

Dealing with Trials

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- [0:00] Well, good morning. We are beginning to walk through the book of James. So if you have a Bible, turn with me to James chapter 1. Last week, Pastor Nick introduced us to the person of James, one of the brothers of Jesus, and the leader of the church in Jerusalem, and the author of this book.
- But today we're going to begin walking through this letter, section by section, so I'm going to read the first 11 verses, James chapter 1. Let me invite you, wherever you are, to read along with me, or listen as I read.
- James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the dispersion, greetings. Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.
- For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 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 to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting.
- [1:23] For the one who doubts is like a 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.
- Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation. Because like a flower of the grass, he will pass away.
- For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass, its flower falls and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.
- Let me pray. Father, thank you for these words. Thank you for this wisdom that you gave to James.
- For the benefit of his people that he was writing to. Would you, by your spirit, take this wisdom, take these words. Strengthen our hearts.
- [2:25] Equip us for the trials that we face today. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Well, this morning's passage is about dealing with trials.
- And these days, I don't think I need to say anything more to prove that we are dealing with a relevant topic. So let's jump right in. James was writing to people who were experiencing trials.
- Verse 2, he says, When you meet trials of various kinds. The King James translates that verse, When ye fall into trials, like the man in Jesus' parable who fell among thieves.
- It's the same word. Or it could also be translated, When you strike trials. The same word is also used in Acts, when Paul is on the ship in the storm, and the ship strikes a reef, and begins to break apart into pieces.
- The idea here is of an unchosen encounter with an intense difficulty that brings us to the end of our own resources.
- [3:29] When you meet trials. When you encounter trials. When you're confronted by trials of various kinds that you probably didn't choose and might not have expected.

Trials can take many forms. They can be external, sort of circumstance-driven or internal. Wrestlings in our own hearts. They can be chronic or acute.

They can be long-anticipated or entirely unexpected. Now you might wonder, What specific trials were James' readers experiencing?

Well, Tell that at least some of them were facing persecution. For being called by the honorable name of Christ. We see that in chapter 2, verses 6 and 7.

We also see that many of them were experiencing poverty. Now there's probably the most references to being poor as a trial. Financially strapped. Verse 9 mentions the lowly brother, the Christian in humble circumstances.

[4 : 29] Verse 27 mentioned widows and orphans. Two of the most vulnerable groups of people in the ancient world. Chapter 2, verse 15 mentions a brother or sister in Christ who is poorly clothed, lacking in daily food.

Chapter 5 mentions day laborers who were working in the fields but being deprived of their rightful wages. Some were experiencing persecution.

Many were experiencing poverty. Others were dealing with sickness. We see that in chapter 5, verse 14. And finally, many had been scattered. Who does James write to in chapter 1, verse 1?

Those in the dispersion. Those who had been scattered. So persecution and poverty, sickness and scattering, these are some of the trials that James' people were enduring.

Now, do we know anything more? Well, we know that James was the leader of the church in Jerusalem. And we know from the book of Acts, chapter 11, verse 19, that a significant number of Jewish Christians originally from Jerusalem had been scattered due to the persecution that arose over Stephen, the first martyr.

[5 : 41] And these Jewish Christians, Acts tells us, traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch. They scattered in several directions. So perhaps in the mid to late 40s A.D.

Now, if that's true, this letter would be the earliest Christian document that we possess. The earliest New Testament writing.

Now, we can't be sure of the exact date or the exact location to which James was writing. But James was writing as a pastor to his scattered flock.

The 12 tribes representing the probably Jewish Christians who had been scattered throughout the nations from Jerusalem. James was writing as a pastor to his scattered flock who had experienced persecution and poverty, sickness and scattering, trials of many kinds.

And the Lord Jesus, who inspired James' words back then and who has faithfully preserved them through the centuries, continues to speak to us through these words today.

[6 : 44] Even as we are scattered. And even as we face trials of various kinds. So what does James have to say to us about dealing with trials?

Well, I want to look at James' teaching under three headings. First, the purpose of our trials. Second, prayer in our trials.

And third, perspective on our trials. Purpose, prayer, and perspective. So the first thing we see is that James reminds us in verses 2-4 of the purpose of our trials.

He says, You know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And then he says, Let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

James uses some rich words in these verses. So let me delve into four of them briefly. Firstly, first, testing. James talks about the testing of our faith.

