

## **WARMING UP**

1. How does joy differ from happiness?

## **DIGGING IN**

2. Read James 1:2–12. It seems strange that we should “consider it pure joy ... whenever [we] face trials of many kinds” (v. 2). Why are we to be joyful?

3. What is perseverance?

Why is it important in the Christian life?

4. How are perseverance and maturity developed in us by enduring trials (vv. 3–4)?

How does our attitude toward these trials affect our growth?

5. How do trials reveal the depth of our character?

What difficult experiences have increased your perseverance and maturity?

6. How might trials expose our need for God’s wisdom (v. 5)?

7. According to James, how will God respond to our request for wisdom (v. 5)?

8. Under pressure, how does the faithful Christian (vv. 5–6) contrast with the person described in verses 6–8?

9. In the context of trials and perseverance, why do you think James contrasts rich and poor Christians (vv. 9–11)?

10. In what ways do you rely on your possessions for joy?

How can the promise of receiving this crown increase our joy in the midst of trials?

## **PRAY ABOUT IT**

Praise God that this passage gives Christians an eternal perspective on trials and suffering. Ask him to make this perspective your perspective as you talk to him about trials and suffering in your life. Pray that you would truly experience joy in trials.

## **WARMING UP**

1. When you think of God's power, what comes to mind?

## **DIGGING IN**

2. Read 2 Corinthians 12:1–10. Paul feels forced to “boast” to defend himself against his opponents. How would you summarize his boasting (vv. 1–6)?

3. Why do you think he refers to “a man in Christ” (v. 2) when speaking about his own experience of being “caught up to the third heaven”?

4. In spite of his supernatural experiences, Paul wanted people to judge him on his character, not his experiences (v. 6). Why do people's actions and words reveal more about them than their “credentials”?

5. Why was Paul given a thorn in the flesh (v. 7)?

6. How can our experiences — spiritual and otherwise — lead us to become conceited?

7. Why did God refuse to remove Paul's thorn in spite of his repeated prayers (vv. 8–9)?

8. We usually want God to demonstrate his power by removing our weaknesses. Why is his power more perfectly revealed in the midst of our weaknesses?

9. When have you experienced God's power and sufficient grace in the midst of a painful weakness?

10. What different kinds of experiences qualify as “thorns” in our lives (v. 10)?

11. What thorn is currently causing you pain?

12. What have you learned from this passage that will help you to rejoice in that weakness?

## **PRAY ABOUT IT**

Praise God that weakness has purpose in your life because you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank him for the ways that you have seen his strength through your weakness.

## **WARMING UP**

1. If you were to describe your times in Scripture as eating food, what kind of food would it be —blueberry pie, meat and potatoes, green vegetables, whole-grain bread, chicken broth, or what? Explain.

## **DIGGING IN**

2. Read Psalm 119:9–16. How is the psalmist's passion for God's Word evident in these verses?

3. Describe a time when you rejoiced in the Word as one rejoices in great riches.

4. What are the functions of the Word of God according to this passage?

5. One of the functions of God's Word is to keep our way pure. What does a pure life depend on according to this passage (vv. 10–16)?

6. In what ways have you found it easy to live a pure life according to God's Word?

7. Read Psalm 119:105–112. Another major function of the Scriptures is guidance (v. 105). In what areas do you rely on God's Word for guidance?

8. What difficulties has the psalmist encountered in following God's Word?

9. In spite of his suffering, how does the psalmist feel about Scripture?

10. How do your responses to Scripture compare to those of the psalmist in both of these passages (vv. 9–16, 105–112)?

11. The psalmist makes a purposeful choice not to neglect God's Word (v. 16). What choices do you need to make in order for God's Word to play a more vital role in your life?

## **PRAY ABOUT IT**

The psalmist says that the Scriptures are “the joy of my heart.” Pray that God will bring joy to your heart as you keep the commitments you have made regarding his

## **WARMING UP**

1. Have you ever felt joy in the midst of difficult circumstances? If so, why?

## **DIGGING IN**

2. Read Philippians 1:3–26. According to these verses, what reasons might Paul have to feel discouraged or depressed (see especially vv. 7, 12–14, 22)?

3. In spite of his personal circumstances, what reasons does Paul give for being joyful?

4. Joy usually results when our desires are fulfilled and our values are affirmed. What do we learn about Paul's values and desires in this passage?

5. Imagine that you are in Paul's situation — under armed guard, in chains, unable to leave your rented quarters, awaiting trial. How would you feel?

6. What difference would news of the spread of the gospel make in your feelings? (Be honest.) Explain.

7. How do your desires and values compare to Paul's?

8. Let's look more closely at the gospel in which Paul rejoices. What confidence does he have about the gospel (vv. 6–7)?

9. As God completes his good work in the Philippians and in us, what kind of people does Paul pray we will become (vv. 9–11)?

10. How much does your joy center on the work of the gospel in you and in others?

11. What substitutes for the gospel do we and our culture gravitate to for sources of joy?

12. Paul's joy in the gospel was so all-consuming that he proclaimed, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (v. 21). What do you need to experience that kind of joyful commitment to Christ?

## **PRAY ABOUT IT**

Thank God for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Confess to him those areas in which your values and desires are not like Paul's. Thank him that he has promised to complete in you the work he began when you became a Christian.

## **WARMING UP**

1. How do children usually feel about being disciplined by their parents?

## **DIGGING IN**

2. Read Hebrews 12:1–13. The writer of Hebrews compares the Christian life to a race (vv. 1–3). What principles for running does he recommend (vv. 1–3)?

3. What kinds of “clothing” can hinder us, and what kinds of sins can entangle us as we run?

4. What does it mean to “fix our eyes on Jesus” (v. 2)?

5. How can focusing on Jesus affect your perseverance in running this race (vv. 2–4)?

6. What is encouraging about the fact that the Lord disciplines us (vv. 5–11)?

7. What do you think it means to “share in his holiness” (v. 10)?

8. The results of discipline are “a harvest of righteousness and peace” (v. 11). What might this look like in a person's life in concrete, practical ways?

9. In what sense is God's discipline like physical therapy (vv. 12–13)?

Why is it vital for us to cooperate in this therapy?

10. In what ways have you experienced God's discipline in your life?

11. How do you usually respond to God's discipline?

## **PRAY ABOUT IT**

Praise God for what you have learned about our heavenly Father's discipline in this passage. Pray that he will help you to accept his discipline joyfully. Ask him to produce in you holiness and the fruit of righteousness and peace.

## **WARMING UP**

1. What are some of the deep longings of your heart? For what do you yearn?

## **DIGGING IN**

2. Read Matthew 11:28–30. What invitation does Jesus give in this passage?

3. What do you think it means to “come to Jesus”?

4. How easy or difficult is it for you to come to him? Why?

5. Jesus invites all who are weary and burdened (v. 28). What types of weariness and burdens might he have in mind?

6. To what extent do you identify with the weary and burdened? Explain.

7. What is a yoke (v. 29), and what does it do?

What does it mean, therefore, to take Christ's yoke upon us?

8. What promises does Jesus make to those who respond to his invitation?

9. What would it mean to you to find “rest for your soul”?

How would finding rest for your soul bring you joy?

10. How does it help you to know that Christ's yoke is easy and his burden is light (v. 30)?

11. Jesus describes himself as “gentle and humble in heart” (v. 29). How do these qualities increase your desire to come to him and learn from him?

12. How does the rest Jesus promises in this passage speak to the yearnings and longings of your heart?

## **PRAY ABOUT IT**

Ask God to reveal to you specific ways you can respond to Jesus' invitation to rest. Thank him for the joy we have when we experience Christ's rest.