

James 1:1-18 What to do in trials...

1. We have all heard the old adage – suffering can make you better, but it can also make you bitter. What factors do you think tip the scales one way or the other?

As an "icebreaker" to get people thinking about the topic in general. No right or wrong answers here.

Read James 1:5-11

2. For the biblical writers wisdom was a practical understanding of how the world worked. God having knit a pattern, a fabric into every aspect of life. In order to navigate successfully through life we would need wisdom, an understanding of the fabric that God has knit into that aspect of life. If we lack this wisdom, James encourages us to ask God for it. How are we to ask, and what would this look like practically?

We are to ask with faith – with a living trust in God.

Without doubt – as mentioned in the sermon this is a word that means divided loyalties. I am both loyal to God and to something else. In the sermon Tim used the illustration of inviting us to think about the foundations of our lives. Some of it will be on the rock – on who we are in light of Christ's love and grace – it is rock because it is stable and unchanging. Some of it will be on sand. Things that are unstable and change – like career, relationships, money, possessions, reputation, acclaim. Trials bring to light that those things are sand affording us the opportunity to shift the foundation of our lives off the sand and unto solid rock. If we ask for wisdom with a desire to keep our foundations on the sand – a divided loyalty – I want God – and this thing – the wisdom that God gives will be rejected before we hear it because we will want to keep our foundation on that thing.

Vs. 9-11 is an example of what we often put our foundations upon – wealth and possessions. If you are lowly – boast in who you are in Christ. If you are rich and you begin to lose it – boast in that for it will afford you the opportunity to do something in your life that you may never have done otherwise – shift the foundation of your life off of the sand and onto solid ground.

Practically? There would be no right answer here – simply inviting some exploration of exploring putting this invitation into action.

3. James says that the God we ask is a generous giver who gives without reproach, without finding fault. How does this picture of God address some of our fears or hesitations in asking?

God gives generously – he is going to give us more than we can possibly need to navigate that particular area of our lives. We will have more than enough resources.

God gives without reproach, he doesn't find fault. This addresses our hesitation to ask thinking that God is going to judge us for our missteps of the past, or that we are somehow unworthy of his attention, or that our problem is somehow beneath his power. Any excuse that we have that leads us to not ask is meant to be addressed by James' representation of who God is.

Read James 1:12

4. How does the promise of eternal life reframe our experience of the various trials of life?

In the sermon Tim gave some examples.

The loss of love now is met with the promise of being caught up for eternity in the love of the trinity – the love between father son and holy spirit.

The loss of wealth now is met the promise of the true riches of eternity.

The loss of health or physical prowess now is met with the promise of a renewed resurrected body.

In this question I think you are wanting to invite your group to consider how eternity and the promise of it reframes our experience of trials. It may require a bit of prodding – perhaps asking - what is your vision of eternity? How is that informed by the teachings of the bible? How does that vision bring perspective to the various trials of life?

Read James 1:13-18

5. Every trial is a temptation. When various trials hit there is the tendency to use every means at our disposal to bring things back to the way that they were. We could lie, manipulate, bully, strong arm, jettison convictions, break commitments, bend our moral compass. James is exposing our innate tendency when we succumb to temptation to push the blame outward. How might we blame God for our succumbing to temptation and why do you think we do it?

Blaming God could come from attributing our particular personalities to his design – making our succumbing to temptation a matter of fatalism that owes its cause to something only God has control over.

Blaming God could come from a high view of His sovereignty. A belief that every single event in your life is attributed to him. If he caused it, and you succumbed to the temptation inherent in it. Then it is his fault.

Blaming God could come from a belief that He hasn't given you the resources to respond to the temptations of life with resistance.

Why do we blame God? The alternative is to take full responsibility ourselves. To take responsibility would be to acknowledge that we are the people who do those things, who succumb to those temptations. Without a high view of the forgiveness and love of God in Jesus we may not be willing to acknowledge who our actions reveal that we are.

6. James want us in our various trials to focus on the character of God. The father of lights who gives every good and perfect gift, most notably what he has done for his through the word of truth Jesus, through his death and resurrection. How can fixing our eyes on Jesus reframe our experience of the various trials of life?

Fixing our eyes on Jesus means that we have our eyes opened to his love, so that whatever reason we might give for why we are facing various trials – it can't be because he doesn't love us.

Fixing our eyes on Jesus means we see that he is willing to give up all for our sake – therefore would he not in love give us everything else we need?

Fixing our eyes on Jesus means we see that death could not defeat him – he has won for us eternal life. Which roots us in the promise of eternity for those who are in him.

Again this can be a very subjective question sparking your group to reflect on their own personal various trials in light of the cross