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**OPEN THE CONVERSATION**

Take some time to build relationships with your groups:

* Today’s RBQ (Relationship Building Question): What’s something difficult you’ve done that at first scared you / was hard, but you ended up loving it?

**INTRODUCTION**

Have you ever trained for something tough—like a big test, a sports tryout, or a performance? Most of the time, the process isn't fun. It’s tiring, frustrating, and even painful. But once it's over, and you see how far you’ve come, you realize it was worth it. That’s kind of what James is getting at in the first chapter of his letter. James writes to believers who are going through really difficult times. They’re scattered, facing pressure from the world, and struggling to hold on. But instead of telling them to escape or just survive, James says something surprising—find joy in the middle of your trials. Why? Because God is using them to help you grow. In today’s lesson, we’re going to talk about how trials shape our faith, what maturity in Christ really looks like, and how we respond to both hardship and temptation. This isn’t about pretending to be happy when life is hard—it’s about trusting that God is working, even when we don’t see it yet. The truth is: trials will come. Whether it's school stress, family issues, health struggles, or feeling left out, none of us are exempt from hard seasons. But James wants us to shift how we see them. Instead of asking “Why is this happening to me?” we can start asking, “How is God growing me through this?” That mindset doesn’t make trials easy—but it does make them meaningful. When we endure with faith, we don’t just get through it—we grow through it.

***READ JAMES 1:1-12***

1. **Why do you think God sometimes allows us to go through hard things? Can you think of a time when something difficult helped you grow as a person or in your faith?**
2. **What do you usually do when you're going through something confusing or painful? How might asking God for wisdom change the way you handle that situation?**
3. **What are some temptations that people face when life gets hard? How can you tell when you're being tempted instead of tested?**

**WRAP UP**

* Jesus endured the cross so we could have life, and now He walks with us through every trial we face. How can you trust Him and reflect His love this week, even when life feels hard?

*Ask for any prayer requests, and pray for one another.*

**EXTENDED CUT**

James opens his letter not with comfort, but with challenge—he tells believers to count it all joy when they face trials. This sounds shocking until we understand James’s core message: trials are tools in God’s hands. They’re not obstacles to faith, but opportunities for it to grow. The Greek word for “trial” (peirasmos) can also mean “test” or “temptation,” depending on the context—James makes it clear that trials can either grow us or tempt us, depending on our response.

James 1:2-4 sets the foundation for the theme of endurance. James isn’t saying to be happy about pain, but to rejoice in what it produces. The goal isn’t just survival, but spiritual maturity—becoming more like Christ. Verses 5-8 highlight our need for wisdom to see trials the right way. Without God's wisdom, we get tossed around by our feelings or circumstances. But God gives wisdom freely when we ask in faith.

**1. Why do you think God sometimes allows us to go through hard things? Can you think of a time when something difficult helped you grow as a person or in your faith?** God doesn’t cause pain, but He can use difficult situations to grow us in ways we wouldn’t experience otherwise. Hard things reveal what’s really going on in our hearts—what we believe, what we rely on, and what we still need to surrender to God. Growth doesn’t usually happen when life is easy. It happens when we’re stretched and learn to depend on Him. Sometimes a challenge helps develop things like patience, confidence, or trust. Looking back, we often realize we came out stronger and wiser—even if it didn’t feel that way at the time.

**2. What do you usually do when you're going through something confusing or painful? How might asking God for wisdom change the way you handle that situation?** When things are hard, it’s easy to react out of fear, anger, or anxiety. Sometimes that means shutting down, blaming others, or trying to handle everything alone. Asking God for wisdom means slowing down and inviting Him into the middle of the situation. It could be through prayer, reading Scripture, or talking to someone who follows Christ. Wisdom helps us respond instead of just react. It doesn’t always give us answers right away, but it helps us move forward with clarity, faith, and peace.

**3. When life gets really hard, why do you think temptation can feel stronger? How can you tell when you’re facing a trial that’s meant to grow you versus a temptation that’s trying to pull you away?**

When life feels overwhelming, temptation often shows up more strongly. That’s because we’re tired, stressed, or looking for comfort—and sin can start to look like a quick escape. James shows that a trial is something that can strengthen your faith when you stay connected to God, while a temptation tries to pull you away from Him. The difference comes down to what it leads to. Trials, when endured with God, lead to growth and maturity. Temptation leads to disobedience and regret. Knowing that God never tempts us helps us see that when we feel lured to sin, it's not a test—it’s a trap. And God always gives us a way out.