

Small Group Guide

Based on James 5:13-18 | "God Is a Promise Keeper"



OVERVIEW

This guide is designed to help your group dig deeper into the themes of the sermon: persevering through suffering, the power of prayer, mutual accountability, and the call to bring others back to the truth of the gospel. Use the questions and applications below to spark honest conversation and meaningful reflection.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Suffering is expected, not a sign of failure.** Following Christ does not guarantee an easy life. Even the most faithful believers face hardship, persecution, and pain. The call is not to avoid difficulty but to remain connected to God through it.
- **Jesus is not a distant God.** He lived in poverty, endured mockery, and suffered on the cross. When we bring our pain to him in prayer, we are bringing it to someone who understands suffering from the inside.

- **Prayer is the response to every season.** Whether you are suffering or cheerful, sick or well, prayer and worship are the appropriate responses. God meets us in every condition.
- **Faith is a community practice.** James does not tell individuals to handle their struggles alone. He instructs believers to confess to one another, pray for one another, and pursue healing together. The body of Christ is meant to function as a whole.
- **The past is proof.** Looking back at God's faithfulness, both in Scripture and in our own lives, gives us the confidence to trust him in the present and the future. God does not change. He was a promise keeper then, and he is a promise keeper now.
- **We are called outward even in our own difficulty.** Even while writing to people whose lives were at risk, James urged them to turn their attention to those who were wandering. The mission does not pause during our hardship.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Opening (Getting the Conversation Started)

1. Think of a time in your life when something turned out to be much harder than you expected. How did you respond when the difficulty set in?
2. Before this sermon, how did you tend to think about the relationship between following God faithfully and having a comfortable life? Has that view ever been challenged?

Going Deeper (Engaging the Sermon Content)

3. The sermon describes Jesus as someone who experienced real suffering, from growing up in a looked-down-upon town to enduring the cross. How does knowing that Jesus personally experienced suffering change the way you approach prayer when you are going through a hard time?
4. James instructs believers to pray when they are suffering and to sing when they are cheerful. Why do you think it is important to have a response to both conditions? What happens when we only acknowledge one and ignore the other?
5. The sermon points out that James places the responsibility on the sick person to reach out to the elders, rather than on the church to create a program. What does

that tell us about the role of personal faith and initiative in receiving help from the body of Christ? How does that challenge or encourage you?

6. James says to confess your sins to one another, not just to the clergy. What makes that kind of mutual confession and accountability difficult in practice? What makes it valuable? What conditions need to exist in a group for that kind of honesty to be possible?
7. The sermon draws a parallel between Elijah hiding from persecution and the early Jewish believers scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Both groups were standing for truth in a culture that rejected it. Where do you see that same tension today? Have you personally experienced a cost for standing on biblical truth?
8. The pastor shared the story of stepping out in faith to start the church without a building, without funds, and without a salary. He described looking back on that and being reminded of God's faithfulness at each step. Can you share a moment from your own life where looking back helped you trust God in the present?
9. James closes by encouraging believers to turn wandering sinners back to the truth, even while they themselves are under persecution. Why do you think it is significant that James gives this outward-focused charge to people who are already in survival mode? What does that say about the nature of the gospel mission?

Personal Reflection Questions

10. Which of the three conditions James describes, suffering, cheerful, or sick, do you most identify with right now? What does James say is the appropriate response, and are you doing it?
11. Is there someone in your life who is wandering from the faith or who has never come to it? What would it look like for you to take a step toward them this week?
12. When you look back at your own life, what is one specific example of God keeping a promise to you? How can that memory serve as an anchor for you in whatever you are currently facing?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

The following are concrete steps group members can take this week to live out the sermon's message.

Pray with intention. Set aside time this week to bring whatever season you are in, suffering, joy, sickness, or uncertainty, specifically before God. Do not just mention it in passing. Spend real time in prayer, knowing you are speaking to someone who has been through it himself.

Reach out to someone who is suffering. Think of one person in your church community or your personal life who is going through a hard time. Contact them this week. Offer to pray with them or for them. Do not wait for a program or an event. Be the body of Christ to them directly.

Practice confession and accountability. If your group has the trust for it, take time either now or in a follow-up conversation to share something you are struggling with. Pray for one another specifically. If your group is not yet at that level of trust, talk about what it would take to get there.

Look back before you look forward. Take a few minutes this week to write down two or three specific moments when God was faithful to you. Keep that list somewhere visible. When doubt or difficulty creeps in, return to it as a reminder that the God you serve has a track record.

Take one step toward someone who is wandering. Identify one person in your life who has drifted from faith or who has never heard the gospel clearly. Pray for them by name every day this week. Ask God to open a door for a conversation, and be willing to walk through it when it opens.