- [7 : 48] Now that word appears only twice in the Greek version of the Old Testament. But it appears in Psalm 12, verse 6, where it says, The words of the Lord are pure words like silver tested in a furnace.
- Purified seven times. And then similarly, Proverbs 27, 17 says, The crucible is for silver and the furnace is for gold, and a man is tested by his praise.
- Now in both places, testing refers to an intense and prolonged process, like metals being refined in a very hot furnace, through which they're revealed to be genuine, and purified of everything that's not genuine.
- And in the New Testament, that word testing can refer both to this painful process of being refined in a fire as well as the glorious result, of shining with process of being refined in a fire as well as the glorious result, of shining with the number one quality that James is calling us to embody, as believers in Christ.
- To be steadfast, that is, wholehearted, undivided in our loyalty to God and to the Lord Jesus Christ, because God is steadfast and wholehearted and undivided in his covenant commitment to us.
- [9 : 24] Now we'll see this theme developed as we walk through the letter of James, and we've chosen to entitle this sermon series, Steadfast. So testing produces steadfastness, but the ultimate goal of trials is to make us perfect and complete.
- Those are the last two words I want to delve into. Now for some of us, when we hear perfect, we think unattainable. And I've even heard some people say, perfect sounds boring.
- Right? First we think it's unattainable. Whenever a human being claims to be perfect, perfect, right, to always get a 10 out of 10 on everything, we know it's not true. Right? But I've also heard people say things like, you know, if the world was perfect, it would be boring.
- There wouldn't be any variety, or adventure, or challenge, or risk. But I think that's a misunderstanding of what perfection involves. The word perfect, as James is using it, the word contains the idea of reaching a goal, achieving one's purpose.
- The word can also be translated mature, or excellent, or splendid. Think of a full-grown human being, living into his or her full potential.
- [10 : 41] Think of an artist's masterpiece, triumphantly displayed on the gallery wall. Think of an architect's vision, finally built in and standing.
- Think of finally arriving at a long-awaited destination, after a dangerous journey. Now, if perfection contains the idea of reaching a goal, or achieving a purpose, or completing a journey, completeness, that word complete, emphasizes the idea of getting there all in one piece.
- It can also be translated intact, whole, undefiled, healthy, sound, or as James says, lacking in nothing.
- You see, God will not leave any part of us untouched, or unredeemed. His intent is to mold us, and shape us, through and through.
- Through our trials, making of us something glorious, that will endure into all eternity. You see, James reminds us of the purpose of our trials, that our trials are meant to make us steadfast, and splendid, and whole.
- [11 : 57] And in light of that purpose, James says, count it all joy, when you meet trials of many kinds. Now, that phrase, count it all joy, can be misunderstood, or misinterpreted in some unhelpful ways.
- James does not say, that Christians should only feel, or express joy, and we shouldn't feel, or express, anger, or sadness, or any other emotions.

No. The Bible makes space, for believers to lament, to cry out to God, in the midst of our distress, and perplexity.

To acknowledge our unanswered questions, and troubled hearts. This verse is not telling us, to pretend that we don't have, any other emotions, other than joy.

It's not saying, put on a fake smile, all the time. Also, this verse is not commanding us, to be happy, simply because, we are suffering.

- [13:02] Look at what James says, later on in chapter 5, verse 13. He says, is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing songs of praise. James isn't being cavalier, and inconsiderate.

He knows the pain, that trials can cause. So what is James saying? If he's not saying, that we should only feel, or express joy, and if he's not saying, we should be happy, simply because we're, in a trial.

No, what he's doing is, he's lifting our eyes, beyond our present trials, to God's glorious purpose. He's saying, God is working through our trials, to make us steadfast, and splendid, and whole.

One commentator put it this way, he said, don't just look at your trial, look through your trial, to its potential outcome.

Because if we don't see through, our trials, then we can easily collapse, under them. But as we see through, our present trials, and fix our eyes, on God's glorious purpose, that he is promising, to make us steadfast, and splendid, and whole, and as we align ourselves, with that purpose, we can taste, genuine joy, even in the midst, of the fire.

- [14:23] You see, the question James, is challenging us with, is how are we counting, our trials? How are we thinking, about them?

How are we viewing them? How are we considering, them? Do we just consider them, completely futile? Utterly meaningless? Having no redeeming, value?

Well, if we're holding on, to those thoughts, if we're cultivating, those thoughts, then we're going to be, cultivating, feelings of anger, and despair, and withdrawal.

But James says, there's a better way, to think, about our trials. He says, count it, genuine joy. Not because, trials are enjoyable.

And we don't need, to pretend that they are. But he says, count it, genuine joy, because you know, God's purpose, because you can trust, God's purpose, that he is making us, steadfast, perfect, and complete, through them.

- [15:29] Now that's the first thing, that James, points us to, in the midst of our trials, is the purpose, of our trials. But that leads us, to the second point, James calls us to, prayer, in the midst of our trials, in verses five through eight.

