

LEADER GUIDE

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF JAMES

# THRIVE

Living  
Faithfully in  
Difficult Times

JENNIFER COWART





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# ENDURANCE

Embracing  
Obstacles as a  
Means to Maturity



*Session Notes:* **WEEK 1**

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## LEADER PREP (BEFORE THE SESSION)

### Overview

This week we looked at selected verses in the first chapter of the Book of James, along with additional scriptures, as we considered how obstacles can help us to mature spiritually. We considered that we all have seasons filled with difficulties and doubt, as well as joy. But like the first-century believers who endured persecution, we can learn to view our difficulties as opportunities to draw close to the Lord.

### Memory Verse:

*Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow.*

*(James 1:2-3)*

### What You Will Need

- Thrive DVD and DVD player, or equipment to stream the video online
- Bible and Thrive participant workbook for reference
- Markerboard or chart paper and markers (optional)
- Stick-on name tags and markers (optional)
- iPod, smartphone, or tablet and portable speaker (optional)
- Various versions of the Bible, including The Message Bible

## SESSION OUTLINE

### Welcome and Opening Prayer

*(5–10 minutes, depending on session length)*

In order to create a warm, welcoming environment as the women are gathering before the session begins, consider lighting one or more candles, providing coffee or other refreshments, playing worship music, or all of these. (Bring an iPod, smartphone, or tablet and a portable speaker if desired.) Be sure to provide name tags if the women do not know one



another or you have new participants in your group. Then, when you are ready to begin, open the group in prayer.

If meeting online, welcome each participant as she joins and encourage the women to talk informally until you are ready to open the group in prayer.

### ***Icebreaker (5 minutes)***

Invite the women to share short responses to the following questions:

- What is a difficult experience you encountered in the past? or
- What is a difficult experience you have encountered recently?

### ***Video (20 minutes)***

Play the Week 1 video segment. Invite participants to complete the Video Viewer Guide for Week 1 in the participant workbook as they watch (page 40).

### ***Group Discussion (25–35 minutes, depending on session length)***

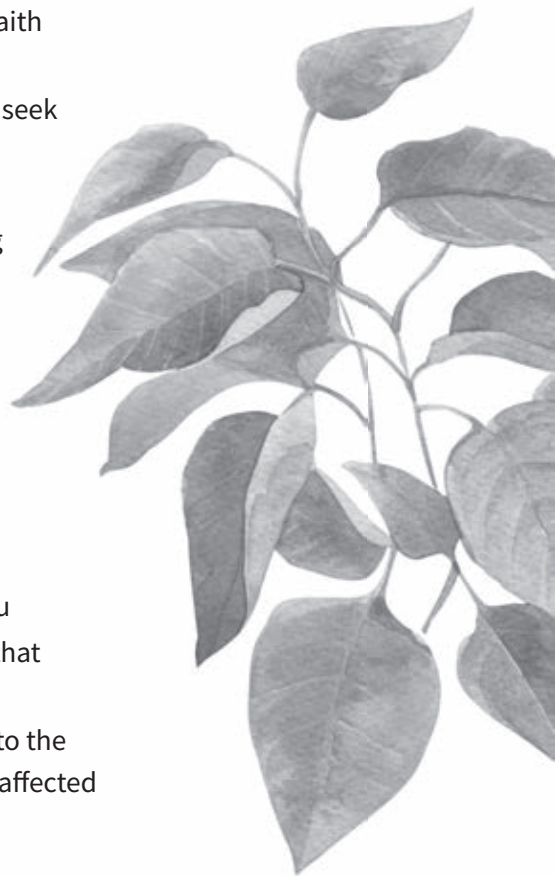
*Note:* More material is provided than you will have time to include. Before the session, select what you want to cover.

#### **VIDEO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- Jen speaks about what Proverbs meant to her as a young person. What similarities do you see between the collection of advice in Proverbs and the advice that James is writing for believers? What differences?
- What does the idea that Jesus had siblings add to your understanding of his experiences and life?
- James offers practical wisdom for life's tough seasons. As you read this week, what seasons and circumstances came to mind for you as a 21st century Christian?
- In this video, Jen underscores that it's not "if" trouble comes to us but "when". Did you find reassurance from James's words that "when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow" or concern?
- What did you hear in Jen's video that will stay with you this week?

## PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In Day 1 of our study we were challenged to recall who introduced us to Jesus for the first time. Some of us were in a church building hearing stories about Jesus from a Sunday school teacher or pastor, and some of us heard about Jesus through a family member, teacher, coach, neighbor, or friend. Meeting Jesus changed our lives—whether immediately or over time.
  - Share who introduced you to Jesus for the first time. (page 14)
  - What do you think it would have been like to be one of Jesus’s siblings? (page 14)
  - James overcame his doubts regarding who Jesus was. What doubts have you struggled with in your own faith journey? (page 15)
  - At the end of Day 1, you prayed for a fresh desire to seek Jesus as never before. How is God answering that prayer?
2. During Day 2 of our study, we focused on thriving instead of surviving. After surviving the days and months during the pandemic, we can all agree that our quest is to thrive. We all want the transforming joy that comes when we go from surviving to thriving!
  - When have you experienced a difficult season of life, and what was your first reaction to it? (page 19)
  - As you look back on that difficult time, what did you learn from it? (page 21) How were you changed by that experience?
  - Has there been a difficult season when you turned to the Lord for peace and help? If so, share how that time affected your faith in God. (page 21)







