

The Complete Christian Understands Trials -

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[0:00] Come on, Phil. Yeah, good stuff. Good. Thank you very much to one and all who have led us thus far. Welcome, everyone. Sorry to disappoint you if you were expecting another preacher.

As I announced last week, you're back to porridge. Porridge is good for you, though. We can live with that. So I'm sure he'll make an appearance at some point, maybe in due course at another time.

But anyway, you're stuck with me once again. Turn with me to the book of James. Those of you who are sharp this morning, we'll know, wait a minute, passed away, looked at James last Sunday night.

I've decided to move that new series that we kicked off last Sunday to the morning series. Because it's quite strategic, it's very fundamental, the book of James, as we seek to grow as individual Christians. That's what it's about. So I thought it would be better, because there's more people here in the morning, to consider this in the morning. And then move, we've only got about three or four sermons left in Philippians, which has jumped from morning to evening over recent weeks, because we've looked at prayer and eldership and one or two other things. That will be moved to the evening. So we'll finish Philippians, I think, at the end of this month, round about then. And then we'll begin a new series on Sunday nights. But James will be our new series for Sunday mornings. Does that make sense? And while I'm on this, the prayer meeting on Wednesday, we'll study old age.

I'm trying to look at MD individually. Can I just scan, can I glaze look? But we'll look at the topic of old age and things that are associated with old age. And so that's what we'll look at on Sunday.

[1:40] And you'll get handouts to take away as well. Then we will look at grief. We'll look at grief after that in another week, two's time. And then we'll begin a new series on the book of Jonah. We'll look at the book of Jonah. So that's where we'll be over the next number of weeks. But let's read together from James. And we're only looking at, I'll fill in the background for those who weren't here last Sunday night to set the tone for this, because I need to do that before we really look at the text.

But let's begin. We're just looking, considering just the first four verses this morning in the book of James, James chapter 1. James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations, greetings. Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

Let perseverance finish its work, so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. So we'll consider those four verses. But let's just seek the Lord's face. Let's ask for his help just now. Our loving Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you, Lord, for the many blessings that we received and for the goodness that we receive from reading your word and systematically, perhaps reading it day by day in our daily devotions. We thank you, Father, for this book included in the canon of Scripture. We pray now, Lord, with your word open before us. Teach us through your Holy Spirit to understand, Lord, what's happening here. So, Father, be with us, we pray. Be our teacher, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. We are considering these first four verses. I'm sure many looking at these verses, you know these verses, you've heard them before. They're strange words indeed. Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds. I wonder if anybody's ever come up to you recently and said that. Consider it pure joy. We don't often respond in that way, do we? We

often say it must be hard, must be difficult, poor you, and we try and feel sorry for that person. But we don't often say consider it pure joy. And that's the verse I want us to consider about trials and temptations. We're beginning this series, continuing our series that we began last week in the book of James. It's a book that is really about Christian growth. We gave this series the title called The Complete Christian, and it's based in verse 4. One of the verses we're looking at this morning, let perseverance finish its work, so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. That is God's desire. I said last week that you are the person that God has chosen, but you are not the person that He wants.

He wants to mold you and to shape you to be like His Son. He wants to sanctify you. We are a work in progress. It's not enough that we're saved, justified. We need to be sanctified. And James is all about that, and that's why we're studying this together. For those of you who weren't here, let me just give you in a few minutes what we considered last week. It's important, and you'll hear this probably every sermon, because we looked at chapter 1, and we looked at two verses in there especially about what this is all about. But first of all, James, the author of James, is more often, more probable to be the half-brother of Jesus. There are four Jameses in Scriptures. We won't go over the pros and cons of each.

