

STUDY 6. NOTES FOR LEADERS

1. a. What has gone wrong for you in recent times?
b. Can you see the reasons or did it just happen?
c. What has been the impact on you and on others?

2. Read James 1:2-4.

My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing (NRSV).

- a. How do you react when you read this verse?
- b. What do you think the various trials would have been?

Probably this was due to some form of persecution. If James is an early writing it would have predated the persecution that was known during Nero's time (62 A.D.). Because of the Jewish nature of the writings (even though lacking in OT quotes) the readers may have been Jewish Christians who were having conflict with the established synagogues. We haven't pursued the issue of persecution in this study because for many Australian Christians it is not a major factor. However there may be some in your group with an overseas background who have experienced some form of persecution. Bring them into the discussion and get them to share their experience.

3. The passage implies that we might emerge through suffering as tougher Christians or that suffering might benefit us in some way.
 - a. Do you agree with that? Would you always agree with that?
 - b. Can you think of how suffering has changed you? Has it made you more compassionate or perhaps bitter and angry?
 - c. Have you become more mature? (see verse 4).

a. James implies that suffering leads to endurance and then to maturity. "Maturity" in Greek has the meaning of completeness, like a cheese that has reached its best through the process of aging. The word can also be translated as "perfect."

4. James urges us to "count it as all joy".

Refer to the sermon for a development of the thought of the association of "joy" and "suffering." Joy is not synonymous with happiness, but is related to happiness.

- a. Is the idea that "suffering equals joy" a call to masochism? Do you know people who seem to enjoy suffering?
 - b. What do you think James means when he asks us to treat suffering as a cause for joy?
5. Imagine you are talking to somebody about the tough time that they are experiencing. How would you respond to these statements?
 - a. "This seems like the end of everything for me. How could I ever recover?"
 - b. "Where is God in all of this?"
 - c. "This has made me so angry!" (*Often suffering is associated with loss and grief and anger is a frequent reaction.*)
 - d. "I have started to wonder if I have done something wrong." (*Am I being punished?*)
 - e. "I can put up with pain but not with people who are a pain."
 - f. "Some people seem to get over these things so easily." (*Refer here to the sermon's discussion about the impact of joy on the way that we see the issue as either a problem or a challenge.*)

6. See Verse 5.

Why do you think this verse follows verse 4? (How are the thoughts connected?)

There are some commentators who do not see connections with the various parts of James and others who see the ongoing thoughts as having obvious links. Here, if the thoughts are linked, James may be implying that the wise person can see suffering in a broader context and not as a challenge to faith.

7. What has verse 6 to do with the issue of suffering?

Suffering can lead us further away from God and cause doubts. 1 Peter 4:12-13 addresses this issue and says that suffering is a part of Christian living. Sometimes the doubts can be caused by false expectations that Christians are excluded from suffering, or it could be that the suffering causes us to be “down”, and as a result, emotionally, we block out God.

8. Do you find these verses from James a help or hindrance in your understanding about suffering?
9. Is there anybody in the group who needs particular prayer because of something that is going on in their lives right now?