

DISCUSSION GUIDE

SUMMER
AT
HILLSIDE

August 20, 2023

PERSPECTIVE IN TRIALS

Special Guest Speaker - Megan Marshman

This Discussion Guide is designed to help you *think more deeply* about the sermon and *engage with others* through thoughtful conversation, biblical exploration and *allow God to work* in your life as you apply what you discover.

➤ CONVERSATION STARTER

Describe a time you had to learn something new (a sport, instrument, job, etc.). What were some of the challenges you faced?

➤ EXPLORATION

Learning a new skill rarely happens overnight. Becoming proficient at that new skill is a journey that often includes many ups and downs, successes and failures, rewards and challenges. The same is true about life. Life is full of new things we can learn and discover about God, ourselves and others. On life's journey we face challenges big and small and lots of them! The Bible calls these challenges trials.

The author of the book of James tells us that trials are inevitable. We will all face them. The good news is that God is with us on this journey, and through these trials, God is continually working to shape us into people who are mature, complete and not lacking anything!

James gives us words of wisdom for facing trials.

James 1:1-4 (From your bible, read aloud)

What do you notice about these verses?

Perspective on Trials

James offers us a new perspective on trials. He encourages us to “consider it pure joy” whenever we face trials. This does not mean he expects us to be happy about the trial or challenge. Sadness, fear, frustration, anger, and sorrow are real emotions that we experience when facing trials. James is not dismissing that reality or asking us to pretend those feelings don't exist. Rather, he offers another perspective—that there could *also* be joy. Joy that is real and good and pure. Joy that can be experienced fully, even in the midst of experiencing other real emotions. James' reasoning for this new perspective is found in verses 3-4. Let's read those again.

James 1:3-4 (From your bible, read aloud)

James tells us we can have a new perspective on trials “*because*” trials have potential to change us.

Potential of Trials

Potential is not a guarantee. Potential is the possibility of what could be. Trials can make you better or worse. The potential of an outcome often lies in your perspective.

James tells us that trials test our faith and in the testing we have the potential to allow God to help us become mature, complete, not lacking anything. On the flipside, we also have the potential to become obsessed with the problem and self-absorbed as we try to face our trials in our own human strength.

2 Corinthians 12:7b-10 (From your bible, read aloud)

What do these verses tell us about why Paul might be able to “delight” in all kinds of trials and challenges?

Share about a time when things didn't go as you planned, but something good and unexpected resulted instead.

When we are open to this new perspective, we can see the potential of what God can do in our lives through the trials and challenges we face. It is God that does the work, not us. James encourages us to “let perseverance finish its work”. The word *let* implies that perseverance isn't something we do, it is something we need to let God do in us. We do this by being open to God with our pain and letting him work in our circumstance, rather than trying to handle things on our own. This is how we become people who James describes as “not lacking anything”. When we let God work in us, we become better equipped to love, encourage and support others in their trials.

Presence in Trials

James helps us recognize the importance of presence in trials by the way he addresses his letter. He says, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters” (James 1:2a). This letter is not written to an individual believer trying to make it on their own, but to the family of believers. We all experience trials. Being present with each other in trials helps us all mature into the family of believers God has called us to be.

Psychological studies show that the number one indicator that someone will be able to grow and heal from trauma or that they will be devastated by the

trauma is whether or not they have family, friends or a trusted group of people to help them process the pain. We need each other!

How has being a part of a family of believers helped you in challenging times?

When facing trials, a second kind of presence is also necessary—the presence of Jesus, who through his own trial did not lose sight of joy.

Hebrews 12:1-3 (From your bible, read aloud)

What joy was Jesus seeking? Glory? He already had glory before he came to the earth in human form. Holiness? He was already holy. The only thing Jesus and the entire Trinity didn't have was us. You and me.

Jesus endured the cross and all its pain, misery and shame because of the potential joy of being in relationship with you and me. Let that sink in. Jesus endured the cross so relationship with you could be possible. It is this relationship that makes joy available to us no matter what we face.

Psalms 16:11 says, “You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

Knowing that joy is always available, how might that change your perspective on a trial you are currently facing?

> TAKE AWAY

Trials are part of life. Every person will face trials, however, the way we face trials can make all the difference.

Take some time to pray for each other that you would experience the presence of God no matter what trials you face this week.