[5:37] But James grew to be the leader in the church in Jerusalem, a leading figure, one of the pillars that Paul relates to in Paul's missionary journey. He'd come back and report to James and the rest of the brothers. He is very high up in the church there. So that's probably the author. Controversial letter, because in this letter you don't really get many doctrines in it. Jesus isn't mentioned, the gospel, the cross, and other doctrines. That's why Martin Luther and others called this an epistle of straw, should be consigned to the end of the book of Revelation, too hard to understand, of no worth. John Calvin and others took a different view. It's very much part of Scripture. But rather than contradicting Paul, because James emphasizes works that he talks about not so much how to what we should believe, but if Christians, if we are justified already, the work of God, we should behave in a particular way. So the book of James is not about putting us on a guilt trip as we look at the tongue, as we look at various things that we should do. Over about 50 imperatives in the book of

James, do this, don't do that. It's not just to put us on a guilt trip. It's to do with growth. And it's a very practical book. James doesn't mince these words, uses loads of illustrations, very clear instructions.

That's why Christians quite like the book of James. It's clear. But the two verses that are the background to this are verses 18 and 21 of chapter 1. If you can understand these verses, these are the verses that explain why James writes the way he does. Verse 18, he chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created. And then verse 21 talks about that we should humbly accept the word planted in us. God, if you're a Christian here, God has done something in you. He has chosen to give you birth. Verse 18, he chose you, he chose to give you birth, a new creation equal to the first creation. God has said, let there be light to shine in your heart, the light of the gospel equal to creation. You're born again. How did he do it? He did this through the word of truth. James tells us this. He chose to do this through the word of truth. We heard the gospel. We read the gospel. But it came to us in word, and we heard, and it's like a seed planted in us.

It gives us new life. The God who said, let there be light, basically said to you and me, let there be light. And we became born again. Why did he do it? So that we are a kind of first fruits. We are the best of all his creation. Of all the things that God created in the world, all the animals, plants, birds, flowers, flowers. Nothing is more impressive than a born-again Christian. We are not only created in his image, we are recreated, filled with the Holy Spirit. We are first fruits as well because we belong to God. We are to be a holy people. So that's, in a few minutes, what the folk got last. If you want more, zoom back on YouTube until last Sunday night. But really, these verses, because we are God's first fruits, because God has placed his seed in us through the word, whenever this word comes to us, when James will teach, whenever we read God's word, this is like water feeding that seed that grows and changes us. That's why when we hear sermons, when we have our quiet time,

we're often changed or transformed in some way. So in these imperatives that James gives, as I says, it's not about guilt.

It's to produce growth within us. So hopefully, as we look at these, we might begin to become more mature, because that is the series title, The Complete Christian. Every sermon that you hear from me will begin with, The Complete Christian does this. The Complete Christian doesn't do that, and that's what we're going to look at. He's interested in bringing us through to completion, that we might be complete, mature, not lacking anything. So James, we're looking at the text now, right at the very beginning. He begins with a bang. He looks at the Christian life, and Christians look at the Christian life differently. Think about your own walk with the Lord. Think about since you became a Christian.

[10:20] Before that, it's luck, fate, reigning, miserable. There's no point. Eat, drink, and be merry. Say, this is all there is. But when you become a Christian, God becomes a big part of your life.

You know that He is part of your life. You view life, and you view the hardships of life through a different lens. You're not just somebody that says, I'm having a hard time, full stop, and that is it. That's the way the man in the street talks. I'm getting grief, my wife's bending my ear, full stop, and that is it. As a Christian, you say, this is hard, but God. God is doing something.

And that's what James reminds them of, about what they already know. And that is why we might struggle to consider things pure joy, but we know there's something behind us, and that produces within us maybe more of a settled peace, and maybe even joy that we're counted worthy to suffer, or God is doing a work. He's not finished with me. He's noticing me. His hand is upon me. And Christians know this. And that's why he says in verse 3, because you know, because you are the firstfruits of God, God has chosen you for birth. He's placed the seed of His Word in you.

