

Discussion Starter

"God whispers in our pleasures but shouts in our pain."
C.S. Lewis

How do you react to this statement of C.S. Lewis?
Do you agree with him?
Does your own experience bear him out?

Worship Together

As we start this new series we are going to come back to the events at the very heart of our faith in a time of worship. You might want to play a quiet worship tape in the background while you read and meditate.

Read Matthew 27:11-54 together.

You could either ask one individual to read it all or take a few verses each. Read it slowly and

meditatively, and allow plenty of pauses for everyone to picture the scene and to dwell on what Jesus has done for us.

When you have finished allow a couple of minutes of silence and then invite people to express their worship in short prayers of gratitude.

Bible Study

"There is nothing like a good thump to reveal the nature of a heart. The true character of a person is seen not in momentary heroics, but in the thump-packed humdrum of day-to-day living."
Max Lucado

Read James 1:1-18 and discuss...

- How do you picture a Christian who is "mature and complete, not lacking anything"?
- Have you had any personal experience of the fact that the testing of your faith develops perseverance? What kind of work does perseverance need to finish?
- Why might our trials lead us to ask God for wisdom?
- According to Max Lucado (above) it's only when someone gets thumped around by life that you really find out what they are made of. Do you agree? Compare the pictures in verses 5-8 of two different kinds of person under pressure.
- Why do you think that James suddenly turns to matters of wealth and poverty in the middle of a passage about persevering under trials? Is there a link? Are these verses simply talking about our bank balances?
- What is the difference between trials and temptations? Are they related in any way?
- List all the things that this passage tells us about God's character. What encouragement would there be here for someone in the midst of trials?

Pray Together

Is anyone in your group facing trials at the moment? Is anyone being ridiculed, harassed or bullied because of their faith? Take the time to pray for them and encourage them along the lines that you have discussed in this study.

Then take a few minutes to expand the horizons of your prayers. Are you aware of other situations where Christians are facing trials or persecution? Perhaps if your group has a link missionary you may be aware of particular pressures that they are facing. Pray for these situations.

Meditations

If you have time, work through these meditations individually before you come to do the Bible study with your group. Why not take five minutes each day to read one of these verses and pray through what its implications may be for you at this time.

Read James 1:2

What kinds of trials have you faced recently? Have you been able to consider them pure joy? How has your relationship with God changed as a result of the trials you have been through?

Read James 1:2-4

Are there areas of your life at the moment where you are having to persevere? What does it mean to you that perseverance is “doing its work” in you, and that that work must be completed? Read Romans 5:3-5

Read James 1:5

What does this verse tell us about God’s character? When you approach God are you able to come with the confidence of knowing that He gives generously without finding fault?

Read James 1:9-11

Do you consider yourself to be someone ‘in humble circumstances’ or someone ‘who is rich’? Are you taking pride in the things that God asks you to?

Read James 1:12

Paul said that if we only have hope for this life we are to be pitied more than anyone (1 Corinthians 15:19). How much does the promise of heaven and your future reward feature in your thinking? Think especially of how this might change your perspective on any trials you are currently facing.

Read James 1:13-15

We all suffer from temptations – where does James say that they come from? Do you take responsibility for your evil desires, or are you tempted to shift the blame to God, other people or situations that you find yourself in? Talk to God about any evil desires that are enticing you at the moment.

Read James 1:16-18

Are you thankful enough? Spend a few minutes meditating on the ‘good and perfect gifts’ that you have received, both recently and over the years. Have you recognised God as the source of these things?