

View Trials Biblically

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[0 : 00] This morning's reading is taken from Psalm 46 verses 1-11.!

And it's titled, God is Our Fortress. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah. There is a river whose stream makes glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her.

She shall not be moved. God will help her when morning dawns. The nations rage, the kingdoms tartar. He utters his voice, the earth melts.

[1 : 33] The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah. Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth.

He makes wars cease to the end of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters despair. He burns the chariots with fire. Be still.

And know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth.

The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah. And then James chapter 1, verses 2 through 8.

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

[2 : 44] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

But let him ask in faith with no doubting. For the one who doubts is like the wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord. He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Thank you very much, Faye. We're still very early into the new year, and I think it's fair to say that we're still entering 2024.

[4 : 00] And while none of us knows what this year has in store for us, I think one of the things that we can all be sure of is that trials and troubles will be part of our experience in 2024.

Indeed, some of us came into 2024 with trials. Trials that we were walking through prior to the year coming in.

And the trials that we face are varied. In some cases, people are the source of our trials. People we live with.

Perhaps people we work with. Sometimes our trials are just from circumstances. Maybe it's an illness.

Maybe it is financial difficulties. And sometimes we can actually have multiple trials at the same time, and extended trials.

[5 : 15] And sometimes our trials can seem unbearable. And that's not a unique experience to us. You read the Psalms, and you find people who endured trials to the extent that at certain points, they wondered if God was even aware of them.

They questioned God and his love and his care. And so we're no different in that regard. But the good news is that while our trials are oftentimes hard, God intends them for good.

And not only does he intend them for good, God uses them for good. I remember an old pastor from Trinidad who was a blessing in my life.

He said something to me that I didn't catch the first time he said it. He said, he said, the garbage truck never pulls up to God's workshop.

He says, God uses everything. He wastes nothing. He uses everything. And brothers and sisters, God uses our trials for our good.

[6 : 41] Not to feel good, but for our real good. And this is the truth, I pray, that we're able to see this morning, that whatever trials we're facing or whatever trials will come our way in the coming days, God intends them and will use them for our good.

before we look at God's word, let's take a moment to pray. Heavenly Father, we are so grateful this morning that you are God and beside you there is no other and that you are an unchanging God and you are good and wise and perfect in all of your ways.

thank you, Lord, that you use trials for our good and I pray in this moment that you would convict all of our hearts of this truth. I especially pray, Lord, for those who may be feeling that their trials are for no good purpose that they can see.

Those who may be feeling that their trials are unbearable. Father, would you give the divine perspective that only you can give.

Lord, whether we are in the midst of trials now or we will face trials in the days to come, would you care for us and speak to us in the ways that you know that we need to hear from you.

[8 : 15] We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Although I'm using two scriptures this morning, the sermon is structured around the second passage, the passage from James chapter 1 verses 2 to 8.

And I think this passage asks three important questions and answers three important questions about trials.

And these three questions are number one, how should we respond to trials? Number two, how should we assess trials?

And number three, how do we endure trials? So first, let's consider how we respond to trials.

How should we respond to trials? Sadly, the reflexive response of many who profess to know Christ today is to attribute their trials and their troubles to Satan or to some sin that they have committed.

[9 : 24] And because they've been falsely taught that the Christian life can be trouble-free, if you just have enough faith, it'll be a life of blessing and prosperity.

They believe that something must be wrong. either the devil is behind it or I committed some sin. And they respond to trials and difficulties by rebuking the devil, binding the devil, and doing all manner of bizarre and biblical things.

That's not how Scripture calls us to respond to trials. trials. Look again at what James says in verse 2. This is how we should respond to trials.

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds. James says when we meet trials, we should count or consider our trials as joy.

The NIV says we should count our trials as pure joy. Now right away we should see that James is not calling us to live in denial.

[10 : 39] He's not calling us to deny our troubles and to pretend they don't exist. He's not calling us if we are ill and someone say how you're doing, say I'm fantastic and I'm doing well and I'm healthy.

No, you're ill. James is not calling us to denial. James knows that trials are hard. He knows that trials are anything but joy and so he says to us, you are to count it as joy.

You are to consider it as joy when you meet with these trials. He's calling us to adopt a certain attitude towards our trials and he says we should view them as pure joy.