So, you know that there's a purpose in the testing of your faith in these various trials. And that's what we're going to look at just now. James is very much a pastor. He's a pastor before he's a writer, really. He's not as grand as Isaiah and maybe even the Apostle Paul. Some folks say, this isn't a letter. It's just loads of sermon, possible topics just clumped together. But as I says, it's not that. He does have a theology. Christians should behave in a particular way, and therefore, he's going to point out various things throughout this whole letter about why he's doing this. But he's a pastor. He cares for people. And he's writing, note how he begins this, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations. He's writing to a group of people, possibly Jewish Christians, who in Acts 2, we read, because of the persecution, were scattered. And he writes to them who are, life is in danger, who have lost family, who have lost homes and their well-being.

[12:42] They're really in a difficult situation. And he's brave enough to turn around and say, consider it pure joy, brothers and sisters, when you had to be thrown out of Jerusalem, when you have no money and no house, and maybe members of your family have died.

It is a big, massive verse. How on earth can this be real? How can we get our head around this?

So, let's look at this topic together. The topic of trials and things, difficult things that come our way. How are we, how is the mature Christian supposed to cope and handle these things? So, first of all then, the reasons why Christians suffer. First of all then, persecutions. The trials come in various ways. Look at verse 2. Consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds.

But here is one, one of the reasons. Persecution. These 12 tribes, the new Israel, or whatever he's calling them, basically have been scattered. And because of persecution, we read this in Acts, persecution breaks out in Acts 11, when Stephen was killed, and they traveled quite away from Jerusalem.

Many of them face death and poverty and so forth. Whenever the Bible talks about suffering, often it's to do with persecution. Suffering in that way. People who are opposed to our message.

And in our country, we don't get much opposition. We get some verbal opposition. Do need to pray about the Scottish government and some of the things they're considering just now. Conversion therapy and others. But we do suffer. And, but we know, we expect this in many ways. It causes us to, in many ways, rejoice, because we're counted worthy to suffer for Christ. Peter writes in his first epistle to the church that's scattered, to a church that's suffering as well. So, therefore, James, right at the very beginning, addresses their felt needs. Every one of them, these scattered ones, they would, they are facing a trial. So, right away, they begin. Doesn't deal with the tongue. Doesn't deal with showing favoritism. That'll come later. Right away, their greatest need is, how do I cope with

the trials and difficulties that I'm, that I'm facing? Because of persecution. So, that is one way in which we can suffer because of persecution. The other way is because of personal sin. Sometimes we suffer. We have trials. Sometimes we don't always handle them well. And because of that, we can sin.

[15:18] Peter says, if you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or a thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler, and so forth. In other words, we can suffer for, because of personal sin in our life.

That can be a trial that comes our way. As Christians, we forget that the principle of reaping and sowing is still very real. We reap what we sow. If we do foolish things, if we do sinful things, we will reap the consequences of that in our fellowship with God, our fellowship with each other, and so forth. So, suffering, that's another kind of trial that comes our way, often self-inflicted.

So, persecution, personal sin. Thirdly, personal life. Trials that are common to each and every one of us, just to do with our life. He causes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good. He sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. We live in a world of thorns and thistles. I never like to use thistles in a negative way, but that is our world, isn't it? We live in a fallen world with all its aches and pains and diseases and sicknesses, sadness and sorrow. This is the world in which we live in. We cannot help this. Trials come to us through our health, through our family, through our boss, through our politicians, through the post office software system. It comes to us in loads of different ways. We live in a fallen world. Another trial that can come our way just because we live on this small planet. Fourthly, the purpose of God. Another reason why trials can come, because God is working in our life. He is molding us and shaping us. He's knocking off the rough edges and so forth, and will deal with this more in a wee bit. But that is another reason why we often suffer because God is molding us. We are a work in progress. He wants to make us like His Son.

So, as we recognize these, and maybe one of these, maybe two or three of these are what you're going through just now. Maybe just the aches and pains fallen world we live in. Maybe your lack of faith.

