my heart. Help me to see your truth amidst the trials I am facing. Help me to shape my expectations around your truth. Help me to be patient with you, my circumstances, myself, and the others around me. Amen.

DAY TWO

Read James 5:8

Do you know that feeling of waking up late for your day? Whenever I wake up late I feel stressed and like I'm behind all day. No matter what I try to do to catch up I always feel like I'm behind. I think it's because I haven't had time to set expectations for the day; to prepare myself for the day and decide how I'm going to respond to the day rather than just react to what comes at me.

I believe that when James encourages us to “Establish your hearts” he is telling us to make a choice about how we will respond. If I make a decision to respond to the day according to God’s truth and perspective it is much easier than being thrust into a situation unprepared and being forced to react as things come. We are to make a conscious choice to be patient in the midst of our trials because otherwise it can be easy to get caught up in the drama of the day or the difficulty of the situation.

REFLECT

- How do you feel when you wake up in plenty of time and have time to prepare yourself for the day versus when you wake up late?
- How do you feel when you start your day with prayer and time with God

RESPOND

- Take some time today or tomorrow, even now during your quiet time to intentionally “establish your heart” in patient trust in God’s control and involvement in your life.

Lord, help me to establish my heart according to your truth and perspective. Help me to be patient as you work things out for my good and for your glory. Help me to rest confidently in those promises and respond accordingly rather than just react to the day. Amen

DAY THREE

Read James 5:9

Often when we are in times of discomfort we allow our pain to justify our grumbling, complaining and bad attitudes towards others. It's like we're saying, "I feel bad, so it's ok if I whine about it and make others feel bad too". For me personally, I'm a terrible "sick person". When I don't feel well I'm not a great person to be around and I know it so I often hide in my room until I feel better because I don't want to be rude to others.

James encourages us that, especially during times of trial, we need to be careful not to complain or grumble against each other. It's during those times of difficulty that we feel more sensitive and justified in our offenses but that is the enemy trying to divide the body of Christ. These passages share similar encouragements (Philippians 2:14; Ephesians 4:29; 1 Peter 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:18)

James reminds us that even in difficult times, God still holds us accountable for our behavior because he judges even believer's actions. (see 2 Cor. 5:10)

REFLECT

- Are there any people, or things that you have been grumbling or complaining about?

RESPOND

- Take some time to apologize to the Lord for your grumbling and ask for His perspective and establish your heart.
- If you were complaining about a person, take some time today to go talk to them and repent and reconcile.

Lord, help me to have an attitude of gratitude. Help me to see life through your perspective and trust what you're doing in my life. Help me to honor you and others with the way I talk. Amen

DAY FOUR

Read James 5:10

There is something powerful about having someone who understands what you're going through. The same can be true about hearing others' stories that are similar to yours. Especially stories where people encountered and overcome similar challenges.

I believe that's why James points us to the prophets who faced all sorts of challenges and overcame them. Many persevered with patience and grace such as Jeremiah: He was put in stocks (Jer. 20:2), thrown into prison (Jer. 32:2), and put in a dungeon (Jeremiah 28:6), and yet he continued his ministry. Other prophets like Jonah didn't handle the challenges with quite as much maturity. However, both stories help us realize that God is using us and growing us in the midst of our challenges and above all else, He is arranging things for His glory.

Romans 8:28 "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

REFLECT

- What is a specific trial in your life that you are facing now? (A strained relationship, difficult job situation, family tension, etc)

RESPOND

- Take some time to pray and search out scripture for specific verses that you can relate to and seek wisdom from.

Lord, speak to me now through your Word. Remind me of the stories of your saints in scripture and illuminate your Word to me. Please bring me encouragement and understanding during my time of trial. Amen

DAY FIVE

Read James 5:11

Have you ever read the story of Job? Without complete trust in God's love and goodness it's hard to look at that story and say that God is compassionate and merciful. It can feel the same way when we are in the midst of our own difficult times. It's hard to see the purpose in our challenges, it can be hard to feel God's grace and presence in the midst of the pain.

This is why James encouraged us to “establish our hearts”. When we establish our hearts, we make a choice prior, during, and after each challenge to say, “I trust you’re Lord, your will be done.” The idea of being steadfast is being immovable and unshakeable even when facing tremendous opposition.

REFLECT

- Do you have complete trust in God's plan and direction for your life? Are there areas where you are still clinging to control?
- Have you established a firm and steadfast foundation in your heart about the goodness of God? Is that an immovable truth in your heart?

RESPOND

Lord, help me believe and trust in your absolute goodness. Help me to see where the enemy has lied to me and tainted my perspective about you. Reveal in me the areas of wounding and pain that have shaped a false perspective and give me the grace to repent of those things. Help me to remain steadfast in the trials I am facing now. Help me to give you praise and honor regardless of how difficult this life is. Amen

DAY SIX

Read James 5:12

This particular verse can seem way out of left field when read in it's context but it relates more than we may think. First off, we need to look at not only the context of the nearby verses but also the greater context of the whole letter of James. It's within that larger concept that we can fill in some of the cracks.

First however, we must understand what the verse means. The word "swear" in this verse is not referring to "bad words" but rather the idea of making oaths. During this time period, many theologians suggest, that it was common to make oaths based on different powers of the time. Much like we might say, "I swear on my mother's grave" to indicate the seriousness of our statement, they might swear to "God", or "by all on earth", "to Ceasar" etc. The problem that was created by this kind of "swearing" was that there seemed to have been a hierarchy between such oaths and if you made an oath that was on a higher plane it could justify breaking a lessor oath.

For example, "swearing to God" might trump an oath I made when I promised I'd help my friend move. It is believed that during the time of writing this was a common practice among Jews that wanted to appear religious and would break their promises. This is particularly frustrating to James because it connects the underling issue of his entire letter of: practicing genuine faith. From the very beginning, James has said that his readers' faith is being tested in the trials (1:3). In the midst of trials, Christians are to ask God in faith (1:6). It is because they hold faith in Christ that they are not to show favoritism (2:1). It is faith that constitutes true riches (2:5). James has gone to great lengths to emphasize that genuine faith will manifest itself in deeds (2:14-26). His whole letter is a plea for his readers to be not merely religious people, but people of faith. (IVP) Reminding ourselves of James intent for the letter helps us understand why James starts the verse with, "but above all" suggesting it's higher importance. It highlights for us, the importance of being people of integrity and faith, not just talking about trusting God but demonstrating that even in the hard times with our actions.

REFLECT

- How consistent are the demonstrations of your faith with your words?
- For example: we may talk about the importance of relying on God and of prayer but how often are we actually doing those things

RESPOND

Lord, help us to be people that demonstrate our true faith with our actions and not just our words. Help us to be faithful followers. Amen