

Seeing Trials Biblically

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[0 : 00] Please turn your Bible to the letter of James. This morning we're continuing our sermon series in James.

Amen.

Cut it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds. For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

And that steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Let's pray together. Father, we bow our hearts this morning and we do so asking that you would help us in this moment to engage with you as we hear your word.

[1 : 16] Father, I pray for the anointing of your spirit upon me as I seek to serve these who are gathered. And Lord, I pray that you would do far more beyond what I could ever do humanly.

Speak to our hearts. Direct our lives through your word, we pray. In Christ's name. Amen. Amen. So if you're anything like me, you probably get a lot of junk mail each day.

I get a lot of junk mail. And one of the first things I typically do is I have to delete my junk mail so I can really get to the mail that is important that I don't want to miss.

I just recently, I just had this thought to look at the junk mail that I receive. And it's interesting because most of them are false advertising.

And they give away the false advertisement right in the subject line. So I just decided, some that I deleted, I began to just look at the subject line of these emails, these junk emails I got, just to see what was the hook that they would put in these subject lines.

[2 : 39] And you know the hook in the subject line of the email is designed like the bait that goes out to fish.

You know the fish goes after the bait thinking that it's going to get food. And what happens is the fish becomes food instead of getting food. And that's what happens with these emails when you go after them.

So here are some of the hook words I saw. And it was common in these emails I deleted. Free, secret, fast, simple, quick, congrats.

That's a big one. You just won from Samsung. \$400,000. And this one, drop. And you know what that one relates to, right?

Drop. What is drop? Someone shout it out. Drop weight. When I saw, this is what it says in the subject line, put 10 drops of this on your tongue to melt away belly fat.

[3 : 53] Now you know the people who get caught with that. Those are people who are deluding themselves. Those are people who want the belly fat to go, but they don't want to do the work to get belly fat away.

So they go after those kinds of emails. And I've said to people, if I was going to have another life, and I was going to not live by principles, I would get in the diet business.

And I would promise people the easiest way to lose weight. Because the easier you tell them it is to lose weight, the more customers you get. Just, you know, tell them anything.

Spin around 10 times after you send me your credit card number. And you will lose weight. And of course, the truth is, many people, only after clicking and completing, they find that the belly fat didn't melt away.

The only thing that melted away was the balance on their credit card. But many people get caught in those kinds of things. And it's amazing how some of us are just so gullible to false advertisements.

[5 : 03] It behooves me that there are people who will fall for a false advertisement that tells you, I'm going to show you how to make money, and I want you to complete this form, send me your credit card information, send me your bank account.

I'm like, why would you be sending money to someone who's trying to help you make money? I mean, it doesn't compute for me. But those scams are really about, at the end of the day, trivial things.

They're about products and services. And sometimes, at least for some people, they learn a lesson. Though they lose money, they learn a lesson not to do that again. But there's another kind of false advertising that is a far greater concern.

And it's the false advertising that relates to the Christian life. There's a lot of it floating around. I'm sure many of you have heard the preacher or pastor who promised people that if they turn their life over to Jesus, all their problems will go away.

The marriage will improve. The finances will get better. The career will prosper. And the list goes on. And really, the false advertising about the Christian life is really the worst kind of false advertising because it misrepresents.

[6 : 30] It misrepresents a God who is true to his word. And sadly, many people who buy into the false advertising of the Christian life, they become confused when they find out it isn't as they were told.

They become disillusioned and disappointed. And some, instead of dismissing the false advertising that they have heard, they dismiss the Christian faith.

When they realize that actually, things get harder in many ways. They realize that the marriage becomes more difficult as opposed to easier.

The financial problems multiply. Perhaps a job is lost. Health is challenged. And problems just grow like weeds. But friends, as many people there are who have been victims of the false advertising about the Christian life that is out there, here's what we know.