CLOSING PRAYER PROMPT

Close your group time by praying together. Consider praying specifically for anyone in the group who is suffering, for those who need physical or emotional healing, for boldness to stand for truth in a culture that pushes back, and for the people in each of your lives who need to hear the gospel.

"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." -- James 5:16

5-Day Bible Reading Plan and Devotional Guide

Based on James 5 and the Themes of Faithfulness, Suffering, and Prayer



Day 1: When Life Is Hard, Pray

Reading: James 5:13-14 — James instructs that those who are suffering should pray, and those who are sick should call on the elders of the church for prayer and anointing.

Devotional: Suffering is not a sign that God has abandoned you. It is an invitation to draw closer to the one who understands suffering more deeply than anyone else. Jesus did not observe human pain from a distance. He entered into it fully. He was mocked, rejected, beaten, and crucified. When you bring your suffering to God in prayer, you are not crying out to someone who is indifferent. You are crying out to someone who has been there. Do not wait for the pain to pass before you pray. Pray in the middle of it. That is exactly where God meets you.

Reflection: What area of suffering in your life have you been carrying alone instead of bringing to God in prayer?

Practical Application: Set aside ten minutes today to sit quietly and bring your specific burden to God in prayer. Name it. Be honest. Trust that he hears you.

Day 2: Joy and Gratitude in the Midst of the Journey

Reading: James 5:13 — James reminds believers that those who are cheerful should express that joy through singing praise.

Devotional: The Christian life is not meant to be lived only in the valley. There are mountaintops, and when you reach them, do not take them for granted. Joy is not a shallow emotion reserved for those who have no problems. It is a deep and settled confidence that the God who created you is also sustaining you. When you experience moments of genuine cheer, sing. Give thanks. Celebrate what God has done. Gratitude is not just a feeling. It is a spiritual discipline that reorients your heart back toward the source of every good thing you have ever received.

Reflection: What blessings in your life have you stopped noticing because you have grown accustomed to them?

Practical Application: Write down five specific things you are grateful for today. Spend time thanking God for each one, not in a rushed way, but with genuine reflection on what life would look like without them.

Day 3: The Power of Confession and Community

Reading: James 5:16 — James calls believers to confess their sins to one another and to pray for one another so that healing may come, emphasizing that the sincere prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

Devotional: One of the great lies the enemy tells us is that we must hide our failures. Shame thrives in secrecy. James, the very leader of the early church, did not tell believers to find a priest or an apostle to confess to. He told them to confess to one another. The body of Christ was designed to carry one another's burdens. When you bring what is dark into the light of a trusted community, you strip shame of its power. You were never meant to walk this road alone. The church is not an audience. It is a family, and families carry each other.

Reflection: Is there something you have been hiding from your community that God is calling you to bring into the light?

Practical Application: Identify one trusted believer in your life. This week, take one step toward greater honesty with that person. It does not have to be everything at once. Vulnerability is built one honest conversation at a time.

Day 4: Elijah Was Just Like You

Reading: James 5:17-18 — James reminds his readers that Elijah was a human being just like them, yet his earnest prayers stopped the rain for three and a half years and then brought it back again.

Devotional: It is easy to look at figures like Elijah and assume they had a spiritual advantage that ordinary people do not possess. James dismantles that assumption entirely. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. He got tired. He hid in the wilderness. He asked God to take his life when the pressure became too great. And yet God used him powerfully because he prayed and he obeyed, even when culture was moving in the opposite direction. You do not need to be extraordinary. You need to be faithful. God does not require perfection. He requires a willing heart that keeps showing up.

Reflection: In what area of your life have you told yourself that God can use others but probably not you?

Practical Application: Read 1 Kings 17-18 this week for the full account of Elijah's story. Pay attention not just to his victories but to his moments of weakness, and notice how God met him in both.

Day 5: God Is a Promise Keeper, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

Reading: James 5:19-20 — James closes his letter by reminding believers that turning a wandering sinner back to the truth saves a soul from death and reflects the genuine, active faith of the one who does it.

Devotional: James ends his letter not with a farewell but with a commission. Look around you. There are people wandering. There are people who once knew the truth and have drifted. There are people who are close to the edge. Your story, the part where you were lost and then found, is not just your testimony. It is a tool God intends to use in someone else's life. You know what it is like to be separated from God. You also know what it is like to have that weight lifted. That knowledge is not meant to stay inside you. God is a promise keeper. He kept his promises to Elijah, to the early church, and to you. Trust that he will keep them for the people you are brave enough to reach.

Reflection: Who in your life is wandering from the truth? What is one specific step you can take this week to reach out to that person?

Practical Application: Pray by name for someone you know who is far from God. Then ask God to give you one natural opportunity this week to speak truth, not in judgment, but in love, from the place of someone who has been exactly where they are.