



# COMMUNICATOR GUIDE

Even If / Week 4

PRELUDE

SOCIAL

WORSHIP

STORY

GROUPS

HOME

## SERIES BOTTOM LINE

Everything changes but some things never change.

## GOAL OF SMALL GROUP

To challenge students to be resilient in the face of change and to encourage them to think about what God may be doing in their lives through change.

## WEEK 4 BOTTOM LINE

**You'll be stronger, even if . . .**

## SCRIPTURE

- *James 1:2-4 NLT*

## TEACHING SLIDES

All scripture, bottom lines, and teaching points that are bolded in this script are also provided as slides in your weekly "Teaching" folder.

## OPTIONAL VIDEOS

\*OPTIONAL MEDIA for this week available for purchase through the XP3 HS Media Package:

- The Even If Countdown (10 minutes)
- Resistance Bands Video (for the interactive)
- The Even If Teaching Video – week 4

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## TEACHING OUTLINE

### INTRODUCTION

- *Note: Tell a personal story about a difficult change you faced.*
- *There's one thing that's for certain when we face change of ANY kind: It changes us.*

### TENSION

- When change happens around us, it often changes what happens inside of us. It's like it can make us become someone different.
  - Change can make us frustrated.
  - Change can make us feel out of control.
  - Change can make us feel like we're not having any fun.
- What we're going to talk about today has the potential to be a game-changer for us when it comes to dealing with difficult transitions in our lives.

### TRUTH

- Today, we're going to look at a passage of Scripture from a letter written by James. James was the brother of Jesus, but he didn't always believe that Jesus was the Son of God.
- After Jesus died and then came back to life, James knew Jesus really was God's Son. He soon became a prominent leader in the early group of Jesus followers.
- During one of Jesus' last talks with His followers, He told them they would be the ones to take Jesus' message all over the known world.
- In other words, Jesus was telling them to make a change—to move beyond their comfort zones and out into the world.
- Jesus' followers were on board with the Gospel, but the idea of being the ones to spread that message around the world was intimidating. So, most of them stayed right where they were.
- And then something changed. The disciples and other early followers of Jesus started to become targets for the religious and political leaders.
- This dramatic change in their lives propelled them to take Jesus' message about grace and forgiveness and a new way of living in the world to new places, while also growing their faith and dependence on God.
- This is what was happening in the world when James wrote to followers of Jesus—who had started out as Jewish—in his letter.
  - *Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy (James 1:2 NLT).*
  - *For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow (James 1:3 NLT).*
- We're all familiar with endurance, but we usually associate that word with athletics. When we train and push past our limits, over time, our bodies adjust to meet those new limits.
- *Note: The Interactive happens here. See your Teaching Script for details.*
- When we work through pain and struggle of any kind, including the struggle to change, we don't just become better at that specific thing; we develop *personal* endurance.
  - *So let it [your endurance] grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing (James 1:4 NLT).*
- Essentially, James is saying that working through the pain and hard stuff—*enduring*—doesn't just make you better at the thing you're working on, but you're actually learning *how* to change.

- You will become the kind of person who James says is complete—you will have joy and gratitude when circumstances don't go your way, and you will grow in character, faith, and love. You will discover you have everything you already need.
- You'll be stronger, even if . . .
- When we see change as something that has a trickle-down effect into every area of life, we see that it's more about becoming *better* through the change than it is about being *uncomfortable* in the change.
- When we view change this way—as an opportunity to grow stronger—we will begin to see it as God sees it.
- But James is telling them that when we trust who God is and what He's like, we can be sure that He's doing something *in* us, no matter how uncomfortable the change may be.

#### APPLICATION

- So, as we leave this series, what are some things we can do to apply what we've learned, some ways we can trust God even if it all feels like more than we can handle?
  - Stop fighting change and start embracing it.
  - Think long-term.

#### LANDING

- What if we saw change as something that made us better and stronger? Wouldn't that change the way we see change?
- Your small group is full of people who can be great encouragers for you as you journey through different changes in your life.
- Remember, God can use change to make you stronger.



# TEACHING SCRIPT

Even If / Week 4

PRELUDE

SOCIAL

WORSHIP

STORY

GROUPS

HOME

## BOTTOM LINE

**You'll be stronger, even if . . .**

## INTRODUCTION

6 MINUTES

In this series, *Even If*, we've been talking about change. Whether you change hairstyles or friend groups, change is a big deal. And change can make it feel like nothing ever stays the same, which can be unsettling.

### TELL A PERSONAL STORY

Tell a story about a difficult change you faced. Make it no more than 330 words and less than 2 minutes to share. Explore some of the thoughts that you had as you faced that change. End with, "But there's one thing that's for certain when we face change of any kind: it changes us."