It's not because of anything that Jesus said. Jesus was honest. Jesus didn't do switch and bait on people. We read the word of God, the gospels in particular, and Jesus was plain speaking and he was very clear about what it means to follow him.

[8 : 08] Jesus taught plainly that to follow him requires a denial of self and a taking up of our cross, which is symbolic of death. Jesus told us, he said, those who follow me will be hated.

They will be reviled. They will be persecuted in this world. And he said to his disciples, in this world you will have tribulation. Be of good cheer.

I will become the world. Friends, that's frank disclosure. And therefore, trials should not surprise us.

But sadly, even for those of us who have not fallen prey to false advertising about the Christian life, even for us sometimes, we're surprised by trials.

Trials come our way and we sometimes question God and we wonder about his love for us. We wonder if he's punishing us for something we did some time ago. And we have all these ideas that are going through our minds that really indicate that we're being surprised by the trials that we face.

- [9 : 23] It's kind of like we hear these things that Jesus says, but we somehow think that they're just not going to come to us. But one of the main reasons that we are sometimes surprised by trials is that we forget what Scripture says about our trials and we forget to see them the way Scripture calls us to see them.

And this morning, this short text that we are going to consider goes a long way in helping us to see our trials biblically. So let us attentively hear God's word this morning through the inspired words of James.

It's insightful that James would write a letter like he has written covering a wide variety of topics to a diverse group of people who were scattered in different geographical areas.

And he addresses them on these topics knowing that these are relevant to all of them. The very first one, he addresses his trials. And James seems to be saying, I know that you are going through trials.

I know it. Don't know the trial, but I know that you are faced with trials. Trials were relevant to them and friends, trials are relevant to us.

- [10 : 57] But we should not think that James is addressing trials in a vacuum. He is not addressing trials as something isolated. But James is addressing trials in a very prominent way in this letter.

And we see that because he doesn't just address it in these opening verses, he comes back to it again and again. Indeed, the way James ends this letter, it's the same way he begins the letter.

He ends the letter talking about how we need to be patient in trials, how we need to consider the prophets, how we need to consider Job, for example.

And he's exhorting us in the conclusion of this letter as to how we as believers are to see and walk through trials. So what James is saying here is not isolated and indeed, it is integrated in this letter, it is integrated in the Christian life.

So rather than talking about trials in a vacuum, what James is doing is he is talking about it broadly. And here's the overall point that I believe that James is making in these opening verses and indeed, as he talks about trials throughout this letter.

- [12 : 17] James wants us to see that God uses life's trials to strengthen our faith and fuel our maturity.

That's why James wants us to see trials in a biblical way, through biblical lenses. He wants us to see that they are a part of life and God has a plan and he designs them and uses them to strengthen our faith and to fuel our maturity.

And the reason is the Christian life is about maturing. It's about growing up. It is about growing up into Christ. It is about moving from milk and moving to solid food.

It is maturing. And what James says to us at the very opening of this letter is trials are a tool that God uses to test our faith and to bring us to maturity.

you know, if you think about what James is saying, you have to almost see James in these three verses and as he addresses trials throughout this letter as a doctor who is, who recognizes that you need the medical help and the hard medical advice or procedure that he is going to give to you.

- [13 : 56] And he's going to be faithful to ensure that he tells you the truth. Imagine going to a doctor and you have cancer and the doctor pats you in the back and says, hey, think happy thoughts.

Everything is going to be okay. That's not a faithful doctor. James is a faithful spiritual doctor and so he is right at the beginning bringing this issue of trials to us and he wants us to see them in a biblical way so that we can embrace them in our lives.

So in our remaining time, I want to consider how James does this and I'm going to do it under two headings for those who are taking notes and the first one is trials and faith. Trials and faith.

In verse 2, James tells us to do something that does not come naturally to any one of us. If any of us, when trials come your way, you start to jump up and down and say, I am so happy that I have this problem or this trial or this difficulty, I think we all know that you're not well.