- How has James 1:2-3 brought you comfort and reassurance?
3. On Day 3 we were reminded of disappointments, adversity, and ways we responded to these challenging days.
    - When has life not turned out as you dreamed? When that happened, what was your first response? (page 25)
    - What are some ways God has comforted you during difficult seasons? (page 27)
    - How has God's comfort prepared you to comfort others? (page 27)
  4. During our Day 4 lesson we focused on ways to embrace obstacles as a means to maturity in our daily walk with God.
    - Read Psalm 34:18 silently or aloud. What does this passage tell you about God's attitude toward your wounds? (page 30)
    - Ask someone to read aloud James 1:2-4 from The Message Bible (page 28). What does James say will be the outcome of this test? (page 30) Now, reflect on your own life. When have you been in the refiner's fire? What did God produce in your character through this time? (page 31)
    - Why is it important for us to reach out to others during their difficult seasons of life? How might you turn the pain of your past into a ministry to others? (page 32)
  5. During our Day 5 lesson we looked at the Scriptures through an eternal perspective. Sometimes it is difficult to focus on the eternal perspective during our day-to-day living.
    - If you could go back and give your younger self some advice regarding difficult times, what would you tell her? (page 37)
    - Troubles are a part of our lives. How did you paraphrase 1 Peter 4:12-13? (page 38)
    - Why is it essential to pray during your good times and not-so-good times?

- How did you paraphrase Revelation 21:4? (page 38) Why is it essential to choose joy? What helps you to do that?

### ***Deeper Conversation (15 minutes)***

Divide into smaller groups of two to three for deeper conversation. (Encourage the women to break into different groups each week.) If you'd like, before the session, write on a markerboard or chart paper the questions below. You also could do this in the form of a handout.

- Every struggle in life is an opportunity. How can you invite God into the midst of each situation? How are you going to allow God to produce in you a work that develops character?
- Where did you see God at work in your life this past week?

### ***Closing Prayer (5 minutes)***

Close the session by taking personal prayer requests from group members and leading the group in prayer. As you progress to later weeks in the study, you might encourage members to participate by praying out loud for one another and the requests given.





# Wisdom

Having Heavenly  
Perspective on  
Earthly Issues



## LEADER PREP (BEFORE THE SESSION)

### Overview

In our second week of study we focused on the theme of wisdom, reading selected verses in James 1 and 3 as well as additional Scriptures. We saw that God is the giver of true wisdom and wants to give us His insight. In Jeremiah 29:13 we read these words, “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” Seeking wisdom from God and godly people equips us to live faithfully and humbly and walk in fellowship with God. With wisdom we are able to see circumstances from God’s perspective and discern how God wants us to live.

### Memory Verse

*If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.*

*(James 1:5 NIV)*

### What You Will Need

- Thrive DVD and DVD player, or equipment to stream the video online
- Bible and Thrive participant workbook for reference
- Markerboard or chart paper and markers (optional)
- Stick-on name tags and markers (optional)
- iPod, smartphone, or tablet and portable speaker (optional)

## SESSION OUTLINE

### Welcome and Opening Prayer

*(5–10 minutes, depending on session length)*

In order to create a warm, welcoming environment as the women are gathering before the session begins, consider lighting one or more candles, providing coffee or other refreshments, playing worship music, or all of these. (Bring an iPod, smartphone, or tablet and a portable speaker if desired.) Be sure to provide name tags if the women do not know one



another or you have new participants in your group. Then, when you are ready to begin, open the group in prayer.

If meeting online, welcome each participant as she joins and encourage the women to talk informally until you are ready to open the group in prayer.

### ***Icebreaker (5 minutes)***

Invite the women to share short responses to one of the following questions:

- Think of the wisest person you know. If you could ask this person for advice today, what would you ask? or
- What's the best advice you have received from a wise person?

### ***Video (20 minutes)***

Play the Week 2 video segment. Invite participants to complete the Video Viewer Guide for Week 2 in the participant workbook as they watch (page 73).

### ***Group Discussion (25–35 minutes, depending on session length)***

*Note:* More material is provided than you will have time to include. Before the session, select what you want to cover.

### **VIDEO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- The memory verse this week says that any who ask God for wisdom will be given wisdom. What do you think is involved in really asking God for wisdom?
- Jen mentions several life areas from friendships to family to finances. Where in your life today do you feel you need the most wisdom?
- The memory verse also uses the descriptor “generously” in how God grants wisdom. How do you see God’s generosity in sharing wisdom?
- Who in your own faith life exemplified real wisdom to you?

## PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. This week we explored the meaning of God’s wisdom and how it impacts our daily lives. The Bible says that true wisdom is the thing we should all seek. In the books of James and Proverbs we find numerous instructions on how to live.
  - How might seeking wisdom impact your life? (page 44)
  - Say the memory verse, James 1:5 (NIV), aloud as a group. According to James, how do we obtain wisdom? (page 46)
  - Whom do you consider wise? What sets them apart from others? (page 46)
  - What happens when people rely on their own desires and intellect instead of turning to God for wisdom and discernment?
2. Daily we are confronted with advertisements telling us we need to acquire more and more things. In our Day 2 lesson we read a powerful verse that challenges that desire to want more things: “How much better to get wisdom than gold, and good judgment than silver!” (Proverbs 16:16). In order to live faithfully, we need the wisdom of God.
  - Read aloud 1 Kings 4:29, 34. What are we told that God gave Solomon, and what happened as a result? (page 50)
  - In what areas of your life do you need wisdom right now? (page 51)
  - Reflect on James 1:5-7. When asking God for wisdom, why is it important to ask in faith without doubting God?
3. On Day 3 we focused on the idea that discovering God’s perspective is the avenue to finding true wisdom.
  - Reflect on the opening words of Solomon from Ecclesiastes 1:2-3, 8.
  - What strikes you about Solomon’s observation? Have you ever had similar thoughts? (page 55)





- What can you do to prioritize your relationship with Jesus on a daily basis? (page 57)
  - Read aloud Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 and James 3:13. On what do James and Solomon agree? (See page 58.)
  - How does reflecting on Jesus lead you toward a life of wisdom?
4. During our Day 4 lesson we were challenged to think about God's will for our lives. We discovered that we should know God personally, love and obey Him, and share Him with others.
    - Is prayer your first reaction or last resort when faced with a decision? What in your approach to prayer needs to change in order for you to seek God with all your heart? (page 63)
    - When seeking God's will for your life, why is it vital to study the Bible?
    - As you seek advice from others, why should you be careful to select mature believers?
    - What does it look like in your life to dwell in God's peace? (page 66)
  5. This week we had an opportunity to discover where our faith is lacking as we encounter difficulties and struggles. No matter what happens in our lives, we know God is with us and wants us to seek Him for help.
    - Ask someone to read aloud James 1:2-4. According to James, why are we to consider difficulties an opportunity for growth? (page 68)
    - When you face struggles, what is typically your first response? (page 71)
    - From Proverbs 11:2 (NIV) we read, "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom." What emotions and feelings come to mind after hearing this verse?



### ***Deeper Conversation (15 minutes)***

Divide into smaller groups of two to three for deeper conversation. (Encourage the women to break into different groups each week.) If you'd like, before the session, write on a markerboard or chart paper the following questions. You could also do this in the form of a handout.

- How might living out Jeremiah 29:13 transform your daily walk with God? What might that look like for you?
- Where did you see God at work in your life this past week?

### ***Closing Prayer (5 minutes)***

Close the session by taking personal prayer requests from group members and leading the group in prayer. As you progress to later weeks in the study, you might encourage members to participate by praying out loud for one another and the requests given.



# Living Faithfully in All Circumstances

This leader guide contains everything you need to facilitate connection and community including prayers, session guides, video viewer questions, and excellent discussion prompts.

Get out of survival mode! You don't want to miss out on *Thrive: Living Faithfully in Difficult Times*! Jen Cowart's study is the perfect resource for any woman who wants to grow in her faith and learn practical tools to navigate life's challenges. With her relatable teaching style and emphasis on developing six essential habits from the Book of James, this study is a must for anyone seeking to deepen their faith while improving their outlook on life.

—**Heather M. Dixon**, speaker and author of *Determined: Living Like Jesus in Every Moment*

Seldom do you find a teaching resource that inspires as much as it challenges. This is that. Jennifer is a challenging teacher, but also a convincing witness. If you *settle*, *focus*, and *reflect* with this study, you will *thrive*. I heartedly commend it.

—**Dr. Maxie Dunnam**, author and pastor


Jen has a relentless heart especially for seeing women go deep with God. In this study, she boldly walks us into the deeper waters of holiness and challenges us to stretch muscles like wisdom and endurance and humility—muscles we all need to exercise more intentionally. Thank you, Jen, for caring for our souls enough to challenge them.


—**Carolyn Moore**, author and founding pastor of Mosaic Church, Evans, Georgia

Also available are a Participant Workbook (9781791027803) and a six-session DVD (9781791027766) featuring the author. Video sessions are also available on [AmplifyMedia.com](http://AmplifyMedia.com).




**Jennifer Cowart** is Executive and Teaching Pastor of Harvest Church. With degrees in Christian education, counseling, and business, she has been integral to the development of the Emerging and Discipleship Ministries at Harvest. Jen is a gifted Bible teacher and speaker and the author of three additional women's Bible studies, *Pursued*, *Fierce*, and *Messy People* as well as several studies coauthored with her husband, Jim, including *The One* and *Living the Five*. She and Jim love doing life with their kids, Aly and Josh. Learn more at [jennifercowart.org](http://jennifercowart.org).

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 **Abingdon Women**  
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RELIGION/Christian Life/Women's Issues

ISBN-13: 978-1-7910-2779-7



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Cover design: Jeff Jansen | Aesthetic Soup