

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

For the week of February 23-29, 2020

“COUNT IT ALL JOY”

GETTING STARTED

To the facilitator: As your group begins, use this section to introduce the topic. If possible, give a brief recap of the sermon.

Share a memorable point, a spiritual lesson, a personal application, a question, or something that challenged you from the sermon last Sunday.

What best describes your temper: (a) Short fuse, big bomb? (b) Long fuse, little fizz? (c) Long fuse, hydrogen bomb? (d) None of the above.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Read James 1:1-4

1. Who is James? How does James describe himself? Who were the recipients of the letter?
2. *Discuss.* When James says “Count it all Joy” (James 1:2), does this mean we are to deny our feelings in times of trial? How does this work in practice? Is this realistic?
3. How does James describe trials? What words does James use in describing the result of trials? In your mind, what are the hallmarks of a mature Christian? Of an immature Christian?
4. *Share.* What wrong thoughts, “doubts” and ideas about God tend to surface in the midst of a trial? What character weaknesses have surfaced in your life when you went through trials in the past?
5. *Discuss.* So much of seeing our trials rightly depends on seeing God rightly. Can you think of examples (i.e. practices, actions, or words) in the gospels that would show how Christ had manifested the right perspective when it comes to trials?
6. *Discuss.* Hard stuff in our life can either make us better or bitter. How do you account for the fact that the same difficult experience leaves one person bitter and jaded while another person is better than they were before? Can you share particular examples or personal experiences that highlight this?

7. *Share.* How has this passage realigned your perspective on trials? What will be the most difficult truth for you to hold on to when you're immersed in a trial? Where is your heart most resistant to God's plans for you?

8. [NEXT STEPS]

This week, pray for God to help you have a biblical perspective of trials and how to respond to them.

- I will commit to go through the devotionals everyday this week.
 - I will seek to know more about who God is by regularly reading his Word.
 - I will not react negatively when trials come; instead, I will count it all joy.
 - I will cultivate my relationship with the Lord in prayer, meditation and solitude.
 - Other ways you can apply this lesson
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REFLECTION

Don't believe for one minute that if you're a Christian and you confess God's Word, you won't have any problems. The fact is that if life is a bowl of cherries, there are definitely some pits in there. The Apostle Peter agrees that sometimes when you're serving God it gets hard. But he brings up a seeming contradiction when he says that you can rejoice while suffering. So which is it – rejoicing or suffering? This is the mystery of the life of the believer. You can be rejoicing and crying at the same time.

The Christian life is real, and when you go through trials, sometimes you weep. How callous it is to tell someone who's going through it that Christians are not supposed to hurt. Life has pain, and it's okay to hurt. Actually, if you attempt to emphasize just the rejoicing part of the Christian life, you might be tempted to go into denial about the realities of life. On the other hand, if you emphasize just the suffering part, you become a depressed Christian.

So how can we rejoice in the midst of our pain? What is Peter talking about when he says, “In *this* you greatly rejoice [emphasis added]”? He's referring to our inheritance of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord! Nobody can take away the fact that I'm born again. You might try to get over on me and con me, but you wouldn't be able to touch my real inheritance, which is kept in heaven for me. Even if someone were to take my physical life, all they would do is send me to be with Jesus, for to be absent from the body is to be present with Christ. Thankfully, we have a living hope and can have joy within, for though we might be going through a season of pain, we are being shielded by God's power through his precious Holy Spirit in us. May the Lord make that real to us today. [Jim Cymbala]

For the full article, check out:

<https://www.brooklyntabernacle.org/devotional/20170207/suffering-yet-rejoicing>

CLOSING THE SESSION.

Close the session by taking the time to pray for one another. Consider the following as you pray:

- Pray that you will grow in learning to rejoice in trials and grow in maturity.
- Pray for those who are hurting, going through fear, worry and anxiety in the group.
- Pray for your unsaved family, friends and loved ones.

DAY 4. THE PRACTICES OF MATURITY

Read: Hebrews 5:11-14.

Believers are on a continual growth track that ascends higher and higher. This side of heaven, none of us ever “arrive,” but we each have a responsibility to press on to maturity. Though many people think those who know a lot about the Bible are the spiritually mature ones, Hebrews 5:14 adds the element of practice to the growth equation. This word means a custom or habit. Christian growth requires the discipline of godly habits carried out daily.

The most important practice to cultivate is a personal devotional time. Since God is the source of all spiritual development, you can’t neglect him and expect to become mature. Transformation begins with time in his Word and prayer.

Obedience is another essential element for advancement. When our desire to obey the Lord is stronger than our attraction to sin, we’ll know we are making progress in our spiritual life.

In terms of physical development, the goal is to become more independent and self-sufficient as we age. But in the spiritual realm, the opposite is true. Those who are mature in Christ recognize their own inadequacy and rely on the Holy Spirit within them. It’s his job to transform our character and empower us to accomplish everything the Lord calls us to do.

In God’s eyes, maturity isn’t the same as getting older. By digging into Scripture and developing God-pleasing habits, we can use our years to grow stronger in the Lord instead of wasting time with passivity. No one becomes mature accidentally. Spiritual growth requires a diligent pursuit of God. [Charles Stanley]

Reflect & Apply.

1. Have you ever considered what it would happen if you *never* grew up physically? Why would that be a problem?
2. What does it mean to become “dull of hearing” (5:11)? What do you think may have been some of the causes that kept them stuck as a spiritual baby? What is the connection between training and maturity?
3. What specific area do you need training to be able to mature? Where can you get help? How and when can you start?

DAY 5. TRANSFORMED BY BEHOLDING

Read: 2 Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 3:1-5.