It's a sign of not being well. It's a sign of being mentally off. Yet James calls us and he tells us that when we meet with trials of various kinds, we have to count them all joy, count them as joy.

[15 : 28] And he does so, he knows that that is not the natural response. As a matter of fact, that's why he says, count it all joy.

Because it is not joy. But notice that James, you know, you may think that, well, James is talking about flat tires and he's talking about irritable people in your life and those kinds of mundane difficulties that we face that we are frustrated by.

But notice what he says in verse 2. He says, count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.

And this word for various, it's a wide word for diversity. James is saying, pick the trial, pick whatever it is, however severe, however small.

All of it. He's not exempting any of it. And I'm aware this morning that some of us, we walk through hard things. Walk through hard things.

[16 : 41] I was saying to a couple recently, we don't, we don't choose the script for our roles in life.

We don't, we don't choose the script for the road that we walk in life. None of us would choose the hard things. And yet, there's a sovereign God who gives us that script and calls us to walk in that role in life.

Some of it is hard. I've been hearing just recently some of the hard circumstances, trying circumstances that some people are walking through that are altering their lives in very significant ways.

When James says various trials, he has all those in mind. Nothing is exempt. And he says, no matter what the trial is, count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet them.

Now, why does James say this to us? Why is it that he say, why is it that he says to us, and really, to his original audience first and then, to us by extension, count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet the trials of various kinds?

[18 : 02] Well, the answer is in verse 3. He says, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. Now, James evidently knew his audience.

He would have, no doubt, known some of them. They were dispersed from the persecution. He was the pastor at the church in Jerusalem.

And James seems to know that they had gone through some trials before, and James seems to know that they had the experience of the benefit of trials.

And so, he seems to be saying to them, you know this, for you know. He says, you can count these things as all joy, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

James is saying, you've already experienced this. So, if they've experienced it, why is he telling them to do it? I think the reason he's telling them to do it is, though we've had the experience, when we are in the midst of trials, we tend to forget.

[19 : 10] We tend to forget how beneficial hard things can be in our lives when we recognize God in the midst of them, and we draw near to God as we walk through them.

And so, James reminds them, as they are in the heat of trials, when they can forget it, he says, you know. When James talks about the testing of our faith, there's actually a picture that he has in mind.

In the original language, the word that James used for testing is not a common word in Scripture. The word is actually only found one other place in the New Testament in 1 Peter 1, verse 7.

And then it's mentioned two other times in Scripture, in the Greek translation of the Scripture, the Septuagint. The Old Testament Scriptures were translated into Greek in this book called the Septuagint.

It's found in two places. The first one is in Psalm 11, verse 7, and the second in Proverbs 27, 21. And in each case, it refers to the process for refining precious metals like silver and gold.

[20 : 35] And James' original audience would have known this. They would have understood what he meant by testing, the testing of your faith, because the word that he would have used, they would have associated it with purifying metals.

And the way it would work is the refiner would take this unrefined gold, and he would mix it with a solvent, and he would add heat to it.

And as he did that, the metal was turned to liquid, and then all the impurities would flow to the top. The dross, they call it, would flow to the top, and then he would use this blowpipe, and he would blow the impurities off with the metal below it.

It was a process that required a lot of skill, and a lot of patience, because you needed enough skill not to allow the fire to get too hot, and then you needed enough patience to allow the metal to be exposed to the fire long enough to get the impurities up.

And so there was this balancing act that needed to happen. And the way the refiner would know and it's a process. It's so, we're told, it was so intense that the refiner wouldn't stand, he would sit so he could really observe.

[21 : 59] And the way that the refiner would know that the gold or the silver had been purified was when he could see his reflection in the pure gold and the dross and everything else has been removed.

and that's a beautiful picture that James is talking about when he says that the testing of our faith, the trying of our faith, the testing to see that our faith is genuine, the testing to see that our faith is not spurious, that it's real.