#### Example:

*When I think back, one of the biggest changes that happened between my freshman and sophomore years in college was when I switched schools. I got into a lot of trouble my freshman year. It wasn't the school's fault, but I'm not sure the new school was the best environment for me. Plus, my family had NO money, and the school was very expensive. So, I talked with my dad and made the decision to change schools and go to a community college that was 10 hours away from my previous school. Talk about a change!*

*As I moved out of my dorm (for good), a bunch of things went through my head . . .*

- *I had friends at my old school. Now I was heading to a school where I knew no one. Not one single soul.*
- *I had gotten used to that school. I had been there a year, which meant I learned the way it "worked," if that makes sense. Every school has its own way of doing things, and now I knew that I'd have to learn how a new school operated.*
- *I didn't know if the next school would be better or if I would regret my decision. What if I made the wrong decision?*

*It was definitely a change. And it definitely wasn't a smooth one. My sophomore year wasn't easy. Not even a little bit. I met some people, but it took me a long time to actually make any friends. I had some roommates who were VERY tough to get along with, and they couldn't care less about it.*

*The point is, sometimes change happens to you, and there's nothing you can do about it. If your dad takes a job in another town and your family has to move, that's change you can't control. Sometimes you decide to make a change in your own life, like stepping away from a relationship in your life that's toxic. My experience was kind of a combination of the two.*

But there's one thing that's for certain when we face change of ANY kind:

It changes us.

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## TENSION

4 MINUTES

When change happens around us, it often changes what happens inside of us. It's like it can make us become someone different. When it came to me changing schools, there were a few things that change did inside of me. Or shall I say, there are a few ways that I chose to react. Maybe you can relate.

**Change can make us frustrated.** I didn't understand why I struggled so hard to make new friends. I didn't understand why it was so difficult to make better decisions. I didn't like that I had gotten comfortable at my old college, only to start over at another college. And maybe you have faced something similar. Maybe your friends have changed, and you don't love the new way they are acting. It's frustrating. Maybe your mom or dad has gotten remarried, and you're having a tough time adjusting to the new blended family. It's frustrating. I get it.

**Change can make us feel out of control.** Even though I tried to make friends, it took a while. I couldn't force people to be my friend. I couldn't make my college do things differently. I felt like a lot of things were out of control. I felt powerless! Maybe you've felt that way too. Maybe you got a new teacher this semester who makes one of your classes EXTREMELY difficult, and there's nothing you can do to make him or her ease up on the difficulty. Maybe your parents have started fighting a lot recently, and you feel like there's nothing you can do to help them get along. It all feels out of control. And we don't like things we can't control.

**Change can make us feel like we're not having any fun.** And let's be honest, nobody wants to *not* have fun. When we get used to things a certain way and then it all looks different, it's difficult. And nobody likes difficult things. Even though I knew that changing schools was probably the best move for me back in the day, it was still tough. It wasn't easy, and it wasn't fun. When we get into a difficult situation, we tend to believe that it will NEVER get any better. When a friend moves away, we feel like things will never be the same—we'll never find another friend like him or her again. We feel like it's going to be like this forever. A lot of times, this is when we look for an escape. We want to feel better, so we look for something that does that for us. And over time, we learn that escaping the pain doesn't actually make pain go away. In fact, it usually just makes it worse. It makes it worse because when the escape is over, we are still faced with the same problem, which is honestly very defeating and disappointing. On top of that, we may have MORE problems because of the escape we ran to, and then we need to escape again—which is not a great cycle to be in.

Here's the good news. What we're going to talk about today has the potential to be a game-changer for us when it comes to dealing with difficult transitions in our lives.

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# TRUTH

8 MINUTES

Today we're going to look at a passage of Scripture from a letter written by James. James was the brother of Jesus, but he didn't always believe that Jesus was the Son of God. And to be fair, it's tough to believe that kind of claim when you shared a bedroom with that person as a kid. But after Jesus died and then came back to life, James knew Jesus really was God's Son. He soon became a prominent leader in the early group of Jesus followers.

But before we get to what he said in his letter, let me give you a little background. During one of Jesus' last talks with His followers, He told them that they would be the ones to take Jesus' message all over the known world. Kind of a big deal for former fishermen who had never really left their hometowns before. In other words, **Jesus was telling them to make a change—to move beyond their comfort zones and out into the world.** This was a big vision that could make a big impact.

But at first, that didn't happen. Jesus' followers were on board with the Gospel, but the idea of being the ones to spread that message around the world was intimidating. Leaving their homes, their communities, and their livelihoods to teach complete strangers was a big ask. So, most of them stayed right where they were. And then something changed.

The disciples and other early followers of Jesus started to become targets for the religious and political leaders. They were arrested and beaten, sometimes even killed. And this crackdown on the Church caused people to scatter from their city and homes. This dramatic change in their lives propelled them to take Jesus' message about grace and forgiveness and a new way of living in the world to new places, while also growing their faith and dependence on God. Because as they traveled, they truly had to trust Him—not just to know what to do, but also for their basic needs like food, safety, and places to stay.

This is what was happening in the world when James wrote to followers of Jesus, who had started out as Jewish, in his letter. One of the things he said was this:

*Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy (James 1:2 NLT).*

Okay, hold on a minute. Consider it joy when you experience trouble? That sounds crazy. Especially because this wasn't just *any* trouble. This was the kind of trouble that could lead to *death!*

But James isn't finished. Check out what he says next . . .

