

# THE LIFE

EMBRACING THE LIFE OF A CHRIST-FOLLOWER

Part 3: The Cost of Discipleship  
Lesson 51: There Is Joy In The Difficulty

**What we want students to learn:** That for the Christ-follower, there is actually joy in hardship.

**What we want students to do with what they've learned:** To unpack and discover what it practically looks like to be joyful in the midst of tough times.

**Scripture Focus:** James 1:2-4

**Supporting Scripture:** Matthew 5:11-12

**Overview:** So far in this unit, you've helped your students see that life as a Christ-follower will not always be an easy one. You've helped them see that persecution is an aspect of living faithfully as a disciple of Jesus. In this lesson, you'll begin to turn the corner a bit. You'll help students see that for Christ-followers, it is not only possible but entirely desirable to experience joy in the midst of hard times. It's part of our inheritance as children of God. It is a unique aspect of being a Christian, a paradox that doesn't seem to make sense to outsiders. But to the Christ-follower, it makes perfect sense. This lesson will help make this point to your students and challenge them to embrace this truth more in their daily lives.

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## Teacher Prep Video

Each *LIFE* lesson comes with a Teacher Prep Video. These are short videos designed to help you grasp the main point of the lesson as you prepare to teach.

To access your *LIFE* lesson 51 Teacher Prep Video, login to your Lesson Manager, navigate to lesson 51, and click on the "Background" tab. You'll notice the Teacher Prep Video near the top of the Lesson Manager window.

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## Bible Background

The *Bible Background* is designed to help you provide some context for the Scripture you'll be studying. *The Details* gives you background info for each book. *The Setting* informs you of what's happening in and around the passage. *The Main Point* gives you an overview of how the passage will be used in the lesson.

- **What do we mean by "context"?** In every **YM360** Bible Study lesson, you'll notice we make a point to encourage you to provide the context for the passages you study. By "context" we mean at the very least helping students know *who* wrote the book, *when* it was written, and *why* it was written.
- **What's the big deal?** When we teach the Bible without giving context, students don't get a "big picture" understanding of the story of the Bible. But this view is vital to grasping the story of God's plan of redemption for humankind. As you teach, use the *Bible Background* to help summarize the context.

## The Details

- **Author:** James, who was Jesus' brother and the leader of the Jerusalem Church.
- **Time frame:** Most people believe the date was sometime in the mid-40s A.D.
- **Purpose:** James was seemingly writing to a Jewish audience. His message was pretty straightforward throughout the book: don't let your faith be one of words only, and live your faith powerfully. It's a message that James hammered home in direct, easy-to-grasp language. It's what makes James such a practical book for all believers.

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## The Setting

The book of James is a letter written to address specific issues regarding persecution and hardships in the church. The letter was written to Jewish Christians who faced all kinds of opposition because of their choice to follow Jesus. The Romans sought to persecute the early believers because they believed them to be instigators of upheaval, and the Jews rejected these Jewish Christians because they viewed belief in Jesus to be blasphemous. The result was immense difficulty. In this passage, James sets forth the theological foundations for the church in dealing with suffering and shows them that even in increased persecution, the joy that Jesus Christ gives provides strength beyond temporal opposition.

## The Main Point

The main point we want to make is that as a Christ-follower, there is joy in hardship. There is no question that the Bible warns believers that times of opposition and persecution will come in their lives, especially to those who follow Jesus. But there is clear instruction as to how Christians are to handle those difficult situations. Followers of Jesus do not only have the tools they need to survive times of struggle but have the foundations laid by Christ to experience joy during trials. This lesson will help your students to unpack and discover what it practically looks like to be joyful in the midst of tough times.

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## Lesson Plan

The *Lesson Plan* contains three elements: an introductory activity called *The Lead In*; the Bible Study section called *The Main Event*; and an application-focused segment called *The Last Word*.

## The Lead In

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- **Goal:** To help students begin to understand what it means to have joy in suffering.
- **Set-Up:** None

FIRST, ask your students if they have ever heard of the phrase “no pain, no gain.” Ask them where they may have heard of this phrase. Have someone share with you what he or she thinks it means. Then, say something like:

- **The phrase “no pain, no gain” is a statement that many of you know well from sports. The idea behind “no pain, no gain” is that unless you are willing to experience pain when you train your body, then you will not be ready nor succeed in whatever sport you play. This applies to all sports, whether it’s football, volleyball, swimming, or whatever. If you don’t practice and prepare, you cannot be ready to play when game day arrives.**

NEXT, ask the following questions to facilitate a discussion about pain.

