

HIGHLANDS CHURCH

Study Guide

Joy in Trials

Thomas Slager
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Major Points

- 1 Acknowledge your pain — before choosing joy, honestly recognize that trials are real and painful, just as Jesus himself wept and grieved.**
John 11:35
- 2 Choose joy — not situational happiness but deep contentment rooted in God's sovereignty, promises, and faithfulness even when circumstances are not good.**
James 1:2
- 3 Endure trials rather than seeking distraction or quick deliverance — God calls us to steadfastness so trials can have their full sanctifying effect.**
James 1:3-4
- 4 Look to Jesus — the one who endured the cross walks with us through every storm and has overcome the world.**
Hebrews 12:1-2

Key Quotes

- “But it does mean you don't allow god's sovereignty to somehow get lost inside of our pain inside of our suffering inside of the trial*
at 14:08
- “God doesn't call us to distraction. God doesn't call us to deliverance. God calls us to endurance.*
at 25:10
- “we can experience joy even in the midst of trials, not because we understand, but because we serve a God who does.*
at 16:25
- “if it's not good yet then he's not done yet he's still working*
at 31:51
- “it is vitally important to use my head to help my heart catch up to what I know to be true.*
at 26:07

Discussion Questions

1. Pastor Slager talked about being 'toxically positive' and how his counselor told him to stop 'baptizing stuff in Bible verses.' What does that look like practically, and how is that different from genuinely choosing joy in trials?

2. James uses the word 'when' instead of 'if' regarding trials. How does that small word change the way you approach difficult seasons — does expecting trials make them easier or harder to handle?
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3. Pastor Slager outlined three common responses to trials: distraction, deliverance, and endurance. Which of these do you default to most often, and why do you think endurance is the one God calls us to?
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4. The sermon mentioned that 'doctrine leads to devotion' — that right understanding of God leads to right living. Can you share a time when knowing something true about God's character helped your heart catch up during a painful season?
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5. Pastor Slager brought up the story of Jesus sending the disciples into a storm he knew was coming. What does that tell us about God's purposes in allowing trials, and how does that sit with you emotionally?
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Word Studies

πειρασμοῖς
peirasmois

Greek

Tests or trials that prove the quality of one's faith, carrying the dual sense of external hardship and inner temptation, distinct from mere suffering.

ὑπομονήν
hypomonēn

Greek

Active, courageous endurance that holds its ground under pressure rather than passively waiting, implying steadfast perseverance with hopeful expectation.

τέλειοι teleioi

Greek

Complete, mature, having reached the intended goal or purpose — not moral flawlessness but wholeness and full spiritual development.

Cross References

1 Peter 1:6-7

Peter uses strikingly similar language to James, comparing trials to fire that refines gold, showing that the testing of faith across the NT is understood as God's refining process that produces proven, genuine faith.

Romans 5:3-5

Paul presents a nearly identical progression — suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, character produces hope — confirming James's theology that trials follow a purposeful, God-ordained growth sequence.

Deuteronomy 8:2-3

God led Israel through 40 years of wilderness testing to humble them and reveal what was in their hearts, establishing the OT precedent that God uses prolonged hardship to develop faithfulness and dependence on him.

Genesis 50:20

Joseph's declaration that what others meant for evil God intended for good is the OT foundation for the sermon's emphasis on God's sovereignty working trials into his good purposes — connecting to the Romans 8:28 theme.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Paul's teaching that momentary, light affliction produces an eternal weight of glory provides the eschatological framework for why believers can choose joy — the trials are real but temporary compared to God's eternal purposes.

Further Reading

- **Suffering and the Sovereignty of God**
by John Piper and Justin Taylor
- **Walking with God through Pain and Suffering**
by Timothy Keller
- **Leadership Pain: The Classroom for Growth**
by Samuel R. Chand

Scripture References

REFERENCE	TYPE	TIME	CONTEXT
James 1:1-4	Read Aloud	4:40	<i>James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Chri...</i>
Acts 7:59-60	Read Aloud	9:30	<i>And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "...</i>
Acts 8:1	Read Aloud	10:10	<i>And Saul approved of his execution. And there aros...</i>
John 11:35	Read Aloud	11:08	<i>Jesus wept.</i>
Proverbs 3:5-6	Read Aloud	15:40	<i>Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not ...</i>
Romans 8:28	Read Aloud	16:35	<i>And we know that for those who love God all things...</i>
Jeremiah 17:9	Referenced	25:54	
John 16:33	Referenced	30:08	
Psalms 23:4	Read Aloud	30:25	<i>Even though I walk through the valley of the shado...</i>
Hebrews 12:1-2	Read Aloud	31:53	<i>Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a c...</i>
Revelation 21:4	Referenced	13:07	
James 1:2-4	Referenced	3:15	
Psalms 119:105	Referenced	5:30	
1 Thessalonians 4:13	Referenced	11:00	
Matthew 26:36-39	Referenced	11:30	
Mark 6:45-51	Referenced	28:20	