

Small Groups - Managing the Struggles

by Pastor Richard Braun

Date _____

Week _____

Icebreaker

What is frustrated you this week? Politics, talk radio, sermons, traffic, etc. How & why?

Opening Prayer

Thank you, God, for the good and even the bad in our lives. Thank you for giving us minds, bodies, and souls to honor you. Life can be challenging at times, help us to find relief in the tough times, especially in those areas where we have control. Lord, also help us to find shelter in your grace for areas out of our control. Please give us the wisdom necessary for making good decisions. Amen

Open It

1. In what area/s of life do you struggle the most? What determines that for you? Explain
2. In what area/s of life do you struggle the least? How does this balance out the tough times?
3. Do you know a person who has many struggles or trials in their life? Do you think they deserve the hardship? How do they deal with their difficulties?
4. Since we know God is omnipotent and all-powerful, why doesn't He prevent suffering and hardship in this world?

James, believed to be the brother of Jesus, writes about struggles. His input here is similar to Peter's remarks in I Peter 1:3-9 where Peter talks about rejoicing even if we suffer grief for a while. Trials turn to praise, and glory and honor are revealed when Jesus Christ comes again in the end, and we receive salvation.

James 1:1-13 NASB

James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings.

[2] Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, [3] knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. [4] And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

[5] But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. [6] But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. [7] For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, [8] being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

[9] But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position; [10] and let the rich man glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. [11] For the sun rises with a scorching wind, and withers the grass; and its flower falls off, and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

[12] Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

[13] Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

Explore It

1. I personally have a hard time rejoicing in trials or struggles. Does anyone else, or is it just me? What do **you** do when trials and struggles come your way?
2. The Bible seems to say (Ecclesiastes 9:1-2) that God's will comes to the good and the evil man just the same. Life isn't fair; it's all chance (providence). If so, why do good people have to struggle?
3. Why does God give us hardship and struggle? Or does it even come from God?
4. (Extra Credit) Can good exist without evil? If there were no evil, would we know good was something positive? Do struggles or trials come about because evil exists in the world? What do you think?

Get It

1. In verse James 1:2, the term "*trials*" refers to what? Remember, God never tempts us to fail.
2. The Greek word for "*testing*" in James 1:3 means proving. Does that change the meaning of this passage for you in any way? If so, how?
3. When I'm in an arduous struggle, it's hard to listen to anyone, let alone God; however, in James 1:5, we are encouraged to ask for wisdom. How do we know wisdom when it comes to us? Give an example if you are willing to share one incident.
4. James 1:6 says, "*ask in faith without doubting.*" For some people, faith without doubting can be an elusive thing. If our faith is wavering, how do we improve that issue? Rom 10:17
5. What promise does James give us later on in this passage? Do you believe it? Does it matter to you?

Apply It

1. We just heard that if we are to endure our trials but lack wisdom, ask God, and he will give us the wisdom we need. How does God speak? (Through his Word, the Holy Spirit, his church, and through people) Look at a struggle you have. Search God's Word for insight, and ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten and bring to remembrance what God has said. Seek out someone of faith and ask for their input and wisdom about your struggle. Try to ask in faith, without doubting.
2. As a group exercise, ask one willing person to share a significant trial or struggle in their life. Now ask the group to pray about this issue. What passages come to mind that might relate to this trial or struggle? Keep going to the Word for wisdom.
3. If you'd like to dig deeper into the issue of struggles and trials, the how and why for all of us, I would recommend a book called - "*When Bad Things Happen to Good People*" by Harold Kushner.

Closing Prayer -

Dear God, creator and redeemer, we thank you for having patience with us and allowing us to grow through our struggles. As we search to find our way, please be with us, and give us courage, strength, and wisdom to make good decisions. Amen.