If any of you, lacks wisdom, let him ask God. Now James is not, abruptly shifting, to an entirely, unrelated topic here. No, James is a wise pastor, and he recognizes, that it's hard.

It's unnatural, for us to look, through our hard trials, and to see, God's good purpose. That's not something, we as human beings, naturally do. Right?

We often struggle, to remain steadfast, in the midst of sickness, or displacement, or isolation, or uncertainty, or anxiety. We struggle, especially when, our trials become, far more intense, or last far longer, than we ever expected them to.

And many of us struggle, because we've heard that verse, in first Corinthians, that says, God won't let us be tempted, beyond our ability, but he'll also provide, the way of escape, so we can endure it.

[16 : 36] And sometimes we think, but that's not my experience, right now. Sometimes we think, I don't see any way out. And I don't see, how I can endure this, any longer. Count it all joy?

That's the most, unrealistic command, I've ever heard. And so James says to us, if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask God. Right?

We need, to be, we, this perspective, doesn't come naturally, to us. And so James says, we need to ask God, for wisdom. Now what's wisdom? Well, according to the Bible, wisdom begins with, seeing and honoring God, for who he really is.

Sometimes that's hard, for us to do, in the midst of trials. To remember, and to honor God, for who God, always has been, and is, and always will be.

But wisdom is also, the practical ability, to live in line, with the purposes of God. Amidst the problems, and complexities, and frustrations, and difficult situations, that we face, in a fallen world.

[17 : 42] We need wisdom, from God, to recognize, his enduring purposes, and not be overwhelmed, by our present problems. We need wisdom, from God. When in the midst, of trials, we're weighing, competing priorities, and having to make, difficult decisions.

And so we should ask, for wisdom, and keep asking, for wisdom. And then James, gives us a wonderful truth, to encourage us, in our asking. He says, God gives generously, to all, without reproach.

Without finding fault, without making us feel, ashamed for asking, God generously, gives. Have you ever received, a gift from someone, but later on, you realize, that their gift, wasn't sincerely given?

Maybe a friend, gave you high praise, to your face, and then, you realize, that they, were at the same time, talking badly, about you, behind your back. Or maybe a relative, did you a favor, or sent you a gift, but it came with, unspoken expectations, and veiled threats, of criticism.

Maybe a co-worker, covered your shift, because you were sick, or your kids were sick. But then they expected you, to cover for them, when they were, being dishonest. Maybe this kind of thing, has happened to you, so many times, that you find it hard, to trust the motives, of anybody, who offers to give you something.

[19 : 16] Well, this isn't a new problem. The book of Sirach, which is a well-known book, in James' day, said this, a fool's gift, will profit you nothing.

A fool gives little, and reproaches much. Today he lends, and tomorrow he asks it back. You see, some people in this world, it's best, if you don't ask them, for anything.

Because they don't have, your best interests at heart, and the main thing, you will get from them, is trouble. But James says, the true God, is not, like, that.

The God, who we pray to, is by his very nature, a giving God. And he gives generously, and without reproach. That word generously, can also be translated, sincerely, or single-mindedly, whole-heartedly.

Right? In verse 3, we heard James' summons, to steadfastness, to give our undivided loyalty, to God. But here, James proclaims, God's steadfast, and undivided, and utterly sincere, and genuine loyalty, and generosity to us.

[20 : 33] In the Jesus storybook Bible, it calls it, God's never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always, and forever love.

God's steadfast love. With God, there's no backtracking, or backstabbing, no second-guessing, or later on, guilt-tripping. God does not mock us, or shame us, or belittle us, when we ask him for wisdom.

He is utterly sincere, and wholehearted, in his generosity, to us. This is what Jesus himself taught us, in the Sermon on the Mount.

Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. I knock, and it will be opened. If you who are evil, know how to give good gifts, to your children, how much more, will your Father, who is in heaven, give good things, to those who ask him?

So James, and Jesus say to us, ask, and keep asking. Because God, our Heavenly Father, delights, to give, to his children.

[21 : 46] So if we lack wisdom, to face our trials, we're struggling, to see God's purpose, in the midst of them, we should ask the God who gives, and we should ask confidently, and trustingly, without wavering, in our loyalty to him.

Now, verse six, James says, ask in faith, with no doubting. Now, this is another verse, that can raise questions.

Especially, if you're struggling, to endure trials, with steadfastness, and joy, you might think, but how can I ask in faith, with no doubting? I'm plagued, by feelings of doubt, and questions, that I can't answer right now.