And the reality is that just like that refining process, all of us are in the crucible of life. And we meet with trials and difficulties, and those are like the solvents and the heat in the natural process.

And mixed together, working in our lives, God uses them to conform us more to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He uses them to purify our faith, that our faith in him would grow, that our faith in him would be tested and tried, and we would come out trusting him more, believing him more than we did when we walked through the trials.

[23 : 25] It's not designed to destroy us, although sometimes we feel like we will be destroyed. And the Lord will not allow that fire or that trial to be on our lives for a second longer than it needs to be.

He loves us that much, and he is that wise to know the very extent to which that trial needs to go.

He controls every single aspect of it. I remember a number of years ago, I heard a well-known minister who I still to this day dearly love.

He shared a testimony about how some friends had falsely accused him to the IRS that he was not complying with the tax rules. And that resulted in an investigation.

They did a tax audit. He said it lasted for two years. His whole ministry is on the line. I mean, there are all kinds of implications of fines, going to prison, all sorts of things.

[24 : 40] And he just talked about the ordeal of walking through this two-year trial. And when he came out of it, he said this, he said, when he came out of it, he said, I didn't want a second more of it.

It was that bad. he said, but you know what? He said, what it produced in me, as I drew near to God, I wouldn't trade for a million dollars.

And I think many of us have had those kinds of experiences. Where the trial itself was hard, but when we look back on it, we see how God worked in our lives. And not just in a vacuum, how God worked in our lives as we prayed, as we were driven to our knees, as we were driven to desperation, as we opened his word.

And then, because of that, he worked in our lives. It's interesting that when you look at some of the Bibles that they put in hotels, for example, they have all of these different areas, if you're worried or if you need, they build it around a lot of the crisis of life, because the truth is, for a lot of people, it is in those times of desperation when they run to open a Bible.

But you know, the same is true for us a lot of times as well. Some of the times that we have walked closest to God have been in the midst of our trials. Some of the times that we prayed most have been when they drove us to our knees.

[26 : 23] and they do a work in us. I think the song that Andrew Crouch wrote, the song, Through It All, it really captures well the reason that trials and the testing of our faith produces this steadfastness, this trust in the Lord that we wouldn't have otherwise.

He wrote, Through It All, Through It All, I've learned to trust in Jesus. I've learned to trust in God. Through It All, Through It All, I've learned to depend upon His work.

And friends, what better gift that we could have that a trial that we have walked through, a hard situation, a hard circumstance, that it produces that kind of good in our lives, bringing us nearer to God, helping us to trust the Lord more, helping us that in the future when we face some other trial, we could reflect back on that faithful God who brought us out of those other trials.

And we are able to trust Him in the midst of that trial. But again, it's not automatic. perfect. And James will help us to see that it's not automatic because James is going to go on.

Next, we will hear a sermon where he says, cry out to God for wisdom in the midst of your trials. Really, him say, you need to understand temptation in the following week of the sermon.

[28 : 04] You need to understand temptation and you need to understand God that He only gives good and perfect gifts. And then the following week, He's going to call us to be doers of the word and not hearers only.

And so James is not saying to us that, listen, when trials come, they will automatically purify your faith and they will automatically produce some good in you. No. It is only to the extent that we are drawing near to God in the midst of it.

The ESV translators translated this word out of the original to be steadfast or steadfastness, but the word is translated as patience in the King James Version, as perseverance in the NIV, and as endurance in the NASV.

And all these words, I think, communicate to us this important truth that the Christian life is a marathon. It's not a sprint. Not a sprint.

But there are many people who are hearing, people talk to them, and it's just about a sprint. Just have faith for this or have faith for that.

[29 : 21] No, it's a marathon. It's not. A sprint is not a shine for a day kind of life. It is to endure through the dark clouds and endure through the rain and endure through the storms of life.

faith. And God designs all of them for our good. They put heat to our faith, and they test the metal of our faith, and the result is that we persevere, produces perseverance in us.

