

Discussion Guide for *When Life is Hard*

Chapter One – *What Are Trials?*

Sharing the Gold (group discussion questions)

- Read Hebrews 12:5–11 and then ask, “So, does God really spank His children?”
- Discuss the point that some of life’s deepest and most lasting lessons come to us wrapped in pain. How would you respond to the expert’s insistence that “nothing good could ever come from causing a child pain” using your own experiences for examples.
- What are the two necessary beneficial responses to God’s discipline in our lives?
- What does discipline have to do with holiness?
- Discuss the following statement from the chapter: *Trials we embrace and learn from; consequences we repent and turn from.*
- James ended the chapter with three memorable principles that allow us to make the most of trials: the pain is momentary; the profit is immense; and the promise is conditional. How are these principles shaping your understanding of trials?
- Before closing in prayer, invite each participant to share what they hope to gain from reading and discussing this book on trials. Focus on those desires in prayer.

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Chapter Two – *Why Trials?*

Sharing the Gold (group discussion questions)

- Read James 1:2–8 and invite to group to wonder out loud why a practical man like Jesus' half-brother James would start his only letter in the New Testament by immediately talking about trials and temptations.
- There are at least three specific commands in these verses. What are they and how do they affect our response to trials?
- What is joy? How does this passage help define it? How is it different from happiness?
- Review the survey answers from 100 people that James quotes in this chapter. What answer(s) most clearly fit your response to trials?
- What have been some of your personal discoveries in “staying under discipline” during your trials?
- How has God answered your prayers for understanding and wisdom in your trials?
- Before closing in prayer, ask each group member to share one specific request for prayer from the group related to their current trials.

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Chapter Three – *What to Do with Trials*

Sharing the Gold (group discussion questions)

- Read 1 Peter 4:1–19. Ask each group member to identify the verse that affects them the most in this passage. Why?
- How are the Glimpses of Gold and the emphasis on Job 23:10 affecting your understanding of trials?
- Why is it important for believers to acknowledge that trials are an inevitable part of following Jesus Christ?
- During your reading of this chapter, when you asked God, “What do You want me to do when life is hard?” what became your first step to take?
- Ask for volunteers to explain each of the four “first responses” to trials (rejoice, don’t be ashamed, do a self-exam, and entrust your soul to your faithful Creator). If those responses or their significance are uncertain, review the appropriate parts of the chapter.
- Invite group members to share ways in which their love for Christ and their spiritual maturity have been significantly deepened as a result of the trials they have experienced.
- As your closing time of prayer, encourage the group to express glory to God wherever they might be in dealing with trials.

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Chapter Four – *What If I Refuse this Trial?*

Sharing the Gold (group discussion questions)

- Read Hebrews 12:12–17. Lots of Christians are familiar with the first two verses of this chapter and are surprised to discover that running with endurance and looking to Jesus have a lot to do with the way we handle God’s discipline. Ask: How does the fact that others are observing you in your trials remind you to depend on Christ?
- Review together the downward stations of the rejection spiral. Describe the symptoms of each station. How does resisting or rejecting a trial lead from one lower station to the next?
- How long can a resistant person remain at any of these “stations” before moving to the next lower one? For example, is it possible to get to bitterness and just stay there? Why or why not?
- In what ways does repentance serve as the turning point for each of these stations?
- Why doesn’t repentance work for the last station (disqualification)?
- Give group members an opportunity to share their struggles with the downward stations in their handling of trials. Be sensitive to each other’s movement toward repentance. Then take time to pray for each other.

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Chapter Five – *Why Some Trials Never End*

Sharing the Gold (group discussion questions)

- Read 2 Corinthians 12:7–11. Ask the group if anyone can think of a trial they thought for sure was a thorn, but it has passed and become a permanent record of God's work in that person's life.
- What are the primary differences between trials and thorns?
- When do you think it's safe to begin calling a trial a thorn?
- In what ways, if any, should we respond to a thorn differently than to a trial?
- Share examples with each other similar to James' account of his childhood friend Wendy and how her thorn lead to blessings in his life.
- When it comes to the thorns of others, how should we pray?
- Take time for extended prayer for one another. Practice encouraging each other through prayer.
- **NOTE FOR CHAPTER SIX. If you have been meeting on a regular schedule, plan to meet at least once more, even though folks may not have read all the devotional moments in the last chapter.**

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Chapter Six – *Take It with You*

Sharing the Gold (group discussion questions)

- Read Job 23:10; then invite the group to quote it from memory. Ask them to each tell what their favorite word is in the verse, and why.
- What have been your most difficult moments in this study? The hardest ideas to get your mind and arms around?
- Ten years from now, what are the two or three principles from this study on trials that you would still want to be practicing in your life?
- What has changed for you since we started this study?
- In what sense can you affirm that the trials you have faced or are facing, or will face will turn out to be some of the best parts of life?
- As gold submits to the heat of the furnace in order to be tried and purified, in what ways are you submitting to the heat of God's love as you endure the trials He has allowed into your life?
- As we close this study in prayer, as the weeks go by and God's Spirit brings you to our minds, how would you like us to pray for you?