

James 1:1-18 - Enduring our Trials

Introduce yourself.

Father's Day - Being a dad of 4 years at this point to now two lovely little girls I can say that there's certainly a joy to be had on a day like today, and I'm sure that many dads would nod their heads in agreement with me. But I want to fire off a message to all you non-dads out there, to include even you singles out there - this is still a day for you. Yes you can celebrate your earthly dad for sure, but not knowing where everyone is on that spectrum of being able to rejoice with their earthly dads, there's always a heavenly dad that you can celebrate. No he doesn't look for your praise on a specific day. No he doesn't expect any gifts from you. No he doesn't expect perfection. No, it's actually quite the opposite. If you are of the family of Christ, if you have said that God our Father is the family that you have been adopted into, then guess what? Even on a day like today, that God will only continue to give and give and give. He may not always give us what we want, but He will always give us what we need. And for that, we should remember Father's Day as a day to celebrate our heavenly Father as well. Amen?

Alright, let's get into our text. Bibles. Hand them out. Don't own one, take it. Gift.

We'll be in the book of James today. James one. If you're new to the Bible or just haven't cracked it open to James lately, flip all the way to the back of your bibles to Revelation, then start flipping slowly, very slowly, back towards the front of your bible. You'll pass the books of Jude, John's epistles, and Peter's epistles, and eventually land at the book of James. James is a short book. Only five chapters, and my hope is that we can walk through this whole book together as a church over the course of one to two years. So now Nick and I have a race going on: will he finish the book of Luke first or will I finish the book of James first? Okay, the book of James. We're starting in chapter 1, and we're reading verses one through eighteen. We'll read it, pray, and dive right in.

***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, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that

person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

9 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, 10 and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. 11 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.

12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. 18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Pray.

Alright. Trials and suffering. What a great Sunday topic to walk through, especially on a day like Father's Day. This is certainly not, I repeat not in any way a feeling that I have about fatherhood or Father's Day itself, so don't look into this anymore than it being God's will that this where we should be reading and seeking to understand God's word this morning.

Okay, so, if I could send you off with just one main idea today, one thing that I want you to remember from the entirety of the next 40 minutes or so, if you remember nothing else it's this: you and I will experience trials, and will suffer in this lifetime. We will experience trials and suffer. And it's going to be hard. We're going to say and do things that will seem out of character for us.

We'll do things like question God's will - you didn't mean to bring this into my life! Look, I know better than you old man! Get this suffering done and over with so I can start living my best life now and living to my full potential, as some prosperity folks would say.

We're going to question the goodness of God - why would you do this to such a good person like me? Don't you know how holy I am? I pray four times a day even for people that I highly

dislike, I tithe double than what my neighbor does, I serve the poor and lame and even the hard to love people in my church. A good God wouldn't bring such trials and suffering into my life like this!

We're going to wonder whether God is even still there - our prayers will feel empty. We'll feel abandoned, almost left for dead. We will feel alone. We will feel ways that we've never felt before. Friends, when I say that we will experience trials and will suffer, that is simply a promise from scripture. Do I want any of you to suffer? No! Absolutely not. I'm no masochist. I wish only God's blessings be poured out on each and every one of you, including my daughters, my wife, and me. But friends, you have to understand, that **God's blessings sometimes come in the form of trials and suffering**. He intends for us to grow closer to him in the midst of the trial.

So, remember this as we go through our sermon this morning: if you are of Christ, then you and I will experience trials and suffer. It's a promise in this Christian life. It has nothing to do with coincidence or bad luck or karma or reputation or even good works or evil works. It is the father's will to bring trials into our life and to allow suffering to happen. And just in case you of little faith, doubt these words, we'll look at some scripture this morning to support this fact. But listen here friends, and this is what our text is getting at this morning: we will either run to Christ and ask the Holy Spirit to guide us in the midst of that suffering, or we won't. There's no in between. We will either say "God, outta the way, I got this! No need for intervention from you!" Or we will say "Lord. I'm broken. I'm suffering. Help! Give me the wisdom of what to do or what to say next, and help me to have perseverance in this trial. Help me reflect who you are in the midst of this suffering." And friends, that's a prayer that God wants to answer.

So you're probably wondering who this James guy is and where he gets off making these outlandish statements about the promises of trials and suffering and so much more in his letter. I mean, why does he think he is so wise about human nature? Why does he get to dictate what my response should be when things go wrong? Well, let's start off with understanding who James is, and then we'll learn more about his resumé as we go on.

James is the brother of Jesus. Scripture shows us that there was a sibling relationship between Jesus and James. We see it in Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3. We should have both up on the screen but let's just read one in the interest of time. This is the people of Nazareth speaking:

Matthew 13:55 reads "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?"

For those of you wondering, real fast, the Judas mentioned here is not Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus, but rather the other Judas who authored the book of Jude. Good thing to distinguish early on: was Jesus' brother known as a traitor or not. The answer is no.