- **Do you think the phrase “no pain, no gain” applies to the Christian life? Explain your position.**
  - Answers will vary. This isn’t a super-tight, “apples-to-apples” comparison. But the concept is applicable in some aspects. As you discussed in the last lesson, trials are a part of following Christ. Our faith is strengthened by walking with God through the hard times. Try to engage them in this question, be sure that they understand where this example falls short
- **When we experience pain in our lives, what is often our first reaction?**
  - *Answer:* We often look for someone to blame, or we wonder what we did wrong
- **If we are followers of Jesus, are we promised that our life would not have any pain? Why or why not?**
  - *Answer:* Again, refer to previous lessons in this unit and reorient your students around the fact that Bible tells us persecution will come.

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THEN, ask the following question:

- **How do people who are not followers of Jesus react when they are faced with difficulties and trials in their lives?**
  - *Answer:* Take a moment and write down the different responses on the board. Press them on this. We want them to see the difference between the Christ-like response and the worldly response to suffering.

FINALLY, explain that over the last couple of weeks you have been studying the cost of following Jesus. Explain that the Bible is clear that there will be trials and difficulties in our lives. Say something like:

- **We know that the Bible tells us that the trials and hard times in life will come. But the question remains: how are we, as followers of Jesus, supposed to act when we are faced with hard times? We are going to find that the Bible not only helps us know that difficulty will come, but that we as Christians can have true joy in the midst of difficulty.**

Transition into *The Main Event* portion of the lesson.

### The Main Event

- **Goal:** To help your students understand that for the Christ-follower, there is actually joy in hardship.
- **Set Up:** You'll benefit from a dry erase board. Make sure students have a Bible or that they are able to look along with a friend. Each student will need a notecard and a pencil to write their definition.

FIRST, split the students into two different groups. Give each student a notecard. Ask one of the groups to define *joy* and the other group to define *trials*. Ask them to provide examples of their definitions that they will share with the class. Give them five or so minutes to work and then call them back together to share. Once they share, write the following definitions on the board.

- **Trials: tests that challenge faith in the life of a Christ-follower.**
- **Joy: a happiness that is spiritual, enduring and only found in Jesus**

THEN, explain to your students that the relationship between trials and joy seems to be miles apart, but in the Christian life, they are hand-in-hand. Say something like:

- **When we look at these definitions and the examples that you gave for each of these, they seem to be totally different things. At first glance, one would assume that the only way to have joy is to be free of trials in life, and the only way we lose joy is when trials come. But in the passage that we are going to study today we are going to discover that as Christians, we can have joy as a result of trials in our lives because of our trust in Jesus Christ.**

NEXT, explain that Scripture tells us that trials can produce joy in our lives based on the fact that we know God is making us more like Jesus every day. Explain that in today's lesson, you are going to study the book of James to better understand the relationship between trials and joy in the Christian life.

THEN, ask students to turn in their Bibles to James 1. As they turn, explain the context of James provided in the setting and background at the beginning of the lesson. Be sure they understand the setting in which the Jewish Christians found themselves when James wrote. Remind them of the definitions discussed above as you read through the text so that they can better understand their use in the passage.

NEXT, read or have a student read James 1:2-4. When students have finished reading, lead them in a short discussion. Refer to verse 2. Ask something like:

- **What does Paul urge these fellow Christians to do in verse 2?**

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- *Answer:* Count it joy when they face trials.
- **What do you think Paul means when he says “trials of various kinds”?**
  - *Answer:* Any trial in life, in any context.
- **What are these believers to do when all kinds of trials and difficulties arise in their lives?**
  - *Answer:* Count it all joy; they are to be thankful for every one of them.

Explain to students that James doesn't waste any time exhorting and urging his fellow believers to count every problem, struggle, and trial in life as a joy. James knew that these believers were facing some serious opposition because of their faith in Jesus. Say something like:

- **Some were even faced with the threat of death! But James tells them no matter the trial, they should be filled with joy. How could this be? Let's keep digging.**

THEN, tell students that the “how” of having joy in trials comes in verses 3-4. Explain that for the sake of explanation, you will take each of these verses one at a time. Then, direct your student's attention to verse 3. Ask the following questions:

- **What is the reason that James gives for having joy when trials come in life?**
  - *Answer:* The testing of faith (trials) produces steadfastness.
- **What does James mean when he says, “the testing of our faith”? What about our faith is being tested?**
  - *Answer:* The word “testing” implies the testing of genuineness. It's the testing that ensures that faith is legitimate and real.
- **What do you think James means by “steadfastness”?**
  - *Answer:* The word “steadfastness” in the original language implies a steady consistency and growth in something. In this case, it's growth in legitimate faith and Christlikeness.