And verse seven, says that if I doubt, I can't expect to receive, anything from God at all. Maybe this verse, is saying that God's, not going to help me. But when we read a scripture, and have an immediate, negative reaction to it, we should check ourselves, because often, we're not hearing, what it's really saying.

So let's look at this paragraph, a little more carefully. When we read it more carefully, we might notice, a key word in verse eight, double minded. It also appears, in chapter four, verse eight.

[23 : 00] Now, why is this word important? It's important, because it's the opposite, of steadfast, and undivided. You see, a double minded person, is not simply someone, who has unanswered questions, or troubled emotions.

A double minded person, has divided loyalties. It's even possible, that James invented this word, to get his point across.

We haven't found it, in any earlier writings, but later Christian writers, pick up on it. This idea of being double minded, insincere, unwilling to commit.

Another thing we might notice, is the image James uses, in verse six. A wave of the sea, that is driven, and tossed by the wind. The image is of the swell, of the sea. Always in flux, never at rest, constantly changing, with the winds, inherently unstable, anchored to nothing.

So in the context, of this paragraph, we might ask, what does James mean, by with no doubting, in verse six? Well James is not saying, that we should never expect, to receive anything from God, if we have unanswered questions, or troubled emotions.

[24 : 18] In fact, James assumes, that we lack some wisdom. Right? If we had complete, and perfect wisdom already, we wouldn't need to ask for it. So of course, we're going to have, some unanswered questions, and some troubled emotions.

That's why we need to ask, in the first place. What James is warning us, against, is exactly what Jesus, warned us against, in the Sermon on the Mount.

Which so much of James, echoes. Right? Jesus says, no one can serve two masters. We cannot expect, to receive wisdom from God, if we're unwilling, to surrender, ourselves, to God.

So James invites us, to ask God for wisdom, confidently, and trustingly, without wavering, in our loyalty to the Lord. So, so far we've seen, that James reminds us, of God's purpose, in our trials.

He calls us to prayer, in the midst of trials. And third, verses 9 to 11, James gives us, a surprising perspective, on our trials.

[25 : 27] let the lowly brother, boast in his exaltation, and the rich, in his humiliation.

Now what is this? James is giving us, an upside down perspective, on our trials. Think about it this way.

Christian believer, if you're in a low position, in this world, if you have limited resources, and options, and connections, if you feel, often disregarded, and overlooked, James says, rejoice.

Because you have, an eternally, exalted position, in Christ. You are seated with Christ, at God's right hand, in the heavenly places.

You are a child, of the king, of glory himself. You have an eternal, inheritance, that will never fade away. As James will say, in chapter 2, has not God chosen, those who are poor, in this world, to be rich in faith, and to inherit the kingdom, that God has promised, to those who love him.

[26 : 40] So James says, you are an honored member, of the only kingdom, that will last forever. You are chosen, and loved by the God, of the universe himself. So hold your head high, and do not be ashamed, you have much, to glory in, as a brother, or sister, in Christ.

But on the other hand, James says, if you are rich, if you have a high position, in this world, if people speak well of you, and listen carefully, when you speak, if you have plenty of resources, and options, and connections, to draw upon, remember that all that, will pass away.

You will one day die, and none, of your worldly possessions, none of all those things, can you take with you. All the riches, and beauty, and fame, of this world, can fade away, far more quickly, than you might expect.

It's all like, a flower of the field, flourishing today, withered tomorrow. So James says, humble yourself, before the Lord.

Don't glory, in things, that won't last, for eternity. Now in the midst of trials, we all need, this counter-cultural, and counter-intuitive perspective, on our trials.

[28 : 11] Right? We might be enduring adversity, pressed hard, by outward circumstances. We might be enjoying prosperity, but enticed, by inward temptations, each in their own way, can be a form, of trial.

We tend to think, of suffering, or poverty, as a trial, but the Bible also says, that receiving praise, or being well off, is a spiritual trial, because we can be enticed, to put our heart, in the wrong place, and let our heart, be captivated, by the things of this world, that won't last, instead of by, the reality of God.

You see, either way, whether we're, enduring adversity, or enjoying prosperity, we can let, our identity, get wrapped up, in our earthly, circumstances, in our changing condition.

We can so quickly forget, who we are, before the unchanging God, and before his son, Jesus Christ. James says, remember who you are, before God.

You might ask, how do we get, how do we remember, how do we maintain, that eternal perspective, that James gives us here, in the midst of our trials? when we're, low in this world, to remember, that we are, exalted in Christ, and when we're, exalted in this world, to humble ourselves, before the one, and only God.