So why does James call us to count our trials as pure joy? And how can we possibly count pain and suffering as pure joy?

Well, first we need to remember that James was not writing to us originally. He was writing to a particular audience of people. We see them referred to in verse 1.

[11 : 57] He was writing to Jews who were in dispersion, Jews who had been dispersed from their homeland and who were living in foreign lands and living in great difficulty, who were facing trials.

And James knew them generally and one of the things he knew was that they were mature believers and they were no stranger to trials.

That's why he was able to draw on that and he was able to say to them in verse 3. He says to them, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

James says, you know this. He wasn't writing to novices. He wasn't writing to newly converted Christians who were experiencing the Christian life in early stages and who may have been filled with wrong ideas about it.

He's writing to seasoned believers who have been following Christ and he says to them, you are to count it all joy because you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

[13:16] Notice in verse 3 that James explains what trials are actually doing when they come our way. He says they are testing our faith.

That's what he says. For you know that the testing of your faith produces trials. He's referring to the trials and he says you know the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

Exactly what does James mean by the testing of your faith? the original word that he used for testing is rarely used in scripture.

And the New Testament is found in one other place in 1 Peter 1.7 where Peter talks about the tested genuineness of our faith. And that is mentioned two other times in the Old Testament in the Septuagint which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament scriptures.

It's found in two places. In Psalm 11 verse 9 and in Proverbs 27 21. And in both of these Old Testament references the testing is referencing the refining process for precious metals like gold and silver.

[14:36] And James original audience would have known this. They would have understood the word testing the same way we would understand if somebody says filter or filtration.

We understand that particular process. James used the word that they understood and they associated with the refining of silver and gold.

The refiner process they would have known would take the unrefined silver or gold and he would mix it with a solvent and then he would add heat to it until the metal turned to liquid.

And then all the impurities which they called the dross would float to the top and then the refiner would use a blowpipe and he would blow all the impurities off of the surface.

And this was something that this was a profession. It required a lot of skill. It required a lot of patience. During the refining process the refiner would actually sit down.

[15:42] It took a while. And he fixed his eyes on the precious metal. And he needed to be skillful enough not to allow too much heat but he needed to be patient enough not to allow too little heat.

He needed to allow enough heat to separate the impurities. So he needed to balance those two skills. And in those days the way the refiner knew that the gold or silver had been refined was he was able to see his reflection in the refined metal.

That's when he knew that he could begin to withdraw the heat because the refining process had been completed.

And brothers and sisters that process that ancient process of refining precious metal is very much like what happens when our faith is tested.

When he goes through trials. And that is what is happening. Our faith if we belong to Jesus Christ our faith is being tested. If you don't belong to Jesus Christ well you're just going through a hard time.

[16:59] But if you're going through Jesus Christ if you belong to Jesus Christ you're not just going through a hard time. Your faith in Jesus Christ is being refined.

In Malachi 3 verses 2 to 3 it says the Lord shall sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver and he shall purify the sons of Levi.

And so really what happens is we are all in the crucible of life and the various difficulties that we meet are like the solvents and the heat that God sovereignly uses to refine us and to remove the dross from us.

Like the ancient refiner he fixes his eyes on us as we go through life's trials and we go through life's tests and he's taking care to ensure that he only leaves us in the trials as long as he needs to and until he's able to see his image more reflected in and through our lives.

He will not destroy us in the process even though sometimes it may feel like we're being destroyed. He's refining us not destroying us.

[18:25] And so the bottom line is that we can count our fiery trials as pure joy because we know that when we meet trials in this life our faith is being tested and our faith is being refined.

And we know that our faith being tested will produce perseverance, will produce steadfastness, it will produce a patient endurance, it will produce the ability to press on faithfully serving the Lord in

the midst of our trials, in the midst of our troubles.

That's what James is saying to his original audience and what he's saying to us by extension. He's saying to us, those of us who have been serving the Lord for any length of time, you know from past experience, you know from past experience what your trials produce.

They produce the good fruit in your life of steadfastly walking with the Lord, pressing on in the midst of the trials, in the midst of the difficulty.

This is why James says you can count the trial itself as pure joy because you know what it produces. You know what is on the other side of it. I think most of us, if not all of us this morning who know Christ, can testify to this.

