



Get Wisdom!

Small Group Work Sheet
March 20, 2011

Part 1 - Ice Breaker

- Share a time you wish you acted with more wisdom.
- How would you describe the state of wisdom in our culture? Why do you think it is the way it is?

Part 2 - Sermon Review

- Describe the difference between wisdom and knowledge.
- What is the difference between God's wisdom and regular wisdom?
- James 1:5 is a promise for wisdom in trials. How has a loss of context, when this verse is quoted, led to a misapplication of the verse?
- We often think of wisdom during a trial to help us get through it, but God wants to give us wisdom to understand how he desires to transform us in it. How does that change the way you look at the trials you are facing?
- Since God is so generous with wisdom and doesn't find fault when we ask for it, why don't we ask for it more?
- What does James teach us about God's character and purpose for our lives?
- When James 1:6 talks about doubting, what is the object of the doubt? Is it doubt in God's ability? Is it doubt in the fervency of our prayer? Is it doubt in the purpose and character of God? How does your answer change the way you pray in a trial?
- What are the dangers of doubt for our emotional world?
- What are the dangers of doubt for our character?

Part 3 - Digging Deeper... *Doubt and Suffering* by Sinclair Ferguson

...you must become familiar with the biblical teaching on the significance of suffering, and fit our own lives into its framework. As you do so, instead of doubting the goodness or the power of God, you will begin to marvel at the wisdom of his ways.

First, suffering is the result of the fall, the expression of a cosmos and a human race out of tune with its Creator. If doubt arises because we cannot understand "why bad things happen to good people" we need to have our thinking radically reoriented to Scripture. For there we learn that there are no "good people" (compare Gen. 8:21 with Rom. 3:9-18).

We belong to a fallen and sinful world. The real mystery is that good things happen to bad people. The recognition that God has done good to and for a sinful person like me in such a world as this is medicine that immediately begins to work.

Second, our suffering as Christians is part of what the New Testament calls the divine *paideia* or child-training (Heb. 12:5–7, 11). It is not pleasant while we experience it; but afterwards we can see that our Father was training and strengthening us through these disciplines. He sometimes works painfully in our lives; he always works purposively, even if that purpose becomes clear only later. As the Puritan John Flavel once wrote, the providences of God are like Hebrew words—they can only be read backwards.

So long as we know that the Father's hand directs even suffering for our good (Rom. 8:28), we will not lose heart. For the discipline of suffering then becomes a sign of true sonship (Heb. 12:5–12). Rather than cause us to doubt the Father it leads us to ask him to fulfill the purposes of his love.

Third, suffering is a divine investment in our lives. It is the raw material out of which God creates glory (2 Cor. 4:17). Part of the reason for Paul's own suffering—as he later realized—was to enable him to comfort others with the comfort which he had experienced himself (2 Cor. 1:4). That is not the whole story, of course, but it is an important part. Samuel Rutherford put it quaintly: "Some graces grow best in winter."

Fourth, suffering may also be given to us to chasten and humble us. Whatever Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was, he says it "was given me" (2 Cor. 12:7). That phrase invariably points to God's sovereign purpose, in this case, "to keep me from becoming conceited." The scalpel of suffering had to be seen in its proper context if it was to be understood. Paul needed spiritual surgery. The heavenly Surgeon was cutting away the potentially malignant growth of pride; this operation was a "pridectomy"!

Fifth, sometimes our suffering is an aspect of a spiritual conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. That was so in the case of Job. Like Paul, his suffering was "a messenger of Satan" (see Job 2:3–8); its purpose was to torment (literally, "to strike with the fist," 2 Cor. 12:7).

Satan's design is always to make capital out of our suffering by producing doubts. "This proves God does not care for you" he whispers. "You are dispensable to him," he adds. Remember Job's wonderful response? "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15 nkjv). Seen in that light our suffering will make us determined to resist Satan, "standing firm in the faith" as Peter urges (1 Pet. 5:8–9).

Sixth, ultimately God's purpose in our suffering is to show us Christ's glory. Like the disciples in the storm on the Sea of Galilee we may wonder why he has brought us into such circumstances and cry out, "Don't you care if we drown?" (Mark 4:38). But he who is himself at rest in the storm has his reasons: He means to display his glory and in his own time to say "Peace, be still" (Mark 4:39 nkjv), either to our circumstances or to our hearts.

Paul discovered this when the Lord told him "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Knowing this the apostle was able even to rejoice in his sufferings because in his weakness it would become clear that his strength lay only in Christ (2 Cor. 12:9–10; see Rom. 5:1–5). Paul might not be able to see the final tapestry God was weaving in his life, but he had a sight of the pattern the Master Weaver was using. That was enough to nourish his faith.

When we experience suffering, whether it is physical, mental, or emotional, most of us have a tendency to listen to the doubts and fears which ordinarily lie latent in our souls. One of the great lessons the Psalms teach us is that we must learn to speak back to our souls, to expound biblical teaching to them. We must exhort them to think biblically about our situation, dispensing the medicine Scripture prescribes...

-Sproul, R., & Sproul, R. C. (2000). *Doubt & assurance* (electronic ed.). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.