



Growth Group Discussion Questions

Series: Satan's Favorite Lies

Lesson: Pain Should Be Avoided at All Costs – Part 2

Primary Scriptures: James 1:1-5

Lesson 6 - Week of October 18, 2020

DISCUSSION

We have all heard the analogy of the glass half full or half empty. The concept is where we focus our attention – on the glass, the amount of **air** or the **water**. To illustrate this concept, a group of scientists performed an AQ test on a group of senior college swimmers. AQ stands for Adversity Quotient. Other familiar nonscientific names for AQ would be grit, backbone, fortitude, persistence, and tenacity, for example. AQ tests are given to show a person's ability to handle adversities (i.e., a glass half full or half empty). After giving the AQ test to the swimmers, the swim coaches, based upon their interactions with the swimmers, were asked to label each swimmer as either positive or negative. When compared to the AQ scores, the coaches were off by 75 percent. On the surface, you would think that this would be easy to identify, but it wasn't. Next the swimmers were asked to swim a 50-meter race. At the end of the race, the testers added 1.5 seconds to everyone's time, which is a lot of time in the swimming world (the difference between first and fifth place). After the scores were given, the swimmers were asked to compete in another 50-meter race. This time, with a 100 percent accuracy, the times decreased (i.e., better) for the swimmers who tested as positive thinkers on the AQ test. The times increased (i.e., worst) for the swimmers who tested as negative thinkers. What does this mean? Good news! We can control our thoughts as we go through our various pains and sufferings. What's your Christian AQ? Do you have what it takes (grit, backbone and fortitude) to get through this life? Are you a Christian who sees the glass half full or half empty?

In continuing our study from last week on Satan's lie that pain should be avoided at all costs, today's lesson will focus on how to embrace the pain and suffering in our lives. We must remember, when we find ourselves faced with storms, our Father will give us the power to handle whatever is thrown at us. Let's look at James 1:1-3, "¹ James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes (note these were persecuted refugee Jewish Christians) scattered among the nations: Greetings. ² Consider it pure joy (i.e., rejoice), my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance." As you can see, as Christians, we have a strange response, a strange attitude, and a different type of prayer than one would imagine.

The first thing that we must have in order to embrace the pain and suffering is a **strange attitude**, which is to rejoice. Question: How many of us have taken our vehicles in for a simple repair then the tech informs us we have a \$2,000 problem, and we responded by thanking the Lord? Or when we go to the doctor for a checkup then they run tests and the tests come back positive, do we respond that God is good? Probably, not any of us have uttered these words during times of crisis. Therefore, James 1:2-3 is a very strange attitude to have. Let's look at some key words in these verses." ²

Consider it pure joy (i.e., rejoice), my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ **because you know** that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. In verse 2, James is talking about how we should think, not how we should feel. As Americans, when we hear the word joy, we immediately think feelings. James is not asking us to feel something; he's saying to "think" something. It's worth noting that we cannot control our feelings but we can control our thoughts and actions. So, whenever we tell people who are hurting that they should not feel the pain, we are talking foolishness.

Whenever we beat ourselves up because of what we feel, we are beating ourselves up needlessly. James is not telling people who are experiencing pain and suffering to have joy leaping through their bodies. What he is saying is that you need to “consider it” “because of what you know,” as a result of fulfilling God’s will. An example would be a person who is going through military boot camp. He is not loving the experience. But what gets him through is “considering/thinking” and “knowing” that the boot camp won’t last forever and a just reward is on the other side. We must be careful when it comes to feelings because they are tied to our responses and actions. Instead of rebuking people when they are discouraged or hurting, all we need to do is help them have a better perspective.

The second thing that we must have in order to embrace the pain and suffering is a mindset that **there is always something for which we should be thankful**. Our fellow persecuted and martyred Christian brothers and sisters had something for which they were thankful. They knew their trials would end and they would eventually wake up in glory with no pain and suffering. We cannot control our feelings, but we can control how we think. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, ¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ **give thanks in all circumstances**; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” The meaning here is not to be thankful for every circumstance, **but** in every circumstance to train your mind to find something to be thankful for as you go through your moments of pain and suffering. This concept and practice will change your life. So instead of being beaten down by pain and suffering, remember to “clinch” it. Keep in mind that boxers don’t use the “clinching” method if they are winning the battle. They use it if they are losing, and this method will lessen the blows.

A strange response is to embrace the benefits of trials and sufferings. When we are going through our trials and sufferings, putting our focus on perseverance will produce understanding and completeness. What can be learned when we embrace that which we can’t ethically get rid of? If you can’t get out of it, then focus on what you can get from it. Here’s what we can focus on to get through various situations: 1) Trials build character (James 1:3-4); 2) Suffering teaches obedience (Hebrews 5:7-8); 3) Trials reveal the truth about your faith (1 Peter 1:6-7); and 4) Suffering creates empathy (2 Corinthians 1:3-6).

A strange prayer is to ask the Lord to **give you wisdom**. As stated in James 1:5, “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.” Most people who are facing a trial are looking for deliverance, not wisdom. That’s why this statement sounds strange and counterintuitive. Know this, there is nothing wrong with seeking deliverance. Jesus asked for deliverance in the garden three times. Therefore, ask for deliverance, but seek wisdom. As you pray, ask God to show you how to respond, how you can bring Him honor, and to show you what you can learn from the trial. But God hardly ever responds when you ask Him to show you why you are going through a trial.

In conclusion, remember to focus on the words and the voice of your Father. He will make you aware of the enemy’s lies and give you comfort and wisdom accordingly.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Principle #1: Perspective is Everything

How is Paul’s perspective in 2 Corinthians 1:3-11 contrary to how most of us would normally think when facing physical or emotional challenges?

Principle #2: Be a Psalm Writer

Psalm 77 is a good example of an honest prayer amid a tough situation. Use this prayer as a guide as you write out your own “psalm” about a tough season in your life or a painful situation. Honestly express your thoughts and emotions to God. Also include a list of the things God has done for you that will help you maintain your trust in Him.