Say something like:

- **James says that we should rejoice and be joyful when trials come because it tests our faith and helps us to become more and more like Jesus. Although trials are still difficult, Christians can walk through hard times with joy because they know that through the testing of their faith they can grow more and more into the kind of disciple Jesus desires: one who is steadfast. But where does steadfastness lead? If we are progressively growing to look more like Jesus, what is the result?**

NEXT, turn student's attention to verse 4. Ask the following questions:

- **What happens when steadfastness has its full effect in us?**
  - *Answer:* We are made perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Explain to students that God uses trials in our lives to make us trust Him. He brings difficulties into our paths so that when they come, we can trust in Him more and more, becoming more steadfast until the day we are made perfect with God in heaven. Say something like:

- **James says that we can have joy because we know that with every trial, our faith will grow stronger and we will grow closer to the person the Holy Spirit is leading us to become.**

THEN, explain that James was not the only teacher in the New Testament to talk about joy in trials. Say something like:

- **James is not alone when speaking about trials and the joy that come from them to those who trust in Christ. Jesus Himself talked about it! Listen to this passage from Matthew 5.**

Read Matthew 5: 11-12. Ask something like:

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- **Who does Jesus say are blessed in the Kingdom of God?**
  - *Answer:* Those who are persecuted and reviled and spoken evil against on His account.
- **What does Jesus say these people should do? Why?**
  - *Answer:* Jesus says that they should rejoice because of the great rewards that await them in heaven.

Say something like:

- **Even Jesus told His followers that they could have joy and rejoice in the face of persecution and trials because their heavenly reward would be great for their suffering. Jesus wanted His followers to understand that because of him they have a hope beyond this life, which gives them joy in every circumstance, good or bad. We have the same hope in Jesus.**

FINALLY, help your students to see that when they respond with hope in the midst of trials in life, they not only grow in their faith but they will powerfully point lost people toward Jesus. Say something like:

- **When we trust in Jesus in the face of trials, our faith will grow deeper, and our trust will grow stronger. We will become more and more steadfast as we prepare for an eternity of perfection with Jesus. And what is even more amazing about having joy in the midst of trials is the powerful witness it gives to unbelievers. When we trust in Christ even when our worlds are turned upside-down, nonbelievers will struggle to understand how we still have hope. They will wonder why we are joyful when the world around us seems to be falling apart. In these moments, God wants to use our trials not just for our sake but as a tool to show others His saving power in Jesus!**

Ask if there are any questions and if there are none, transition into *The Last Word*.

## The Last Word

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- **Goal:** To apply the idea of joy in trials to real life situations and struggles in each of your students.
- **Set-Up:** Each student will need something to write with and something to write on.

FIRST, set-up the activity by saying something like:

- **One of the most difficult parts of facing trials in the world today is that we are not willing to admit that we are walking through difficulties. Especially in church, we tend to put on masks and pretend like everything in our lives is great. But this is different from having joy in trials. Just because we have joy in the face of trials doesn't mean that trials are not incredibly difficult. One of the ways that God equips us to face trials in through the church. Right now, we are going to practice sharing some trials and struggles that we are facing and pray for one another.**

THEN, explain that first, students will take some time by themselves to write down trials that they have recently faced, are currently facing, or they can see coming in the future. As they write them down, encourage them to write a prayer asking God for help, steadfastness, and joy in the midst of their trial. Allow approximately five minutes for this exercise.

NEXT, ask that students split up into groups of 2-3 and share their trials with one another. Remind them that this time is not for offering solutions to one another's problems but praying for each other in the midst of difficulties.

FINALLY, call all your students back together and ask them to share what it was like to share their trials with others and to be prayed for. Once some have been able to share, be honest and communicate how they can pray for you also. Then, say something like:

- **Trials will come in our lives. But we can have joy. Why? Because we know that God uses trials and struggles in our lives to teach us to trust in Him more than we ever had before. We can have joy when trials come because we know that we**

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will one day be made perfect to be with God forever. But while we are here on earth, we as the church are called to pray for each other, bear one another's struggles and encourage one another to remain steadfast under trials.

FINALLY, allow time for any closing thoughts or questions from your students.

- Don't forget to distribute the devotions to your students this week. If you're posting them on Instagram or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.
- Use the *Social Media Guide* to stay in touch with students via text or Instagram and to encourage them to follow through with reading their devotions.

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### We Want To Hear From You . . .

- Do you have questions about a lesson?
- Something that worked particularly well you want to share?
- Something that didn't work you want to bring up?

We value your feedback! Please do not hesitate to email us with your questions, comments, or concerns at [feedback@youthministry360.com](mailto:feedback@youthministry360.com).