

SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

COFFEEHOUSE FIVE CHURCH

JAMES

TRUSTING GOD IN TRIALS

JAMES 5:7-12; JOB 1:1-22

07/02/2017



MAIN POINT

When trials and suffering come, wait on God. Be patient, because God is working even when we cannot see it.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Think back over a time in your life when you faced a seemingly insurmountable challenge. What predominant emotions did you feel during that time?

At the time, how did you think God felt about your situation and what did you think He was doing? Did you think God was waiting? How was that different from what He actually had planned?

Immense challenges are a staple of life. In such situations, it can be tempting to simply accept the status quo and never move forward. Today we will discuss patience and what it looks like to keep moving and growing despite significant obstacles in life.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 5:7-12.

Why did James urge patience? What was happening to his readers?

Why is it hard to wait and be patient in the midst of suffering? Why do you think James used Job as an example?

The believers that James was writing to knew suffering and hardship. Persecution was common at this time. This led many to wonder why God was being slow—why was He not bringing everything to a close? James called for patience in suffering, just as Job was patient and waited on God in the midst of challenging trials.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOB 1:1-3, 8.

Do you think it is easier or more difficult to give to God when you have lots of possessions like Job?

How can the world's perspective cause us to give up more quickly, rather than keep moving forward?

How do you think Job felt about his standing before God, prior to all his loss? Why did Job have to experience these horrible things?

The multiplied financial losses, the emotional heartbreak of the deaths of all his children, and the personal physical suffering Job would soon experience did not come as punishment for anything he did or failed to do. God permitted these tragedies for purposes far greater than Job or others in this story would ever fully grasp.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOB 1:9-17.

What kind of hardship did Job face in these verses?

What might Job have been thinking as messenger after messenger delivered bad news?

How might economic hardships affect our heart toward sacrificial giving? How might they stop us from moving forward in the direction God is leading?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOB 1:18-19.

What kind of loss did Job experience in verses 18-19? What kinds of questions or thoughts do these verses raise for you?

From a human, observable perspective, Job was the victim of criminal and natural disasters. From a biblical perspective, we know these events were not random but allowed by God and caused by Satan. One of the great biblical truths is found in the Book of Job: God is in control of the events in this world, including those in our lives.

Why are we so quick to question God when suffering happens?

God did not allow Satan to bring suffering into Job's life for the sole purpose of proving Satan wrong. God knew Job's faith was real and did not need this test to discover that truth. We will be exploring reasons for Job's suffering in the lessons ahead. We will see God's purposes in suffering are complex and those who try to reduce the purpose of suffering to simple answers are wrong.

Have you ever let yourself believe God cares less for you when you experience relational loss like this? Why or why not?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOB 1:20-22.

What difference does his faith in God make in the way Job deals with his catastrophic losses?

How might a person without faith respond to similar losses?

Amazingly, Job's first instinct moved him to submit and surrender to God. This is the first step forward. The last phrase, "Praise the name of the LORD," showed Job's understanding of God's sovereignty. Since all he had belonged to the Lord, God could take it back at any time. In all of this, not once did Job question God's justice, love, wisdom, or sovereignty.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What has been the most challenging trial in your life? What have you learned from it? How did it require patience?

How can we prepare for adversity in our lives? What kind of mind-set does it take to keep moving when that adversity comes?

How might faith in God sustain you in the face of similar losses?

What hardships are causing you to want to give up right now? What faith response is God asking you to give in light of life's difficulties?

PRAY

Ask God to guide you to be a faithful steward of all He has given, even during the difficulties of life.

COMMENTARY

JAMES 5:7-11

5:7. In light of God's ultimate justice, James exhorted his brothers to be patient. The Greek term rendered "be patient" means "to be long-suffering," "to endure." Rather than to seek revenge for wrongs, we are to live in anticipation of the Lord's coming—Christ's return.

An illustration from farming presses James's point. The farmer plows his field and sows his seed. He eagerly expects a crop of precious fruit, which he holds dear because of his toil and his dependence on it for survival. The early and the late rains refer to the promised land's two rainy periods. The early rains began during October and lasted for a couple of months, and the late rains began in February or March and also lasted a couple of months. These rains usually came gradually. The farmer sowed his seed when the early rains came and softened the earth. Then he anticipated the late rains to cause the grain to grow to maturity. Farmers depended on these crucial rains for crop production. Without them, people could face famine.

5:8. Believers are to follow the farmer's example of perseverance. In light of Christ's imminent return, we are to strengthen our hearts. We are to persevere in faith and renew our courage and commitment. Our phrase "just around the corner" captures the sense of the words "is near." Living in light of Christ's return should give believers staying power, because at His return believers will be vindicated and the wicked oppressors will be judged.

5:9. The Greek term rendered "complain" means "to groan" or "to sigh" inwardly and then "to verbalize ill feelings toward someone." In this context it has the sense of blaming others for one's difficulties. James wanted believers to stop murmuring or grumbling against one another so they would not be judged. Again he echoed words of Jesus (Matt. 7:1-2). The word "look" calls attention to and emphasizes a strong warning: Jesus, the Judge, is on the threshold and is about to enter (see v. 8). With the Judge so near, how can believers continue to grumble against and find fault with one another?

Verse 9 does not mean Christians will face the same judgment as the wicked (vv. 1-6). Instead, believers will be judged on the basis of their relationship with Christ, and the wicked will be judged on the basis of their lack of a relationship with Him.