[17:38] Maybe you're not walking with the Lord as much, and you're struggling to consider anything pure joy. You're just struggling to even raise a voice of praise to the Lord. These are the things. But what is the purpose? James wants to remind them, and he wants to remind them of what they already know. So, secondly then, the purpose in Christian suffering. James wants to communicate there's a purpose in this, and they already know this. He says in verse 3, because you know that the testing of your faith produces something. In this case, perseverance. There's a purpose in it. So, I'm saying that's what separates the Christian from the non-Christian. This is a book for Christians. It's only for Christians, the book of James. As Lloyd-Jones says, to expect Christian conduct from somebody who's not born again is rank heresy. You can't expect a Christian to live in a godly way who don't have the Holy Spirit. We are fallen creatures. Here is a book. He wants them to know there's a purpose.

There's always a purpose in God's dealings with us. You remember Joseph. I'm reading through Genesis. I'm racing through this. You're reading three or four chapters a day, and I'm just about to come up to those passages. And you remember Joseph. Troubles came upon him wave after wave after wave. And he's given a vision of a colorful coat, and he'll bow down, and then he gets persecuted and sold into slavery, basically, by his brothers, taken to Egypt, cast into prison for something he didn't do.

It was there, and even when he was there, when there was wee glimmers of light, it just fizzled out again. And why? He must have asked, why is all of this? Why is it? I have no respite in this. And it was only years later he's able to say, you intended to harm me, but God intended it for good. To accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives, he could see that God had a plan. God had a purpose.

So, from that perspective, he can consider it pure joy when he sees his brothers, when he sees the end result. It's only when you have an eye on the end result, not the here and now. The here and now will not cause us to rejoice, but only when we see things in the future. And Wednesday, I'll give you a printout of an article John Piper did a couple of days ago, just talking about old age and how,

if you view old age in a particular way, that will cause you to rejoice. If you don't, you won't rejoice. You just see the problem, and that is very difficult. But he could recognize this, Joseph, that suffering toughens us up. It does various things in our life. I remember in Windsor Castle, hearing a wee story about a person who noticed a wee, what's the kind of call it, it's that snowdrop, a wee flowery thing. It comes up in the spring in the middle of winter or whatever, and it's, this wee flower was getting battered about. And they just noticed this and think, well, that flower's got no chance to survive. It's just getting beaten by the wind. And they mentioned this to the groundsman, and they said, what was the quote? They said, they always do better when they suffer a little. And I like that, it just causes their roots to go down, and this wee thing's getting battered. It's the same principle with God's people. We do better when we suffer a little, when our faith is tested, and so forth. So what are the reasons? What is the purpose that, in suffering? First of all, then, is to make us obedient. I've chosen, I needed a piece, I've chosen the word pliant, to make us bend towards obedience. It's to change us.

[21:34] God often does this. His hand is sometimes heavy upon us when we're disobedient, and trials often come because we are acting immaturely. We're not acting as mature Christians. So trials will sometimes come. The psalmist in Psalm 119, that great psalm, says this in verse 67, Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I obey your word. In other words, before I was afflicted, I wasn't living life as I should. And because of that, I'm afflicted, and now I obey your word.

He went astray. He's afflicted by God. And then in verse 71, he says this, It was good for me to be afflicted, so that I might learn your decrees. He realizes it was good that God's hand was heavy upon me, dealing with me, showing me things in my life to make me more obedient. That's why we read our daily devotion, have our daily devotions read his word. It's not just to give us warm fuzzies always, and to make us feel good about ourself. Sometimes the road to maturity is to feel bad about ourself, to see ourselves as he sees us. I don't think we take that seriously enough. We looked at this in prayer, didn't we? The importance of repentance, confession, and so forth. And therefore, next verse, the psalmist says, The law from your mouth is more precious to me than a thousand pieces of silver and gold.

So we wander from the Lord, and the Lord will often chastise us. Hebrews said this, Our earthly fathers disciplined us for a little while, as they thought best. But God disciplines us, what's the next words? For our good. For our good, in order that we may share in his holiness.

