

Leading a Small Group Discussion

1. Prepare

Work through the materials and think yourself into your group meeting.

2. Pray

Pray before your group meeting.

3. Don't talk too much

Your job is to get people thinking and talking and keep the discussion moving from member to member rather than talking to the members.

4. Be A Good Listener

So simple yet so hard to do. Don't just listen to what people are saying – actively listen. The best leaders listen with their eyes and ears.

4. Don't Answer Your Own Questions

The whole purpose of asking the question is to create an environment where group members feel safe to share. It's not about getting the right answer. When people are silent with some of these questions, embrace the silence: this might be where the introverts are thinking and the Holy Spirit is speaking!

5. Encourage Responses

If no one really speaks you could say something like, "Paul, you look like you were going to say something..."

6. Ask Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions help group members to say more than a simple yes or no. Use 'what?' or 'how?' questions to get people to open up.

7. Try To Involve Everyone

Your group might be too big if everyone isn't able to speak their thoughts. Groups of over eight members will have difficulty doing this. In those cases, it might be best to divide the group into smaller groups for some of the time.

8. Keep the Main Thing, the Main Thing!

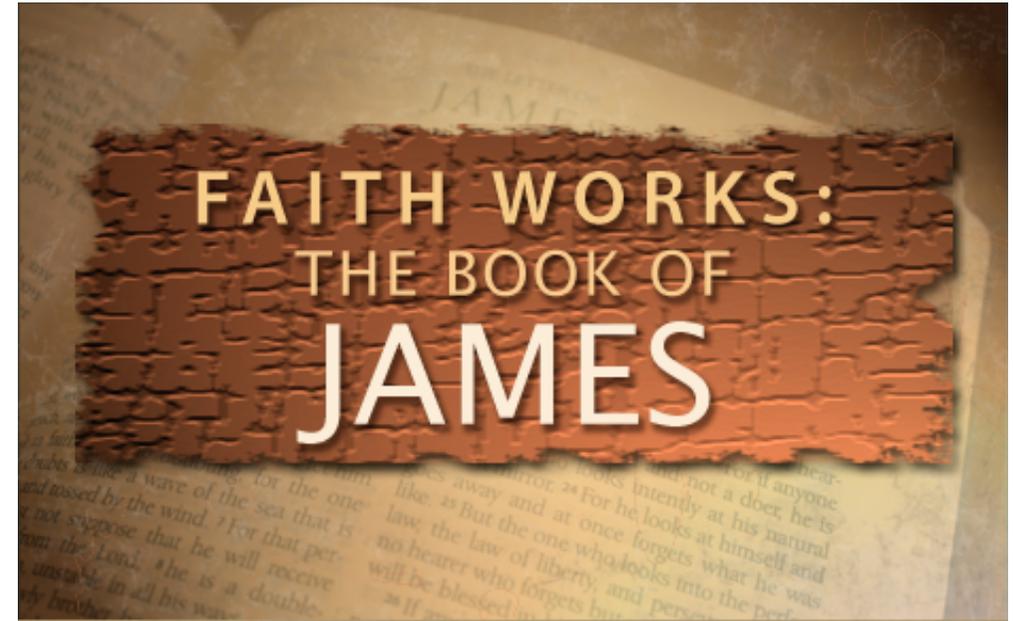
Remember, the focus is not on getting through the material and you may not cover all the questions. If the discussion is fruitful then allow group members the time they need to discuss, process, and grow with the information.

9. Manage the Time

Keep an eye on the clock. Don't let things get bogged down in interesting but irrelevant discussion. Bring things back on track and take the initiative to move things on when it feels right.

10. Leave time for application.

Make sure people have time to think about the difference that this discussion will have in their daily 'frontline' lives.



Discussion Guides for Small Groups

James - Joy in Trials

WAY IN

Can you think of a tough time in your life, which, though difficult at the time, you now thank God for?

Read James 1:1-8

Key Text: James 1:2,3

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

DISCUSS

1. Note that James tells us to '**consider** it pure joy' when we face trials. He doesn't say that we should **feel** pure joy. The trial is still painful but how we think about it (i.e. consider it) transforms it. How can we learn to think differently in painful and challenging situations? What advice would you give a new Christian?
2. James had seen his brother Jesus crucified, and resurrected (1 Corinthians 15:7). How does Jesus' resurrection help us in considering our trials? (See too Hebrews

12:1-3: what do these verses add?)

3. Why is perseverance in faith so important? (v4). How does Peter's prayer for Peter connect with this thought (Luke 22:31,32). See too Matthew 24:12-14.
4. Prayer is a key to handling our trials with joy. What does James tell us to pray for? (v5)
 - How does God reveal his wisdom to us in our troubles? How have people in the group received God's wisdom for facing difficulties?
5. In verse 6, James is not saying that we should never question or seek to explore our faith more deeply. Doubt here means to be 'double-minded' (v8). Someone perhaps who is asking for God's help, but also seeking help in other directions at the same time. There is a saying that "faith is not really faith until it is all we are hanging onto". Do members of the group agree with that?
 - Do you think Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego give us an example of what single-minded faith

looks like? (Daniel 3:16-18)

6. Imagine a Christian friend came to you and shared about a hard time they were facing at the moment. How would you apply your group's discussion to your conversation with them?

WAY OUT

Pray in the light of this passage for any in the group (or any known to people in the group) who are experiencing "trials of many kinds".

Commentary Notes: James 1:2-4

If we stop and think about it, this is actually what we most long for as Christians (or at least what we should most long for): to become more whole in Christ; to know him more fully and intimately. And it is trials that give us this opportunity to mature in our faith. In fact, we can't get there without trials. They are the spiritual equivalent of growbags. It is how the Christian life works; faith grows through learning to persevere in hardship. The apostle Paul says something similar in his letter to the Roman church: "We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Romans 5:3-4). It is suffering that proves, strengthens and deepens our faith. Faith is a little like a muscle in the human body. It is as it is worked out that it grows. It needs something to push against. Physical training is a painful and sweaty process. The Hollywood actor preparing to play the superhero does not become ready by lazing around and being inactive. Muscle growth requires discomfort. Faith needs the pushback of trials for us to grow spiritually. Trials and difficulties are an opportunity to cling on to the promises of God more tightly.

Allberry, Sam. James For You: Showing you how real faith looks in real life (God's Word For You) (pp. 14-15). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.