

Icebreaker:

In the Bible, do you like to read narratives (stories and history) or practical teaching (like James)?

Read scripture and discuss:

1. In verse 1, to whom was James writing, and what might have been their circumstances? How might those circumstances shape what he wrote?
2. How have trials matured you? In the midst of trials, is it easy to see how they are shaping you?
3. From verses 6-8, how did James define “faith” and “doubt”? What does it mean to be “double-minded”?
4. Is it easy or hard to believe God will answer your prayer (James 1:5-6)? How can we increase our faith in God’s desire and ability to answer prayer?
5. Re-read verse 11. Does this verse challenge you? If so, why?
6. Can you put in your own words what James teaches about temptation (James 1:12-16)? In your life, what have you found to help you fight temptation?
7. According to James, when experiencing great difficulties, what question is likely to arise? When you suffer, what typically becomes your focus?

This series is called “Working Out Our Faith.” Each week, we will recommend a practice to work out our faith.

Work out your faith:

This week reflect on how you spend your time. How does the way you spend your time reflect your priorities? In what ways does your calendar shape you spiritually? Next week, we will begin by sharing our reflections on this exercise.

Prayer:

As your group closes in prayer, please remember the following requests from our church family.

> Prayers of healing for Ken Miller and Daniel Qua.

Requests from ZPC’s April’s Prayer Calendar:

- > Pray for God to bless the ZPC mission team serving in Brazil at the Great Banquet
- > Pray for our facilities ministry as ZPC continues to grow physically and spiritually.

We begin a new study this week on James, our spring study of just 7 weeks ending the week of May 20. James is a different kind of letter. Scholars believe that James is Jesus’ brother. James writes to people who are Christians and tells them how to live for Christ in very practical ways. He jumps around to different parts of the Christian life giving lots of advice, and in the end telling us that faith without deeds is dead. We are adding a small exercise each week called “Working Out Your Faith.” We’ll ask you and your group members to try a spiritual practice for the week that James discusses. We encourage you to try these and then reflect on them with your group the next week.

[Question 1] James’s writing is geared to people who are already believers. Unlike Paul, James does not spend any time explaining the theology of the gospel message. He wants believers to wrestle with this question: How do we respond to the grace we’ve already received.

[Question 2] We don’t often grow spiritually when everything is rosy. We are more likely to coast. We more often grow and mature when faced with trials and struggles and depend on God and brothers and sisters in Christ to help us. It is not always easy to see how God is using trials, often they are painful and sorrowful. But God can bring good from bad, and move us closer to Him in these times.

[Question 3] God says doubting is OK. It is OK to doubt and question what we don’t understand. However, being double-minded is not doubting, but is chasing God one moment and chasing the world the next. John Bunyan has a character in Pilgrim’s Progress who is double-minded called “Mr. Facing-both-ways.”

[Question 4] James 1:5-6 says to ask for wisdom and to believe and not doubt. This is not always easy to do but often hard to believe God will answer your difficult prayers. You can increase your faith by reflecting how God is trustworthy, how he always fulfills his promises in scripture, and by asking brothers and sisters in Christ to pray with you so that they might help you in prayer and may have answers for prayer.

[Question 5] This verse can be challenging to those who put their faith in wealth, not God. The verse can also be encouraging. One commentary says, “The poor should be glad that riches mean nothing to God, otherwise the poor would be considered unworthy. The rich should be glad that money means nothing to God, because money is easily lost.”

[Question 6] God doesn’t tempt us; we are tempted by our own desires and things we see in the world. Giving in to temptation leads to sin and separation from God. God calls us to flee from temptation – literally to run away! God tells us to focus on scripture and pray. And when we have sinned, to not be stuck but to confess to God and even to confess to other believers who can help us.

[Question 7] In verse 13, we read that we might ask, “Is God tempting me?” We might also ask, “Why is this happening? Where is God in the midst of this?” We focus on ourselves and how can this be fixed? Instead, we might watch for what God will do in the midst of difficulties and suffering, believing God will act.