So sometimes many trials and temptations and things can come our way to make us pliable, to make us obedient. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but later on it produces a harvest of righteousness. Hebrews 12, 11. Harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. This is good that we look at this at the start. I don't know about you, but gym membership suddenly rocket in January, don't they? Everybody's dry January, no biscuits, no cakes, watercress, sandwiches. That's it for the next couple of months. We look after our body. But to see that that God, at the start of 2024, may be training us in righteousness, that is harder. That is painful.

That is really painful. That hits us at our very being. Our mindset shows us things. You don't like to be told your body mass index isn't very great or whatever. But when God puts his finger and he says, you're not very good, John, your thoughts, your attitude, your actions are unworthy of a Christian, never mind a mature Christian. And he will often do this, and that is hard. We can blame others. It was them a big boy made me do it and ran away, Lord. You are the man. You said you did. It's in your heart to do this. And God will do this. The purpose of suffering is often to make us obedient. Secondly, it's to cause us to persevere. That's what James mentions in verse 3, talking about consider it pure joy. Why would you consider it pure joy? Because you know, you know this already as a Christian.

[25:08] There's something in you. You just know that God is doing a work in you. You know that the testing of your faith produces something. What does he say? Perseverance. It produces perseverance. You never really know. People say, well-known verse or well-known saying, you never really know your Bible until it becomes part of your experience. I've preached 30 years worth of sermons. And I remember, was it last year, a couple of years ago, suddenly verses I'd preached on that I thought I knew,

realized I didn't know because they were now part of my experience. That is, it's very easy to say, I trust the Lord at all times. You never know until the Lord places you in a situation. And the verse that you know, the verse that you've got in your fridge, is a wee fridge magnet. You suddenly, it's tested. And you realize, I don't trust the Lord as much as I think I do. And the whole purpose of this is to make us obedient, but to cause us to persevere.

And you never know this until you're put on the treadmill of life. You never know how fit you are until you go on a treadmill or still you put on your new trainers and you jog around the block and you think, wow, this is going to be harder than I thought. You never know until the Lord places you in a particular situation. But if you can, under God, press on, you are more resilient. I've worked in affluent churches, I've worked in poorer churches. I must confess, churches in poorer areas, I just find the Christians, as generally speaking, very resilient. Life is hard for them. Every day is a struggle to get up and to, just to cope and to see through the end of the day whether their husband beats them up with drugs and they've got no money. And then when they become Christians, wow, they already get good muscle set already for perseverance because they've persevered through life. Others who have been born with a silver spoon in their mouth, who wanted 2.4 kids and a Volvo and wanted everything planned out and are going to live in, better not say any in Edinburgh, Kostorfen. Let's say Kostorfen. I don't think anybody lives in Kostorfen here. Anyway, you live there and you think, I'm going to do that.

And it all works out for you. And you get to 57 and suddenly something happens that isn't quite right. You've never been tested. And you just fall to pieces. The wind's changed it and you can't cope.

But those who have over their life, one hardship after another, that produces perseverance in you. You go, I've been here before. I've been round the block. I know how difficult this is. And the Lord has proved himself faithful. I'm going to trust in him. And you never know that. So the trying of your faith produces perseverance. You can moan about the treadmill and want to get off. But if you stick at it and say, Lord, help me to endure, that will produce perseverance. It changes your character. Thirdly, perfection. Perseverance is not the goal. Perfection is the goal. That's, we don't, when we go on, just keep toiling on. It's to do with perfection. Perseverance, James says in verse 4, let it finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. So it's not just persevering, grinning and bearing it. It's rising above it and being this joyful Christian in the midst of trials and difficulties. That is very hard. That really is, to be Christ-like in that way, where you can not only see behind it, but persevere in it, and persevere through that it produces a character in you that is impressive, that is godly.

Job knew this, didn't he? Struggled all the time. I go here, I go there. I don't know where to find him, but he knows the way that I take, and when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.