But that's the relationship between trials and faith. Trials test our faith and produces perseverance. perseverance. The second, and finally, and briefly, let's consider the relationship between trials and maturity.

In verse 4, James writes, And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James is telling us that we need to allow the trial to produce in us the steadfastness that it is divinely designed to produce.

It's like a doctor who gives a prescription, he says, listen, you need to take all of this. You skip a day, continue taking it until you're finished. James says, steadfastness, we need to let steadfastness have its full effect so that we may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

[31 : 06] But how many of you know that our natural tendency when we are in trials is to try to find a shortcut, try to see, man, how could I get out of this situation? And it doesn't mean, it doesn't mean that we don't do sensible things in the midst of our trials.

It doesn't mean that at all. If you're unemployed, as hard as that is, seek employment. And especially in an economy like this, where it's probably not going to be the first application you send out or the first business you call on, you're walking through that trial of being unemployed and all the things that it brings, but yes, continue to be diligent in doing that.

But let's steadfastness, have its full effect. I mean, this would be a strange example, but one way of, one illustration of how someone could try to get from under the trial of unemployment is to go and rob a bank or steal or do something crazy.

That's jumping over the fence. That's jumping out the window and saying, man, I'm out of here. I've had enough of this. One of the examples that comes to mind is this story of Elimelech in the book of Ruth and how when there was a famine in the land, he decided, I'm out of here.

I'm going to go to Moab. And the trials and the difficulties that that bad decision brought, he didn't stay. Enjoying the trial because there was a time later when the word was, God had been merciful to his people and he gave them bread.

[32 : 45] God, help me to endure this trial.

Help me to allow this to have the divinely intended effect that it is supposed to produce in my life. And one of the things we can think about, and this is not original with me, I heard John Piper wrote a book, Don't Waste Your Cancer, and we can consider the same thing.

Let's not waste our trials. Less than just goes through the hardness of trials and we come out without the effect of steadfastness in our lives.

Let's not come out of trials not trusting the Lord more, not more convinced that he is a faithful God. God. James says when we do that we will be perfect and complete lacking in nothing.

What does he mean by that? He doesn't mean moral perfection, because how many of you know if that were true we would all be morally perfect for the trials we've been through.

[34 : 01] Instead he means spiritual maturity. And not lacking in anything I believe could be understood to me and that we would not be lacking in anything that that trial is designed to produce in us in terms of steadfastness.

And so here James has in mind when we in the heat of the trial want to throw in the towel and say, you know, I've just had enough of it. This week I was reading in my devotional reading and going back through using the table talk read through the Bible program.

And this week reading through Genesis, I read again the story of Abraham. How when he was 75 years old the Lord promised him he was going to have a son.

And you know the story. Abraham was old and Sarah not only was old but she could not have children. and after they had lived in the land of Canaan for 10 years, she had this brilliant idea.

She says, it doesn't seem like I are going to get pregnant so why don't you go into my slave and have a child. It's very interesting. When you study in the Old Testament in particular, how God uses this number 10, 10 is the number of divine testing.

[35 : 32] It's why we have 10 commandments. It's when Jacob said to Laban, he said, you changed my salary 10 times. He didn't change it 10 times, but he said, you tested me to the limit when you kept moving the goalposts with my compensation.

After 10 years, they got tired and they resorted to this other means of trying to have a child. And so when Abraham was 86, Ishmael was born, he had this child.

But it wasn't the promise. It wasn't who God promised him would be his heir. And then when Abraham was 99 years old, God appeared to him again and said, you're going to have a child out of your own loins.

And a year later, sure enough, Sarah had Isaac. Abraham was 100 years old. And then about 14 to 15 years later, when Isaac would have been around 14 or 15, the Lord spoke to Abraham and said to him, I want you to take your son.

These are the words. Take your son, your only son, the son you love. I want you to go to the land of Moriah and offer him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, I will show you.