[19 : 51] We can testify with James' original audience that this experience of having our faith tested produces this spiritual stamina, this ability to press on in the midst of adversity.

reality. And if you're here this morning and you're serving the Lord and you have not yet come to experience this, and maybe you've been serving the Lord a long period of time and you're saying, well, I really don't know about that.

I just encourage you to take very seriously the words of this passage. These words are true. But that's in all that James says to us.

He says something else to us in verse 4. Notice what he says in verse 4. And let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete lacking in nothing.

Now, what is James saying in this verse? I believe he's saying trials are hard, but they produce good fruit in you, this fruit of spiritual stamina, the ability to press on in serving the Lord.

[21 : 09] So, allow the spiritual stamina that the trial brings, that the trial produces to be fully worked out in your life to help you to grow in spiritual maturity.

In short, I think what James is saying is don't shortcut the intended result of the trial. Let it have its full effect in your life. Stay in it.

And you won't lack anything that God intends the trial to produce. And if we do, the promise of verse four is that we will be mature and not deficient believers in Christ.

For those of us who are currently walking through trials, how are you responding? How are you viewing your trials? Are you counting them as pure joy because you know the fruit that they will in the end produce?

Or are you resenting them? Or even resenting God? Who sovereignly brought the trials your way?

[22 : 17] And this is one of the important truths that we must remember about trials. We must remember that ultimately all of our trials, whatever the source of them, whatever the form of them, ultimately they are from the sovereign Lord who brought them our way.

And brothers and sisters, if you have not settled this issue of the sovereignty of God in all things, I encourage you by the grace of God to settle it. Read God's word, pray about it, talk to brothers and sisters, but settle this issue.

God is sovereign in all things. There's no area of life, no aspect of life that is exempt from his sovereignty. And all that comes our way comes under his sovereign hand, including our trials, including the hardest trials that come to us.

There may be a lot of things about our trials that we don't know, but there's one thing that we can know, it is ultimately from a sovereign God, a sovereign God who is good, a sovereign God who is wise, a sovereign God who is perfect in all of his ways.

this was Job's perspective. Job faced multiple severe and sudden trials.

[23 : 42] And with his robe torn and his head shaved, he fell on the ground and he worshiped God and said, the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. Job didn't say the Lord gave and Satan took away. He said, the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. And those of us who know the story, we know that Satan was the means by which the calamities and trials that Job faced came his way.

But ultimately it was from the sovereign Lord who brought those trials Job's way. Sarah Grove sings a beautiful song and many of us know it.

We sing it here sometimes at church. It's a song he's always been faithful. And the second verse of that song bears out the truth that James is communicating in these verses.

[24 : 46] Here's what the second verse says. I can't remember a trial or a pain he didn't recycle to bring me gain.

I can't remember one single regret in serving God only and trusting his hand. All I have need of his hand will provide.

He's always been faithful to me. Brothers and sisters, this is the true testimony of all those who have walked with the Lord.

And all those who have sought to view trials in this way, counting them as pure joy, submitting to the trial under God's sovereign hand, and God takes those hard trials, he recycles them to bring us gain, to bring us good.

I can certainly testify to that for my 48 years of serving the Lord. God, I can't remember a single time that God did not take my trials and recycle them for my gain.

[25 : 59] I can't remember a single regret. And I literally pondered this as I prepared this sermon. He's always been faithful to me. God uses them for our good.

God uses them all. He uses them for our good. And the good that God uses them for is enduring good. Not a thing of good.

Not something he gives us some good thing that perishes or we lose it in some period of time. No, it's the good that he builds in us, that he forms in us, that he shapes in us, the character, the love for God, the commitment, the perseverance in the face of trials.

God works that good in us where we can, like Job, in the midst of loss, say, God, you have given, God, you have taken away.

And Job did that and he didn't understand a lot of things that were going on and sometimes we are called to do that even when we don't understand. But we know that God is the sovereign Lord in the midst of all of our trials.

[27 : 13] Brothers and sisters, Job is, sorry, James is not calling us just to have a positive view of life. He's not calling us to think happy thoughts and just view our trials in a positive way.

No, he's calling us to trust God with our trials and to trust God in our trials, knowing that God is at work in them for our good. This brings me to the second question.

How should we assess our trials? James tells us we should assess our trials with wisdom. And the wisdom that James has in view is God's wisdom.