[29:17] Gold is, I don't have, I have this gold ring. I was going to say, I don't have anything gold. I have this, I have this wedding ring. Gold. Gold is so impressive. Job just says, I will come forth as gold. See, even in Job's day, to produce gold was incredibly difficult. Even today, I remember a number of years ago looking at how do you get gold today. It's very laborious. It's drilling and blasting, loads of pressure, tons of pressure, washing, chemicals, cyanide, intense heat for the smallest sweep of gold. When he has tried me, I will come forth to produce gold, to produce gold in a Christian. This impressive creature involves a lot of suffering. There is no shortcut to this.

I think we think, I'm doing okay. I'm shining here as the golden one. Ask the person next to you, and they'll say, I don't think so. We, we, was it Rabbi Byrne says that? I quoted it before. Oh, that God, the gift we'd give is to see ourselves as others see us. And we need that. We don't, we are deluded if we think. And so God works in our lives. The trials are there to change us. Paul said the same things. We glory in our sufferings, he says, because we know, there it's again, a Christian knows that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character, and character, hope. You want hope for 2024? That might be the way that it will come to you, through trials, through difficulties, through perseverance, on into a new character, a different, a shining individual, an impressive trophy of God's grace held up in that way. And the world is looking. The world needs people like

that, golden people, because they are struggling. They don't consider anything pure joy. They might watch a program and they get pure joy for 30 minutes or 90 minutes or a meal. That is a pure joy. It disappears.

We can know pure joy in the midst of trials, because we know that God is at work in us. They are changing us. And the world needs to know, what is it about you that, that, that you're going through the same as me, but you're reacting differently. You are different. The world needs to see this. That gives us the opportunity for gospel ministry. The other purpose is for the praise of God's glory. The purpose of this is always to bring praise to God himself. Peter says this, These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Praise to him and praise to you. There are those both sides. Our glory. James will say this in verse 12, Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial. Verse 12 in the same chapter, Because having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. There is praise for God. There is praise for us. This crown of life, God is glorified. So, how do you view trials and sufferings? Do you understand them? Do you respond like a Christian? Lord, it's hard, but I know. I know that this is producing something in me. I know that you're in control. I know that things are being worked out according to the counsel of your own will, and I press on, because I know I'm being transformed. I'm being changed. Do you know maybe why you're suffering? Is it maybe because of personal sin? Maybe simply because God's working in you. He will use the daily things. When you miss the bus, how do you react to that? When somebody cuts across you, just in conversation, when things don't go the way you are. As Christians, we exclude God too much.

We only exclude him in the big thing, take him in the big things. But in the small things, do you see God's fingerprints in every area of your life, even this morning, molding you and shaping you to be like his son? James says, consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, when you face various trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. Is that the desire of your heart at 2024, more than your body, more than your mind, more than your house, more than your holiday, that God could mold you and shape you into this individual who is becoming more and more complete, a mature believer? May the Lord help us to do this. James knows that people will struggle with this.

[34:32] So next week, we're going to look at verse 5. If anyone lacks wisdom, if you don't get this, if you just don't see the wisdom in any of this, he says, ask God to show you, Lord, I don't get it.

I don't get why I'm in this tunnel for so long. We'll look at that next week, the importance of wisdom that we need day by day. If we're going to stand there, we're going to sing our closing song, All I Once Held Dear.

In a minute, that's part of our service, but I want to encourage you, if you can, come out this evening. We are in Philippians, and the verses that we're looking at tonight are life-affirming, changing verses, and they will help with what we have looked at this morning.

The verses we will consider tonight are, finally, brothers, sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, lovely, admirable, think about these things.

Our battle begins in the mind. If we lose it here, we lose it elsewhere. So, if you're struggling, this will really help you this evening as well, to understand every aspect of your life is very much, it has the fingerprints of God all over it. He is at work in your life and in mine. Let's close this part in prayer. Our loving Father, we thank you for your Word. We thank you, Father, for these difficult words of James. And yet, Lord, we have begun to realize that you are changing us, Lord. We want to be that golden Christian, that person that can put up with so much and withstand so much. So, Father, just lead us and guide us. Continue to work in and through us and help us, Father, to be pliable as clay under the hands of the potter. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

[36:25] Amen. Amen. Thank you, folks.