The greatest characteristic a Christian can exhibit is this completely unveiled openness before God, which allows that person’s life to become a mirror for others. When the Spirit fills us, we are transformed, and by beholding God we become mirrors. You can always tell when someone has been beholding the glory of the Lord, because your inner spirit senses that he mirrors the Lord’s own character. Beware of anything that would spot or tarnish that mirror in you. It is almost always something good that will stain it— something good, but not what is best.

The most important rule for us is to concentrate on keeping our lives open to God. Let everything else including work, clothes, and food be set aside. The busyness of things obscures our concentration on God. We must maintain a position of beholding him, keeping our lives completely spiritual through and through. Let other things come and go as they will; let other people criticize us as they will; but never allow anything to obscure the life that “is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3). Never let a hurried lifestyle disturb the relationship of abiding in him. This is an easy thing to allow, but we must guard against it. The most difficult lesson of the Christian life is learning how to continue “beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord....” [Oswald Chambers]

Reflect & Apply.

1. In what ways have you tried to change your behavior? (What rules have you set for yourself?) How have they worked? When the pressure is really on and your flesh begins to show itself—what do you try to do to “stop”?
2. What kind of change do you think is Paul talking about in 2 Corinthians 3:18? Is this permanent? Is it progressive? How do you think does it happen?
3. Check out 2 Corinthians 3:18 in the NIV and ESV. Why do you think ESV translates it as “beholding the glory” while NIV renders it as “reflecting the Lord’s glory”? [Note: Dr. Thomas Constable states: “We experience gradual transformation. As we observe Christ’s glory we advance in Christ-likeness and reflect his glory, not in our faces but in our characters.”]
4. Take the time to reflect: How are you being transformed into the image of Christ?



Living Word NRA
Worship God. Advance His Kingdom.

COUNT IT ALL JOY

February 23, 2020

Questions for Personal Study & Reflection

This 5-day devotional includes readings with brief commentaries that builds upon the weekend sermon. You are encouraged to take the time to read the Bible passages and meditate on them. On average, you will need 20-30 minutes to complete them.

Reflection questions and applications are intended to invite you to slow down and mediate on the truth that God is teaching you. Daily application steps are also given to help drive the message in practical ways.

DAY 1.

SUFFERING YET REJOICING

Read: 1 Peter 1:1-8.
Don't believe for one minute that if you're a Christian and you confess God's Word, you won't have any problems. The fact is that if life is a bowl of cherries, there are definitely some pits in there. The Apostle Peter agrees that sometimes when you're serving God it gets hard. But he brings up a seeming contradiction when he says that you can rejoice while suffering. So which is it – rejoicing or suffering? This is the mystery of the life of the believer. You can be rejoicing and crying at the same time.

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Reflect & Apply.
1. What are the blessings God has given his people in 1:3-5? To the best of your understanding what do each of these blessings mean to you?
2. Based on what you see in these verses, how is this joy possible?
3. How is God convicting you to grow in your faith in light of this study? Be specific (e.g. personal life, church life, world, etc.).

DAY 2.

STRENGTHENING OF OUR FAITH

Read: 2 Corinthians 1:8-9; James 1:1-4.
Strange as it may seem, one of the primary purposes of being shaken by suffering is to make our faith more unshakable.

Faith is like muscle tissue: if you stress it to the limit, it gets stronger, not weaker. That's what James means here. When your faith is threatened and tested and stretched to the breaking point, the result is greater capacity to endure. He calls it steadfastness.

God loves faith so much that he will test it to the breaking point so as to keep it pure and strong. Paul experienced this according to 2 Corinthians 1:8-9. In that verse, the words "but that was to" show that there was a purpose in this extreme suffering: it was in order that — for the purpose that — Paul would not rely on himself and his resources, but on God — specifically the promised grace of God in raising the dead.

God so values our wholehearted faith that he will, graciously, if necessary, take away everything else in the world that we might be tempted to rely on, even life itself. His aim is that we grow deeper and stronger in our confidence that he himself will be all we need.

He wants us to be able to say with the psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73:25–26). [John Piper]

Reflect & Apply.
1. What does trusting in God mean to you? What should it mean? Do you depend on yourself or others to solve your problems, or God? Think of a situation when you did this.
2. Suffering is apparently the way in which God produces maturity in us. Why do you think that nothing seems to be as effective as trials at this? (See also 2 Corinthians 1:8-9, 12:7-10)
3. Take some time to pray and meditate on how you can apply this passage to your Christian walk.

DAY 3.

DON'T RUN ALONE

Read: Exodus 17:8-13.
My husband Jack was on mile 25 out of 26 when his strength failed him.

This was his first marathon, and he was running alone. After stopping for a drink of water at an aid station, he felt exhausted and sat down on the grass beside the course. Minutes passed, and he couldn't get up. He had resigned himself to quitting the race when two middle-aged schoolteachers from Kentucky came by. Although they were strangers, they noticed Jack and asked if he wanted to run with them. Suddenly, he found his strength restored. Jack stood and accompanied by the two women he finished the race.

Those women who encouraged Jack remind me of Aaron and Hur, two friends who helped Moses, the leader of the Israelites, at a key point (Ex. 17:8–13). The Israelites were under attack. In battle, they were winning only as long as Moses held his staff up (v. 11). So when Moses's strength began to fail, Aaron and Hur stood on either side of him, holding up his arms for him until sunset (v. 12).

Following God is not a solo endeavor. He did not create us to run the race of life alone. Companions can help us persevere through difficulty as we do what God has called us to do. [Amy Peterson, Our Daily Bread]

Reflect & Apply.
1. How does the Jewish people react to this situation they were facing (17:1-4)? What does the Lord do to his people (17:5-6)?
2. Why do you think the success in the battle depended upon the position of Moses' hands?
3. Who can you encourage to persevere through difficulty today?