We need God's wisdom, not worldly wisdom, to assess our trials. And this word is filled with guidance for us that gives us wisdom about how to navigate trials.

But sometimes we face some specific trials that we can't go to a particular verse of scripture and it tells us what to do. We face those specific trials and we need to go to God in prayer.

[28 : 20] And he has ordained it that way. So James writes in verse 5, if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God. Let him pray. Let him ask God who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

This is how we are to assess our trials. We are to assess our trials with God's wisdom. We must not lean on our own understanding. We must not seek ungodly counsel.

We need God's help. We need God's wisdom to assess our trials, to see them as we should, and to walk through them as we should. And this is the only way we can be faithful in our trials.

To continue to respond to our trials by counting them as pure joy, to continue to press on looking to God and trusting him, to use our trials to mature us as believers, we need God's wisdom.

And James reminds us of God's disposition. What is his disposition towards us when we pray for wisdom in the midst of our trial? he tells us. He says God gives wisdom generously and he does it without finding fault or without nitpicking.

[29 : 36] I think we all know what nitpicking is like. We have major things that somebody would overlook, things that are commendable, and then they nitpick at something that just isn't right over on the side here.

He says God doesn't do that with us. Because how many of you know if God was going to be nitpicky with us, he could find a lot to nitpick at. James says he will not reproach you.

He will not be nitpicking with you. He won't be finding fault with you. Now James says more about how we should pray in verses 6 to 8.

But these verses are some of the most misinterpreted verses in scripture. James 6 to 8 many people misinterpreted because they lifted out of its context and they do more than lift they uprooted out of its context and use it to say that unless you have strong unwavering faith when you pray to God you won't get anything from God unless you have this strong unwavering faith and lead some people to have faith in faith rather than have faith in God and not only is this a false interpretation

but it's not true of our own experience how many of you know that if strong unwavering faith was the prerequisite to get God to answer our prayers most of our prayers if not all of our prayers would not be answered

I certainly know that's the case for me because oftentimes I'm like the man in Mark 9 the man in Mark 9 had a son who was possessed by a demon and this demon withdrew him in the fire he took his son to the disciples they could not cast the demon out and finally he brought his son to Jesus and he said to Jesus he said if you can do anything please help us and Jesus said if I can do anything all things are possible for the one who believes and the man said Lord I believe but help my unbelief and this is a precious scripture to me because I find sometimes I'm like that man I believe but I struggle with unbelief and

[32 : 25] I'm grateful that Jesus didn't say okay go away until you have all belief and you don't have any unbelief that you're wrestling with no Jesus cast the demon out and Jesus restored that man's son to him in the midst of his unbelief in the midst of his struggling to really believe that Jesus whom he evidently had seen perform miracles he still struggled would he do it for me would he do it for my son and Jesus did it for him and brothers and sisters when we pray to God and we struggle with unbelief in our prayers our heavenly father doesn't reject us he doesn't find fault with us he knows our frame he knows we are dust he knows that better than we do and the truth is that many times in our trials our faith is weak and our souls about low even as we're pressing on our faith is weak we're looking to the

Lord and seeking to obey his word what it says about trials to consider it pure joy when we actually feel pure pain that's not the one that James is saying will be rejected in this passage that's not the one not the one who is sincerely coming to God through all the difficulties of the trials and all the doubts of the trials but seeking God concerning those trials!

James is talking about a different kind of person in verses 6 to 8 and to understand that we have to take what he says in verses 6 to 8 in the full context of what he says in verses 2 to 8 but especially verses 5 to 8 in verses 5 to 8 James is simply calling us to pray to God for wisdom to assess and understand our trials that he referred to in verses 3 and 4 it is wrong to take this and apply at the prayer generally that's what James is talking about the doubting and the double mindedness that James seems to be referring to is concerning the person who is not settled in their response to their trials and is back and forth on how they are viewing their trials and how they are responding and though I must confess that I do have limitations in fully explaining what

James clearly is meaning in context here what we know is that there's something objectionable about this person towards the Lord this double mindedness this wavering ness and that's what God is finding fault with and he says that kind of person is not going to receive anything from the Lord he's not talking about the one who is just just weak and low and sincerely seeking to serve the Lord and we know this because this is a witness of scripture James is not going to be contradicting the rest of scripture that the Lord receives us in our weaknesses and he draws near to us when we are low this is an objectionable person who is double mindedness and it actually almost borders with a person who is not even sure they are saved or not someone who is really borderline just on the edge of things double mindedness on the fence about things says that person shouldn't think that they're going to receive anything from the