5:10. James pointed believers to the prophets as a group for an outstanding example of suffering and patience. The Greek noun translated "example" comes from a verb that means "to copy under." It refers to students' receiving copies of correctly formed letters to use in honing their writing skill. They practiced writing the alphabet under these excellent models.

James referred to Hebrew prophets as models of perseverance. Jewish believers would mentally review their history for prophets such as Jeremiah who were persecuted but endured. The prophets persevered under pressure; thus, they were worthy examples of steadfastness.

5:11. “See” calls attention to James’s emphasis. Those who endured were worthy of congratulations and praise. The word for “endured” is different from the term for “patience” in verses 7-8 that also has the element of endurance. The word in verse 11 conveys the sense of bearing up under a load without collapsing and of taking blows and having the strength to strike back.

These believers had heard of Job’s endurance, perhaps in synagogue settings in which Job was presented as an example of perseverance. He was not patient in our usual meaning of the word; he “had it out” with God, but he remained steadfast in his faith. We know the outcome from the Lord for Job—the vindication God provided. That God restored Job demonstrates He is very compassionate and merciful. The Greek word rendered “very compassionate” means “full of pity or of tender affections.” It conveys great kindness. The term “merciful” has the idea of being moved by another’s suffering. We can count on God’s active kindness and empathy as we endure hardships.

JOB 1:1-22

1:1. Job was blameless and upright. The personality of Job is most attractive, and pleasing to God Himself. He was completely honest. He was devout; he feared God, like Abraham (Gen. 22:12). And he was moral; he turned away from evil. He rejected what was wrong; he did not merely shun it. The fact of Job’s genuine righteousness is essential to the book. It begins with a clash of opinion between Yahweh and the Satan on this point. The slanderer denies it; Yahweh sets out to prove it.

1:2-3. Job had an ideal family of seven sons and three daughters, both numbers and their sum being symbols of completeness, a clear token of divine favor. Job’s wealth was measured in livestock, and once more the numerals indicate the ideal.

1:4-5. Job’s children were able to enjoy the best of everything. No disapproval of this pleasant life is expressed. We need not suppose that they spent all their time in roistering and did no work. There is no hint of drunkenness or licence or laziness. Job expresses no anxiety on this score, although he is aware of the danger that they might slip into profanity. These delightful family gatherings are part of the atmosphere of well-being that begins the story. They are a mark of good fortune, or rather of God’s blessing.

1:6. Most commentators assume that the Lord’s court assembles in heaven. There is nothing in Job about the location of the levy. Satan’s insolence shows a mind already twisted away from God, but his hostility is not on the scale of a rival power. There is evil here, but not dualism. The Satan may be the chief mischief-maker of the universe, but he is a mere creature, puny compared with the Lord. He can do only what God permits him to do. In the assembly he is more like a nuisance than an official. Satan is not God’s minister of prosecution; it is the Lord, not the Satan, who brings up the case of Job.

The contribution of the Satan to the action of the book is minor. His place in its theology is even less. In the subsequent discussions the misfortunes of men are never traced to a diabolical foe, and it is impossible to believe that the purpose of this tremendous book is to teach us an explanation of evil that Job and his friends never think of, namely that human suffering is caused by the Devil.

1:7-10. The conversation is informal, in keeping with a popular tale. The Lord’s first greeting is the same as Jacob’s to the men of Haran (Gen. 29:4), and means little more than the commencement of conversation. On the lips of God the question does not betray a need for knowledge, but an invitation to state his business.

1:11. The basic questions of the book are raised. God’s character and Job’s are both slighted. Is God so good that He can be loved for Himself, not just for His gifts? Can a man hold on to God when there are no benefits attached? Satan suggests a test to prove his point. His language is abrupt; he commands God with imperative verbs: literally, “But now, you just extend your hand and damage all his property.”

1:12. The Lord accepts the challenge. The Satan is given permission to do what he likes with all Job’s property. But he must not touch Job’s person. The Satan goes out, eager to get on with the mischief.

1:13-19. In swift succession four messengers come with news that his happy world has fallen in ruins. Since his children were feasting in their eldest brother’s house, this was probably the beginning of the weekly cycle. This would be the day when Job had offered sacrifices to ensure the favor of God. Nothing could have stunned him more than the arrival of such news just as he had made fresh peace with his Lord.

1:20-22. Job’s response was magnificent. His actions were deliberate and dignified, like David’s (2 Sam. 12:20) and Hezekiah’s (2 Kgs 19:1). Men of standing wore a robe over their tunic. It was ripped as a gesture of grief immediately on receiving bad news. Shaving the head was part of the mourning rituals in Mesopotamia and Canaan, often described in

ancient texts. Because of its heathen associations it was actually forbidden by the Law, but it is often mentioned in the Old Testament. Since nothing wrong is seen in his action here, it is worth noting that Job does not resort to gashing his body in the way Israel's neighbors often did in bereavement. Job sees only the hand of God in these events. It never occurs to him to curse the desert brigands, to curse the frontier guards, to curse his own stupid servants, now lying dead for their watchlessness. All secondary causes vanish. It was the Lord who gave; it was the Lord who removed; and in the Lord alone must the explanation of these strange happenings be sought. Job passed the first test. He did not charge God with wrong.