

Small Group Discussion Questions

Kid Questions

- What do you think the difference is between Joy and happiness?
- What does it mean to grumble? What are some thing that you grumble about?

Adult Questions

- Now that we have concluded our James study, take some time to discuss the following as a group: What messages, passages or quiet times stuck out to you over the series? What are some key things you have learned during this study? What was the most challenging thing God presented to you during this study?
- Are you facing any trials right now that you would be willing to share with the group?
- James talks about making the decision to respond to trials with Joy. (read: James 1:2-4,12) How are you responding to your trials now? How is your joy lately?
- James talks about the importance of how we use our tongue (read: James 3:1-12; Phil. 2:14) How is your speech lately? What are the things that you find yourself grumbling about lately?
- James talks about demonstrating our faith with action (read 1:22-25; James 2:14-17). Are there some areas in which God has been encouraging you to take action. Take some time to discuss them with your group.

DAY ONE

Read Acts 17:26-27

When you were deciding on a house to live in or which neighborhood to live in, what influenced your decisions? Was it the style or size of the house? The size of the yard? How much privacy the house had? How close it was to your work? Which school district it was in?

Most people pick their house based on the conditions listed above but very rarely do we pick the house based on the neighbors. How many of us even met the neighbors before moving? It's interesting to think about though isn't it. Why is it that we never consider who our neighbors would be when we will likely be living next to them and interacting with them for years. Have you ever had a bad experience with a neighbor? Having a bad experience with a neighbor can make living in your neighborhood a nightmare, whereas having friends who live next door can be exceptionally life giving.

REFLECT

- Acts 17:26-27 says that God has “determined the allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place”. Have you ever considered the idea that God placed you where you are?
- Spend some time reflecting on some of the reasons God may have placed you specifically in your neighborhood for this season.

RESPOND

- Acts 17:26-27 says that God has placed people where they are so that they can “feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each of us.” Can you identify anyone in your neighborhood that maybe “feeling their way toward him” and trying to find him?
- Would you be willing to pray for that neighbor now? Pray that God would continue to provide opportunities for them to find him and that He would use you.

Lord, help me to see and understand why you have placed me in this neighborhood for this time. Lord give me your eyes for my neighborhood and community and help me to guide those who are seeking to find you. Amen

DAY TWO

Read James 1:12

I remember going on this mountain bike ride that was extremely long and challenging. I went riding with a friend who was in WAY better shape than I was and foolishly I thought I could keep up. It didn't take me long to realize that wasn't the case. As I struggled to climb up these steep hills and keep pedaling, even though my legs were on fire, I began to pray that God would help me to not give up and keep going until I made it to the top. Amazingly, I did. I made it to the top and I'll never forget how great I felt. I was so glad that I didn't give up and I pushed through the pain to make it.

Our passage today paints a similar picture. The word, “blessed” can often be translated “happy”. I think it means much more than that, but the idea is that it is a feeling of joy and celebration. James is telling us that there is a joy that comes from remaining steadfast under trial and trusting in God’s promises.

REFLECT

- How are you responding to your trials or even just daily circumstances? Do you feel joyful? Blessed?
- Part of living in Joy is learning to bear the different weights that we face in life. What are some of the weights you’re carrying today? This year?

RESPOND

- Take some time to pray for perseverance for the weights you carry and the joy to continue faithfully.
- Sometimes, in order to be steadfast it means we need to release some weights to the Lord. A powerful prayer for this is the serenity prayer.

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can, And wisdom to know the difference. Amen

DAY THREE

Read James 3:1-12 and Philippians 2:14

Many sections of the book of James are devoted to the subject of the tongue (see James 3:1-12) and so as we look towards living out our faith we must spend some time talking about “How we speak”.

In his letter, James focuses on demonstrating our faith through action, so it is no surprise that part of that encouragement is to learn to control our tongues. The battle to control our tongue is a lifelong battle as James shares in verse 3:2 so it's natural that a way to demonstrate our growing maturity and living faith is in how well we control it. Philippians 2:14 says, “do all things without grumbling or disputing”. This is important because grumbling or disputing is the exact opposite of “choosing joy”.