Lord brothers and sisters the Lord knows the difference the Lord knows the difference of the weak pitiful soul that has bowed low that's crying out to him for wisdom in how to navigate the trials he knows that one he's not going to nitpick with us but this is a different kind of person that James has in view here God's wisdom helps us to count our trials as pure joy based on the trials ability to test our faith and to cause us to steadfastly follow the Lord in our trials and to be mature as a result of them for the third and final question and more briefly how do we endure our trials how do we endure our trials is it a matter of the strong surviving is it a matter where

[37 : 42] God just kind of sits and rubs his hands as he watches us and sees how his children do and the various trials that come their way it's none of that I believe this passage calls us to endure our trials with an expectant hope the hope that no matter what the trial is no matter how hard the trial is if we respond to the trial as we should as we count it pure joy as we press on in the trial trusting God receiving his wisdom God will use it for our good it will work for our good we will grow in spiritual stamina we will grow in spiritual maturity maturity and thus we can endure the trial by having this expectant hope of this fruit of spiritual stamina and spiritual maturity being formed in us

James points to this expectant hope in verse four where he says we will grow in spiritual stamina and maturity glory and brothers and sisters the ultimate reason that we are able to endure our trials the ultimate reason is because the Lord is with his people in their trials he's with us he's with us in our trials and this is the message of Psalm 46 Psalm 46 is written to God's people as they walk through their trials and let's hear again the first three verses God is our refuge and strength a very present help in trouble therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea though its waters roar and foam though the mountains tremble at its swelling as people say as though all hell breaks loose

God is a very present help in the time of trouble but in addition to telling us that God is a present help in the time of trouble three times in Psalm 46 we are reminded that God is in the midst of his people in their trials in verse five it says God is in the midst of her she will not be moved in verse seven says the Lord of hosts is with us the God of Jacob is our fortress and then in verse 11 again it says the Lord of hosts is with us the God of Jacob is our fortress and brothers and sisters this is how we endure our trials by remembering that we are not alone but remembering that our God is with us remember Jesus said he said it's expedient that I go away so if I go away then the spirit will come the spirit of God is with us in all of our trials and in our trials we are called to do what the psalmist does in verse 10 we are called to be still and that doesn't mean not doing anything that doesn't mean an absence of activity no we do what we ought to do need to do a call to do but there's a stillness in our souls there's a rest in our souls where we know that

God is God and that he will be exalted among the nations and that he will be exalted in the earth and indeed he will be exalted in our trials and brothers and sisters we should remember this when we go through life's fiery trials there's one trial that we are all spared from it's a trial that we deserve to endure but it's a trial that we have been spared from and that trial is on the day when God's wrath will be poured out upon the ungodly and it will not be poured out upon us because it was poured out on Christ for us when he hung on the cross and that is the most unimaginable trial that any human being can ever expect to face and those of us who have trusted in

Jesus Christ will never know that trial and all the trials that we face here on this earth the apostle Paul framed it rightly when he said they are nothing but light and momentary affliction that are working for us a more eternal weight of glory so brothers and sisters let us endure life's trials whatever 2024 brings to us whatever you're walking through right now whatever we're walking through right now let us by God's grace have this attitude towards our trials yes they're painful let's count them as joy because we know what they're going to produce in the end in us and let us remember that our trials are not forever they will not last forever forever the eternity that God has for us with himself that's forever but our trials are only tied to this earth we will leave them behind one way or the other whether in death or in the Lord's coming and let us remember our God is with us he'll never leave us never forsake us he will be with us to the very end let's pray

[44 : 10] Father God I pray that you would speak to all of our hearts Lord including those of us who have come to know that the testing of our faith works patience and works spiritual stamina but speak to our hearts but Lord especially to those who are in trials and are having a hard time viewing them in that way God open their eyes help them to recognize that the trials come from your sovereign hand and you are intending to do good to them through those trials trials would you help us Lord to view all of our trials through biblical lens we pray this in

Jesus name amen amen who