

## Embracing What You'd Rather Escape

James 1:1-8, 12

### Small Group Discussion Guide

Opening Question (Try to get everyone involved in discussion): In your family, is there someone who everyone leans on in hard times?

Transition: This week we're launching a 6-week look at the letter of James, near the end of the New Testament. We're calling the series "Gospel on the Ground," because it takes the abstract truths of what Jesus has done for us, and says, "OK, now how do we live in the day to day realities of life in light of what Jesus has done?" Today is life lesson number 1 in what is perhaps the most practical book in the New Testament: hardship is coming and how you view it will make you or break you.

Read James 1:1-8

- Introduction:
  - In verse 2, the word "consider" is a cognitive word: it means to reckon, or calculate, or come to a mental conclusion about something. So, what is James asking us to do during trials?
  - For some of us, thinking differently may be a struggle. How hard or easy is it for you to change perspective? What makes it harder or easier?
  - Why do you think James challenged us to consider trials a joy instead of just saying "consider it a benefit"?
  - James acknowledges that trials will happen ("whenever" not "if" you encounter trials). If we have the perspective that trials will happen as a Christian, how does that help our attitude?
- Pastor Josh said that there are 3 reasons why we can have joy in trials. First, you can have an optimistic perspective on hardship because of the result of them.
  - What results do you see in verses 3-4 that benefit the Christian?
  - Josh said that the word "testing" refers to the process of smelting, which is where extreme heat is applied to ore—a chunk of rock and metal—to get rid of the parts that don't have any value—and just leave the valuable metal. How does understanding this imagery help you understand the maturation of character that comes from trials?
  - "Perseverance" speaks of standing fast. You might picture it as a boat anchored in a rough storm. How does picturing an anchored boat help communicate the value of perseverance in trials?
  - In verse 4, what do we see as our role in the process of refining our character?
  - Have you ever short-changed the maturation process of a trial and then had to learn that lesson over again? Explain.

- The idea behind “not lacking anything” is that we’ll be equipped to handle any circumstance that life could throw at us. How has character growth from a trial helped you in other areas of your life: school, work, parenting, relationships, temptations, etc.?
- A second reason that you can view trials through optimistic lenses is because of the resource God will give you to get through hardship.
  - Whether or not you remember the series on wisdom we did three years ago, how would you define wisdom? Why is it so beneficial in dealing with trials?
  - In the Greek of verse 5, James literally says, “If anyone lacks wisdom, he should ask the giving God.” How is our perspective on trials affected when we view God as generous and not stingy with his help?
  - Have you ever struggled with seeing God as stingy in certain circumstances? How did you deal with it?
  - Verse 6 discusses not doubting God. However, the Psalms show us that this doesn’t mean never question or communicate with God your misgivings. So, what type of doubting do you think James is talking about here? How does doubt lead to double-mindedness or divided loyalties?
  - The New Testament repeatedly shows the value of support via your Christian community. What is one example of a friend coming through for you during a trial?
- Thirdly, you can view hardships as an opportunity for joy because of the reward on the other side of them.
  - Read verse 12. To what does the “crown of life” refer? How does keeping this in mind help with our perspective during a trial?
  - In the 1<sup>st</sup>-century Greco-Roman world, a crown was a wreath used to award the victors in games. How does seeing the end of a trial as crossing the finish line and being victorious help your perspective and endurance during a trial?
  - In Heb. 12, we see this same word, “perseverance,” show up.  
And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured [same Greek word] the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
  - How does knowing that Jesus went through the same type of trials that we have and is waiting for us at the finish line help us keep an optimistic perspective during trials?
  - From this study, how can each of us be a better friend to someone going through a trial?

Let’s move into Prayer

- Among our prayer requests, let’s pray that God might show us when and how we might have a different perspective and tap into his resources when encountering a trial.