REFLECT

- What is your speech like?
- What do you find yourself grumbling about?

RESPOND

- Take some time to repent of the ways your tongue has gotten out of control.
- Take some time to pray about what you're grumbling about. Invite the Lord to speak to you and take some time to listen.

Lord, forgive me for the ways that my tongue has gotten out of control. Help me to honor you with my words. Help me to be a person of joy and gratitude. Lord please speak to me regarding these issues I've been grumbling about _____ . What would You like to say?

DAY FOUR

Read Matthew 12:34-35

In today's passage we read about Jesus' reaction to the religious leaders of the time. In this passage He makes a profound statement that very clearly illustrates James point about the tongue. The statement is: "for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks".

This is a good measuring tool for our hearts. By examining our speech patterns and the things we talk about we can get clues about what our hearts are wrestling with.

REFLECT

- How has your speech been today? This month? This last year?
- Take sometime to sincerely examine the progression of your speech. Are you complaining more or less? Swearing more or less? Etc.
- What does the progression of your speech tell you about what's going in your heart?

RESPOND

- Are there some changes that need to be made to your speech patterns? What practical steps will you take today to make those changes?
- When examining your speech patterns, did your heart demonstrate a movement towards God or away from God.

Lord, help me to control my speech. Lord, more than that, fill my heart with things that are of you. Help me to speak of the good things that you have placed in my heart. Help me to view my speech as a thermometer for the condition of my heart towards you. Amen

DAY FIVE

Read James 1:22-25

The last key element of Living Faith that we're going to look at is "How we act". James spends a large chunk of his letter reminding his readers that a living faith requires action, not just words.

Do you know a lot about healthy eating or exercising. I don't know a ton about them but, I know enough to know that there are some changes that I should be making. I know that I should drink more water and avoid sugary drinks. Simply removing drinkable calories can make a large difference in a daily intake. I know all of those things, but often I don't act on them. Simply knowing that I should avoid a bunch of sugar or exercise is not enough to make me lose weight or to be healthier. It requires that I actually act on that knowledge to receive the blessing of it.

The same is true with the truths of scripture. For example, if I know that God loves me or that I will be blessed immensely with deeper intimacy with God if I take regular time to pray, but never act on that, it's unlikely that I will see the blessings. That is why James says that our faith should be marked by taking action. He also says, at the end of verse 25, "he will be blessed IN HIS DOING". That is an important element to remember. True obedience isn't just acknowledging what is right, it requires us to actually do it.

REFLECT

- Take some time in prayer and ask the Lord what areas in your life He wants you to take some action in

RESPOND

- Take some time to pray about what practical steps you could take today.
- Write down what steps you're going to take today to respond to the Lord.

Lord, Help me be a person of action. Help me to have a living and mature faith. Amen.

DAY SIX

Read James 2:14-17

I love the questions that James asks in this passage. They are so direct and clear. “what good is it my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?” Essentially he is saying, if you claim to be a follower of Christ but never do anything to truly demonstrate that, are you really a follower? A “follower” implies movement; and James asks, “are you moving?” It’s like me calling myself a bobsledder but never bobsledding. In that case, “what’s the point of calling yourself a bobsledder if you never do it”. James asks the same question of believers and provides a stark warning. “Can that faith save him?”

James is NOT talking about a works based faith. He is in NO WAY saying that we need to work to earn our salvation. He is actually saying that true salvation, the salvation that transforms your heart, draws you to action. You are so moved by what God has done for you that you want to serve, not to earn grace but BECAUSE OF HIS GRACE.

REFLECT

- Can the people around you tell you are a follower of Christ by your actions alone?

RESPOND

- Based on your answer above, what changes would you want to make?

Lord, give me compassion for those that are hurting in my community. Help me to love people well and serve you because of all that you have done for me. Help me to live out my faith. Amen