[29 : 42] Where do we get, that perspective? Well, by and large, you won't get that perspective, by listening to the news. Many of us, spend a lot of time, listening to the news, and reading articles, and reading articles, these days.

And they can be helpful, and informative, in some respects, but they will not remind you, of the unchanging reality, of who you are, before God, in Christ.

Christ. But if we turn off the news, and sit quietly, in the silence of our own home, and listen to our own hearts, we won't necessarily, get this perspective there either.

The Bible says, our own hearts, are deceptive, and fickle, and easily forgetful. Where do we get, this perspective, on trials, that helps us, to remain steadfast?

Well, James learned, this perspective, from at least, three sources. First, he learned it, from God's word. In particular, from the Old Testament prophets.

[30 : 54] James is echoing, the words of Isaiah, who said, all flesh is grass, and all its beauty, is like the flower, of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God, will stand, forever.

And the words of Jeremiah, who said, let not the wise man, boast of his wisdom, let not the mighty man, boast in his might, let not the rich man, boast in his riches, but let him who boasts, boast in this, that he understands, and knows me, that I am the Lord, who practices, steadfast love, and justice, and righteousness, in the earth, so brothers and sisters, as you face trials, of many kinds, stay anchored, in the unchanging truths, of the word, of God.

Spend, the time that you have, and find, time, somehow or other, to be listening, or reading, the word, of God.

and letting that, anchor your perspective. But James not only read, this perspective, in the scriptures, James also heard it, from his own mother, from Mary herself.

Luke chapter 1, Mary sang, about God's, upside down kingdom. Mary said, God has looked with favor, on the lowliness, of his servant.

[32 : 20] He has scattered the proud, in the thoughts, of their hearts. He has brought down, the powerful, from their thrones, and lifted up, the lowly. Mary knew that truth, even as a young woman.

And she held, onto it, throughout her life. Through all the trials, that she experienced, as a mother. And you know, we too can learn, from the spiritual mothers, and spiritual fathers, that God has placed, in our lives.

Especially today, on Mother's Day, we can remember, the godly women, of the faith, the spiritual mothers, who have taught us, and who have lived, out these truths, of dependence, on God, through hard trials.

Whether it's your, biological mother, or someone else. That has exemplified, persevering faith, and steadfast love.

Listen, to those people. Don't let their voices, be drowned, out in your life. So James learned, this perspective, from God's word.

[33 : 36] He learned it, from his mother. And finally, James would have seen, this perspective, in the life, of his brother, the Lord Jesus himself. James could have been, echoing Jesus' own words here.

Jesus said, everyone who exalts himself, will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself, will be exalted. But James had not only, heard Jesus' words, he had also seen, Jesus, humble himself.

Jesus, Jesus, the eternally rich, son of God, humble himself to the point of, death on a cross, identifying with us, in our low estate, willingly bearing, the burden of our sin, and the curse of death.

And then he had seen, Jesus raised from the dead, and exalted by God. You see, more than anything else, we can get this eternal perspective, and hold on to it, through all our trials, of various kinds, by looking to Jesus, seeing his death, on the cross, for our sins, and his being raised to life, for our salvation.

And as we're connected with him, we share, in his, humility, and we also share, in his glory. We see that our sins, were so bad, that only, we could only be saved, from them, by the son of God, dying for us himself.

- [35 : 01] And yet we see, that God's love, is so great, that he chose, to do that, on our behalf. And in his resurrection, he defeated death. And so we belong to him.
- And we can rest in him, forever. You see, that's the rock, that can carry us, through, all our trials, of various kinds.
- All the way, to our destination, of being made, perfect and complete, for all eternity. James knew this.
- That's why in verse one, he described himself, as a servant of God, and of the Lord, Jesus Christ. He knew, who he was. He didn't boast.
- In fact, he doesn't even mention, being the physical brother. of Jesus Christ. But he knew, Jesus as his Lord, and Savior.
- [36 : 02] Lord, and Christ. James knew, who he really was. A humble servant, of the Lord, and an exalted follower, of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah.
- As we face trials, of many kinds, let's hold on to that. Remember God's purpose, for us, in our trials.
- Draw near to him, in prayer, in the midst of our trials. Let's ask him, for the wisdom, that we need. And finally, hold on, to this perspective. who we are, before God, in Christ.
- Let us pray. Father God, thank you for the wisdom of James.
- thank you for, how it speaks, to the trials, of many kinds, that we experience today. We pray, that you would anchor us, in our identity, as your children, as servants, of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- [37 : 15] may we see, your steadfast love, to us. And may we be, encouraged and strengthened, to live a life, of steadfast love, and loyalty to you.
- Pray this in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
- Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.