

STUDY 1

CONSIDER IT PURE JOY

"God has not been trying an experiment on my faith or love in order to find out their quality. He knew it already. It was I who didn't."

C.S. Lewis

Unlike Peter, Paul, and John – James does not intend to only explain ‘theology’. He goes one step further for his audience and seeks to both **reaffirm and embed theology through practical application in everyday life**. He knew – arguably better than anyone as Jesus’ own brother – the challenges people face, and often endure, in making the daily decisions we face in life as Jesus-followers. And one of the many questions we ask ourselves and each other each day as we follow Jesus is – **why does God allow us to experience trials and suffer difficulties?**

READ TOGETHER

James 1:2-8 (NIV)

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

Ever-practical, James’ opens his letter with a theme that directly explores this question – and explains that this tension and challenge is a reality of life, but one which can actually help us through each trial and hardship to learn to:

- Remain consistently dependent on God
- Draw closer to Him
- Be increasingly changed and transformed into the image of Jesus

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CONSIDER AND SHARE TOGETHER

Discuss together the following four points (taking turns reading the supporting verses)

1. 'CONSIDER IT' IS AN INVITATION TO CHOOSE (James 1:2)

God invites us to choose Jesus each time we're challenged to make a choice.

Whether the 'it' is a trial, temptation or suffering - as Jesus-followers we're invited to choose considering the 'it' from a heart and mindset that is **changed and transformed** by the Holy Spirit; or, a heart and mindset **unchanged** by the Holy Spirit.

- **DISCUSS:** *Can you recall a time when you have faced a challenge (trial, temptation, suffering) in which you've had to choose how you will respond?*

2. 'POWERLESS REACTION' OR 'EMPOWERED RESPONSE'? (James 1:5)

How do we choose? Faced with trial or hardship - do we do so with powerless reaction or empowered response? Even after choosing to follow Jesus, there is a constant tension between our natural inclination to be independent from God, and rely on our own strength as we go through life's joys, challenges and trials.

- **DISCUSS:** *What have you done really practically to invite God into your decision making during previous trials?*

3. CONSIDER WISELY AND CHOOSE WITH FAITH (James 1:6)

When we experience trials and hardships, James warns us against being 'double-minded and unstable' with our choice-making - which can only worsen or exacerbate our difficulties. Instead, James encourages us to consider **wisely** and choose **with faith**.

- **DISCUSS:** *What are some doubts you have struggled with during a challenge?*

4. CHOOSE, AND MATURE (James 1:4)

He strengthens our faith with His own divine, faithful power - ultimately leading to us becoming fulfilled in happiness through becoming a 'work' of His glory.

- **DISCUSS:** *Share a situation where you have seen God's faithfulness even though the choice was challenging at the time? Is there a choice you have in your life*



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right now that you need God's wisdom in that you feel comfortable to share with the group?

KEY TAKEAWAY

As Jesus-followers, we are equipped and empowered to:

- Consider and choose pure joy through trials.
- Consider and choose pure joy through temptation.
- Consider and choose pure joy through suffering.

PRAY TOGETHER

Lord, when I encounter and suffer trials and difficulties, lead me to consider how I have the opportunity to choose You, and that by choosing YOU - You will lead me to joy. Help me surrender when I attempt to face these situations in my own strength. Remind me that You are working in the midst of trials and hardships to help me become more mature, more whole, and more like Jesus. I thank You for Your intimate care of me - Your passion for perfecting Your grace in my weakness, Amen.

EXTRA RESOURCES

- Book
[*Where is God when it hurts?*](#) - Philip Yancey
- Book
[*Walking with God through pain and suffering*](#) - Tim Keller

PREPARE

Read the following passage - James 2:1-26 - in the coming week to prepare for the next study, 'FAITH & WORKS ENTWINED'.

