

SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE



**PRINCE
OF PEACE**
Called to Connect



Faith & Endurance

January 4 & 5, 2020

How can a sane person consider the hardships of life as “pure joy”? According to James Christ-followers can choose to see them as the pathway to maturity. In the same way that you can only build muscle by the uncomfortable process of heavy resistance, our faith and our character are developed primarily through hardship.

SCRIPTURE TEXT: JAMES 1:1-8

Read the scripture text together as a group.

BACKGROUND INFO

The community to whom James is writing is struggling under many trials (Acts 8:1ff). And James tells them to consider it “pure joy”. That sounds like the worst kind of positive thinking ever! It’s important to note that these difficulties are not sent by God to make us better. Nor are hardships a sign of God’s punishment or absence. They simply are. They are a reality of everyone’s life. How we respond to them is what makes all the difference. And James calls us to respond with joy. Pain isn’t pleasurable, but people of many spiritual traditions, including Christianity, affirm that pain can serve a higher purpose...the purpose of helping us to grow and mature.

But it takes wisdom to see life and our challenging circumstances that way, which is why James says several important things about wisdom: *Wisdom comes from God*. It’s a gift. And in the Christian tradition this gift is closely tied to the gift of the Holy Spirit. *God gives wisdom freely*, without cost and without regard for past failures. *Wisdom only comes to those who ask in faith*, without doubting. Wisdom is seeing life from God’s perspective so that we can persevere through trials. It’s trusting that God is good even when life doesn’t seem to be.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is your first reaction when James says to consider troubles great joy?
- Share about a time when you experienced trials. Was it easy to lean into joy during that time? Why or why not?
- How have the challenges/trials of life helped you mature and grow in faith?
- When has wisdom changed the way you responded to trails or difficult times? What happened?

APPLICATION: This week, consider one change you’d like to experience in your spiritual life in 2020. We are always growing our endurance—what practice can you apply that will help you grow yours?