[36 : 53] scripture says Abraham got up early, he saddled his donkey, he put the wood on the donkey, and they journeyed to the land of Moriah.

And again, very insightfully, we're told that it was three days later that they arrived. Abraham took the wood, put it on the altar, and scripture says he bound Isaac, tied him up.

And so you can imagine, Isaac already asked him, Daddy, I don't see the lamb for the sacrifice, and he says God is going to provide. And so here it is, his father is tying him up now, lays him on the altar, here's the fire he has the knife, and he is going to slay him, and the angel says no, don't do it.

And as I was studying this for this sermon, I just thought, I saw beauty in that.

I saw beauty in that, that here is Abraham who failed the test when God gave him a promise. God says I'm going to give you a son, and after 10 years of it not happening, he just says, I'm done with that.

[38 : 22] And he tries to make his own way. And we see God being merciful to this man who failed the test, and years later calls him to take this son, this son he loves, and sacrifice him on the altar.

Abraham, and Abraham, after having failed and no doubt learned lessons from failing, that God was merciful and God was faithful, and even when he was unfaithful and he and Sarah were unfaithful, God remained faithful and still performed his promise.

When it came time now for him to offer his son, you would have thought that he would have held back, but he was going to slaughter his son.

And the beautiful pictures about the gospel in there, because for three days, Isaac was dead. He was as good as dead.

Abraham left home. He was determined to obey God. Isaac was dead from the moment God said, offer him. But three days later, God gave him.

[39 : 33] his son. And I think it's a beautiful picture for us, all of us. There's not one of us this morning who has successfully navigated every single trial that's come our way.

We have complained. We've done like Abraham and Sarah. We found our own way. We did our own thing. And we see in the mercy of God that that doesn't have to be the end of it.

indeed, with the merciful God, that's not the end of it. There will be other opportunities that we can learn from those failures where we can grow to trust in God, trust in his goodness, just as Abraham did.

God, I was willing to offer his son. What kind of the Lord, to allow him to see that. God knew what he was going to do. God didn't do that for him to know.

God did that for Abraham to see. And then his face was put to the test the second time about that same son.

[40 : 43] This son that he desired so much that initially he disobeyed God and ran around trying to get what he so desired. And now that he had it, he was willing to give it.

And he succeeded in the test the second time. And that's you this morning. And maybe it's a present situation that you're not navigating so well.

I want to say to you, God is merciful. God is patient. He knows our frame. He knows that we have dust. And he will give further opportunities to test your faith that it may be proven to be the real and genuine article.

Brothers and sisters, we should be pursuing maturity in Christ to grow up in him in all things. And the testing of our faith is one of the means by which God uses trials to bring steadfastness in our lives and to bring us to spiritual maturity.

I have a front row seat in the lives of many of you and I know some of the trials that you walk through. I want to say to you, God knows better.

[42 : 05] He knows thoughts and burdens and desires that you carry that I would never know. And he knows how hot that trial needs to be and what it can't be because he knows you're free and he's watching over your circumstance.

And it would be hard, but as James says, count it all joy because you know that it's designed to purify your faith is designed to fuel your growth in the Lord.

James could come across as a hard person when he gives this kind of advice to those in the throes of trials, but he is not. James is kind and James is faithful.

James is the kind of friend that we all need. He's the kind of friend who will speak the beneficial truth, sometimes the truth we don't want to hear in the moment, but the truth that we need so much.

The trials are designed to bring us to spiritual maturity. And so brothers and sisters, count it all joy when you meet with trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness and that steadfastness habits fully found so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

[43 : 44] Let's pray. Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you that we can say amen because we have walked with you long enough to know that you waste no trial that comes our way.

you use it. You use it to test our faith, to purify our faith in you, to cause us to be steadfast as we continue in our service unto you.

Renew this knowledge in all of our hearts, especially for those who are walking through trials in a very acute and real way this morning. Lord, do your work we pray.

In Christ's name, amen. Amen.