*For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow (James 1:3 NLT).*

We're all familiar with endurance, but we usually associate that word with athletics. When we train and push past our limits, our bodies adjust to meet those new limits, over time. You may struggle to lift a certain weight or push against a certain amount of resistance, but eventually, it becomes easier. And then you need to add more weight or more resistance, which challenges you to grow even stronger.



\*OPTIONAL MEDIA for this week available for purchase through the XP3 HS Media Package:

- Resistance Bands Video (for the interactive)

*Use resistance bands to illustrate the idea that facing change produces endurance and makes you stronger.*

I don't know how you feel about working out. You may hate it, you may love it—but either way, working out is not easy! Why else would it be called a work out?

When I first started working out . . . (Talk about what was challenging, the low number of reps, or a workout you absolutely hated but got better at over time.)

When you work out with resistance bands, they come in a set of light, medium, or Heavy. (Good luck starting with the heavy one.) Your ability to withstand the resistance improves over time. It's only after you endure the work out and build the muscle that you can successfully transition from light to heavy. With every rep, your muscles are changing . . . literally ripping and growing. Talk about change you don't want to face.

And change is the same way. You'll be stronger the next time you face change, even if it's change you would never choose. Change is rarely easy. But the hidden gift in showing up to face change over and over is that change can make you stronger. So, build your endurance.

James' words mean endurance isn't just for the gym; it works in every area of life. **When we work through pain and struggle of any kind, including the struggle to change, we don't just become better at that specific thing, we develop *personal* endurance.** We develop an inner strength that can help us in other areas and challenges.

And then James says this:

*So let it [your endurance] grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing (James 1:4 NLT).*

**Essentially, James is saying that working through the pain and hard stuff—*enduring*—doesn't just make you better at the thing you're working on, but you're actually learning *how to change*.** And when that happens, you will become the kind of person who James says is complete—you will have joy and gratitude when circumstances don't go your way, and you will grow in character, faith, and love. You will discover you have everything you already need. It's like you're developing a muscle of endurance that will help you when you face any kind of change. And when you have this perspective, every change you face is another chance to grow, to work that muscle—not just personally but spiritually.

Think of it this way . . .

### **You'll be stronger, even if . . .**

When it comes to change, our tendency is to focus on all the negative parts—all the trouble that comes with it. **But when we see change as something that has a trickle-down effect into every area of life, we see that it's more about becoming *better* through the change than it is about being *uncomfortable* in the change.**

When we view change this way—as an opportunity to grow stronger—we will begin to see it as God sees it. Good change and hard change can be a positive thing, because it's all about . . .

- Growing as a person, friend, daughter, or son
- Getting stronger
- Developing better character

This would've been an idea for me to accept when I had to switch colleges. But when I look back, it's one of the greatest things that ever happened to me. It developed so many things in me that I'm grateful for today. And by the grace of God, I was able to make changes in my life for the better. See, the change that happened around me made a change on the inside of me. And that was for the better.

The audience James wrote to was dealing with their lives being threatened. So, this wasn't an easy message for them, either. **But James is telling them that when we trust who God is and what He's like, we can be sure that He's doing something *in us*, no matter how uncomfortable the change may be.** We can be stronger, even if the change is uncomfortable. We can persevere and endure through change because we trust that God is creating a bigger story. The strength you work on developing now will be the strength you take with you into the future.

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## APPLICATION

3 MINUTES

Change is an opportunity for God to work in our lives. So, as we leave this series, what are some things we can do to apply what we've learned, some ways we can trust God even if it all feels like more than we can handle? Here are a few ideas:

1. **Stop fighting change and start embracing it.** I want to encourage you to change the way you see change. Start seeing it as an opportunity to grow your faith, endurance, and character. God can do something inside of you when you face change, so trust Him to grow you through it. Accept change as a gift from Him!
2. **Think long-term.** Try to see the bigger picture. Change may not feel good in the moment, but know that God is writing a bigger story for your life than what's going on in the current moment. He loves you, and He wants you to live the best life possible. He can use your unique circumstances to help you become who you were made to be. You can trust Him! Things may not get better overnight. But they won't stay the same way forever. Life is bigger (and longer) than your current circumstances. Even if it feels like it will never get better, God's not done yet!

On top of all that, remember that everything changes, but there are some things that never change. And when your life feels like it is changing all around you, God never changes. God's interest in you, His commitment to you, His love for you, His availability for you never changes.

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## LANDING

1 MINUTE

What if we saw change as something that made us better and stronger? Wouldn't that change the way we see change?

Your small group is full of people who can be great encouragers for you as you journey through different changes in your life. Don't be afraid to open up to them and be real about what's going on in your life. Remember, **God can use change to make you stronger**. He can also use the people around you to help you grow stronger through the changes you face.



TRANSITION INTO SMALL GROUPS

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