

The Discipline of Facing Difficult Trials

By Johnny L. Derouen

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read the comments related to James 1:2 in the section **It's in the Book**. Share that the word “consider” is an imperative—a command. James commanded us to “consider.” This is not a choice. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What does the word “consider” mean in the Greek? What did James tell believers to do when we face trials and difficult times? What does James say about the possibilities of trials coming our way?

Assignment Two

Read James 1:3-4; then read the comments related to James 1:3 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: We know that trials produce endurance, but what is the final result of trials in our lives? What does it mean to be “perfect and complete”? Why do you think facing trials produces maturity?

Assignment Three

Read the comments related to James 1:5 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: When we face trials that seem beyond our strength to endure, what advice does James give? How does James say God will respond when we do this? What are the results if we either do not ask or ask without trusting in God's promise in verse 5? Compare this truth with Luke 18:8. What is God saying?

Scripture to Memorize

“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

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will state and understand what God's main desire is for them when they face trials and temptations in life.

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He received his master's and PhD degrees in Student Ministry at Southwestern Seminary, and he has a BS in Microbiology. Johnny served as the minister of youth at Oak Park Methodist Church of Lake Charles, Louisiana; Meadowbrook Baptist Church of Fort Worth, Texas; First Baptist Church of Muskogee, Oklahoma; Houston's First Baptist Church; and Travis Avenue Baptist in Fort Worth, Texas.

Johnny is also a member of the Metro Youth Ministers Association (serving as chairman in 1990). He has written articles for a number of youth ministry publications, authored the book *Christ, the Basis of Faith* (2008), and has written contributing chapters on youth ministry and teaching youth in many books including *Accelerate* (2013).

It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

Have you ever been mad at God? Why? What was happening? Usually we are mad at God during times of difficulty and trials. A little background on the book of James will shed some light on this real-life situation and give us wisdom for our own situations. James was the most trusted and respected of all the elders in the first and only “Christian” church in this period, located in Jerusalem.

At this time, the Christians in Jerusalem were being persecuted by having their homes confiscated and their jobs taken away by the government. When people lose their homes and jobs, they have three choices: 1) fight or protest; 2) do nothing; 3) move to another city in order to find a job and a new home. When the Christians faced these trials, many were forced to flee to other cities such as Ephesus, Galatia, Thessalonica, and Corinth. This was called the dispersion. What did they bring with them? Their faith in Jesus!

This began the spread of Christianity, resulting in you and your group studying God's Word together. If not for their trials and the resulting dispersion, the gospel of Jesus might not have spread around the world.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week may now share answers to those questions.

Studying the Passage

Verse 2. Count it . . . when. *Count it* is a command. In other words, James was not making a suggestion. He commanded the disciple to “consider all joy” the trial the disciple is facing. The word *count* in the Greek literally means to look “through” and not “at” one's trials. So when trials come the disciple's way, the disciple is to look through the trial to the final result or impact of the trial.

As we look through the trial, we are to do this with joy! James uses the word “when,” which tells us that it is not *if* we will face trials; it is *when* we face trials. *We will* face trials throughout our lifetime. Expect them! The word “meet” is a Greek word meaning “a surprise.” So trials will come when we least expect them. They will surprise!

Discussion Question

How could someone consider a trial to be a joy?

The joy comes from looking through the trial to its final result. This will be clear as we look at the next few verses.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week may now share answers to those questions.

Studying the Passage

Verse 3. testing of your faith produces steadfastness. James said that the testing of our faith produces endurance that results in perfection and completeness. This a beautiful passage for those who are going through trials. The word “trial” is a Greek word *that can mean “an external or internal trial or even a temptation.”* The word “testing” is an adjective meaning “to

determine if something is genuine.”

Verse 4. perfect and complete. Going through trials and testing shows us where we are and are not genuine! Testing produces in us an endurance that allows the trial to make us more perfect and complete. *Perfect* and *complete* in the Greek mean to be more mature and genuine.

This is why one can consider a trial to be a joy. This doesn't mean the disciple is happy about the trial. Instead, the disciple has confident joy knowing that if he will let God take him through the trial—and not fight against it—the disciple will be more mature and genuine in his walk with Jesus!

Verse 4. let steadfastness have its full effect. We can choose not to go through the trial correctly. We can choose to miss the opportunity for growth and maturity that comes after the trials. What a terrifying thought!

Discussion Question

What are some ways one could refuse or fight going through a trial?

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week may now share answers to those questions.

Studying the Passage, James 1:5, 8

Verse 5. if any of you lacks wisdom. James knew that many disciples would have a difficult time looking “through” trials. He gave great advice in verse 5. He said that if the disciple lacks the wisdom to get through a trial, he can ask God for the wisdom needed. Why? Because God will give the disciple the wisdom needed, and He will give such wisdom graciously and ungrudgingly.

Have you ever had a stranger walk up to you and ask for money for a meal or gas? Many times we do not really want to give money, but we do give it with a grudging heart. That is not how God gives. When we need wisdom to get through a trial and we ask God, He gives us the wisdom willingly!

The Greek word for *wisdom* in this passage means “to know and practice righteousness.” The disciple does not have to know *why* the trial is happening. True wisdom pursues God and trusts His rule. No conditions are required for receiving this wisdom—only ask! But remember, the wisdom is for the endurance, strength and knowledge to get through the trial in order to gain maturity and genuineness. God is ready to give this wisdom to His disciples.

Verse 8. unstable. If we reject or fight going through the trial, we will become “*unstable*.” This refers to not being able to handle stress, making wrong decisions and responding poorly in times of trials and stress. Remember what the Christians in Jerusalem were going through? James knew the people greatly needed God's wisdom to face persecution.

Discussion Questions

What trials are you going through this week? What wisdom do you need to get through them? What possible results could occur after you have allowed Jesus to take you through the trial?

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to. . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Groups of disciples always are making preparations for evangelism, missions, and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

James 1:2-7 is a crucial passage for the disciple when the disciple faces trials. Jesus' heart is for us to trust Him in whatever circumstance He allows into our lives. He never wastes anything. He will even use trials in our lives to make us more genuine and mature in our faith— more like Him.

In James 1:2, James said that all disciples *will* face trials, and they will usually be “surprise trials.” He commanded the disciple to consider trials a joy by looking through them. This is why a disciple can have joy, not shallow happiness, in trials. When the disciple looks through the trial to the final result, he knows that the trial will make him more mature, more genuine and more like Jesus. This is the only way one can be joyful in times of difficult trials.

Real growth in our walk with Jesus almost always comes through crisis. Why? When everything is good we do not really need Him, but in times of trial we turn fully to Him and our faith in Jesus grows!

When the disciple faces trails that seem too difficult to get through, James told the disciple to ask God for the wisdom to get through the trial. God will always give this wisdom willingly and without reproach! This does not mean God will always tell us why the trial is happening or always take us immediately out of the trial, but God *will* give the disciple the wisdom to get through the trial and to know and practice righteousness during the trial.

The danger is that one can refuse to go through the trial willingly or even avoid the trial. If this occurs, the disciple runs the risk of becoming double-minded. He may lose the opportunity to become more mature or even become unstable—not able to handle the stress. God's plan is infinitely better.

Follow up Question

May I tell you about a time I encountered a difficult trial and how God led me through that period?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.