

Small Group Guide

September 27, 2026

ICEBREAKER

What kind of test taker were you in school, completely prepared, last minute crammer, educated guesser, or the person who stared at the question hoping the answer would somehow come to you?

Follow up: What was your strategy when you came to a question and had absolutely no idea what the answer was?

Leader Note: Keep this moving and have some fun with it. The goal is to get everyone talking before transitioning to the much more important tests we face in life.

OBSERVATION

1. In James 1:2-4, what words or phrases describe what happens when our faith is tested?

James doesn't say **if** troubles come. He says **when** they come. He also connects the testing of our faith with endurance, growth, and spiritual maturity. James was writing to believers who understood hardship firsthand. They had been scattered and were experiencing real difficulties because of their faith.

Follow up: What does the word "**when**" tell us about what followers of Jesus should expect from life?

2. Imagine being one of the believers receiving this letter. You're experiencing real hardship, and James tells you to consider your troubles "an opportunity for great joy." What do you think your first reaction would have been?

James isn't telling them to enjoy suffering or pretend that their circumstances aren't painful. He's helping them see that God can use what is happening **to them** to produce something **in them**.

Follow up: According to verses 3 and 4, what can God produce in us through the testing of our faith?

INTERPRETATION

3. James moves directly from talking about trials in verses 2-4 to talking about wisdom in verse 5. Why do you think he connects those two subjects?

Trials have a way of putting us in situations where we simply don't know what to do. Sometimes our greatest question isn't: "**God, how do I get out of this?**"

It's: **"God, how do You want me to respond while I'm in this?"**

Warren Wiersbe described the difference this way: **"Knowledge is the ability to take things apart, while wisdom is the ability to put them together."**

Follow up: Can you think of a situation where you had plenty of information but still needed wisdom to know what to do?

4. What does James 1:5 teach us about both our need for wisdom and God's willingness to give it?

James assumes there will be times when we don't know what to do. His instruction is simple: **Ask God**. God isn't frustrated that we don't have everything figured out. James describes Him as **generous** and says He will not rebuke us for asking. God has also already given us wisdom through His Word. We can ask Him for wisdom in prayer and then go to His Word for direction.

Follow up: When you don't know what to do, why can it be easier to immediately try to solve the problem yourself rather than first asking God for wisdom?

5. James 1:6 says, "Be sure that your faith is in God alone." Jeremiah 2:13 describes God as "the fountain of living water" and the alternatives His people chose as cracked cisterns. How do these two pictures connect?

When we're hurting, confused, or afraid, we're thirsty for answers. That makes us vulnerable to anything that promises relief. Money isn't necessarily wrong. Relationships aren't wrong. Getting advice isn't wrong. The problem comes when we begin depending on those things **instead of depending on God. Broken cisterns always promise more than they can deliver.**

Follow up: What are some modern "broken cisterns" people are tempted to turn to when life becomes difficult?

6. James describes divided loyalty as being like a wave "blown and tossed by the wind." What might divided loyalty look like in someone's everyday life?

One day I'm listening to God. The next day I'm listening to the world. One moment I'm trusting God's Word. The next moment I'm trusting my feelings. James' concern isn't simply whether we know what to do. The deeper issue is **who gets the final say in our lives.**

APPLICATION

7. When you're facing a difficult situation and don't know what to do, where are you personally most likely to go first for answers?

Maybe you pray. Maybe you immediately try to fix it yourself. Maybe you call someone.

Maybe you worry. Maybe you search online. Maybe you follow whatever your feelings are telling you. The question isn't whether gathering information or getting advice is wrong. The deeper question is: **Where is my confidence ultimately resting?**

Follow up: How can you recognize when something good, like advice, relationships, or financial security, has started becoming a broken cistern in your life?

8. Which do you think happens more often, God hasn't shown us what to do, or God has shown us and we're still looking for an answer we like better?

Let the group wrestle with this question. James later writes: **James 1:22:** "But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says." Sometimes we ask God for wisdom, God shows us what to do, and then we start looking for a second opinion. Sometimes we don't really want wisdom. We want God to agree with the decision we've already made. You can't ask Jesus to lead your life while reserving veto power over everything He says.

Follow up:

Think about a test you're facing right now. Is there something you already know God wants you to do that you haven't done yet?

CHALLENGE

Think about **one test you're facing right now**. Maybe it's a decision you don't know how to make. Maybe it's a relationship you don't know how to repair. Maybe it's a financial problem, family situation, disappointment, health concern, or circumstance you cannot control.

Ask yourself three questions:

Have I asked God what He wants me to do?

Am I looking somewhere else for something I should be looking to God for?

Has God already shown me something I need to obey?

Then begin with a simple prayer:

"God, I need Your wisdom. Show me what You want me to do, and give me the courage to do what You say."

PRAYER

Father, when life tests our faith and we don't know what to do, remind us that we don't have to figure everything out on our own. Thank You for inviting us to ask You for wisdom and for promising to give generously. Show us the broken cisterns we run toward when we're afraid, confused, or hurting. Give us an undivided heart that trusts You above every other voice. When Your Word makes our next step clear, give us the courage to obey. Use the tests we're facing to deepen our endurance, mature our faith, and make us more like Jesus. In His name we pray, amen.