Now, James. Whether James was the older brother or the younger brother of Jesus, the half brother or full brother or cousin of Jesus, that's not a topic for today. What we're concerned

about is that James spent some portion of his lifetime growing up in the same household as his brother, Jesus. Now, some of you may be thinking, "Wow! That's so cool! Growing up with Jesus!" Yeah, maybe, or maybe not. Consider what that would mean for someone like James who is NOT fully God and ONLY fully man to grow up with the "perfect" brother. I say quote perfect, but really Jesus did live the perfect life. But imagine that for just a minute. You hear of your brother teaching in the temple at age twelve. Age twelve! And after mom and dad go to retrieve your derelict brother who disappeared for three days, you hear of other rabbis and teachers being amazed at your brother's questions and responses while at the temple. At the age of twelve! It begins to beg the question: what was I doing at the age of twelve? Likely out disobeying God instead of preaching God's word in a temple. What about when your brother leaves behind his work as a carpenter to begin a ministry. And before he leaves he gathers men from your hometown and without question those men leave everything behind to follow your brother! Jesus! It begins to beg the question: am I that influential? Or do people distrust me? You can almost begin to see that there could be some seething jealousy near the surface in the relationship between James and Jesus. So much so that James would be recorded as one of the people NOT at the cross when Jesus is crucified. His own brother. As a matter of fact, the only blood family member at Jesus' death was his mom, Mary. Sad to think about, isn't it? Even his own brothers and sisters didn't believe him to be the son of God who came to take away the sins of the world. As a matter of fact, it isn't until we see Paul write in 1 Cor 15:7 that things take a different turn.

1 Cor 15:3-7 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

Why is this important? Because James probably would've gone the rest of his Jewish life learning about and maybe teaching the Torah, the Psalms, and the Prophets, but would've never tied any of those teachings to the risen Messiah. Why would he? As a Jew, he would've known the rules really well. He would've held other people accountable for not following the rules. And yet, he would've missed the true joy that's found only when you see the fulfillment of scripture in Jesus. You see, since James didn't follow Jesus during his earthly ministry, it would seem that Jesus died for some cause that he likely didn't know much about and maybe didn't believe in. James' spiritual eyes and ears would have remained shut for the rest of his earthly life without some cosmic intervention. And this is where God comes in and showers James with his irresistible grace. He turns James' heart to see the risen Christ, and makes the entirety of Jesus' ministry clear to him. The Messiah has come, behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29) You can picture James saying, "My brother Jesus, my Lord. It truly was him. The one who never deserved death and yet died for the sins of many, including my own." Now imagine how that must feel in retrospect. Not being present for your brother's ministry, who you now realize is fully God. Not being present for your brother's death, who

fulfilled the promises of scripture, even unto death. And yet, your brother, God himself, sees it fitting to reveal himself to you. Someone who, at least to the lay reader, rejected Jesus as God. Can you see yourself in this story? Can you see yourself as someone who did, does, and will reject God the same way that James did? And yet what happens? Over and over again, God reveals himself to you, to me, in so many patient, graceful, and loving ways. Friends, we are much like James. Having been redeemed by the risen Christ, never forgotten, and always forgiven. Please don't forget these points as we dive deep into some tough verses. My intent is not to hurt anyone here this morning, okay? Rather, I want to show you what God showed me as I studied this scripture. If you need therapy after this message, then you're in good company because I feel like God is still mending my broken heart. Okay?

Alright. So having all this background about James, we see him start things out in a seemingly strange way in his letter.

Verse 1 reads: "James, a servant (or slave) of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings."

We quickly see that James, the brother of Jesus, never made it a thing to be part of the family line of Jesus. Do you see that? It doesn't say, "James, the brother of Jesus and the leader of the Jerusalem church." Which he was, and had every right to start off his letter this way. But instead we see immediately at the beginning of this book that James identifies himself as what? A servant, or said another way, a slave, of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. James understands what eternity looks like when submitting to Jesus as Lord, and any blood relationship to Jesus is totally and unequivocally secondary, not primary, to the unsurpassing joy of worshiping him as his heavenly master. James knows the bigger title he wants in life - son and servant of the most high God, not Jesus' bro.

Also, we should see something else in this first verse. James calls himself slave even though he was effectively the leader of the Jerusalem church. Now, the role that James held was a pretty significant office in the early church, one where, if he wanted to, he could flaunt his title and be considered "something" in society. To understand his influence, read through Acts 15 focusing in on verses 19 and 20 where James delivers the "decision" about whether Gentiles who are being saved should follow Jewish customs. We won't have time to read through it this morning, but read Acts 15 up to verse 20 after this sermon and you'll better understand James' importance in the early church.

What James shows us in those verses in Acts is that those who are in the highest offices of the church of Christ, those who are making decisions about the church and its members, are but servants to that church and its members. They should not therefore act as masters over the congregation, but rather as ministers. As servants. As slaves. To the most high God, the Father and the Son and the Spirit.

A little more background on James before we move on to the rest of our text. James had a few nicknames. And these are important to know as we consider his authority to speak on trials and suffering. One that many of you probably know about is James the Just. He was called James the Just because of his utmost integrity, his virtue. The guy was honest, he was faithful in following religious customs and the law, and, get this, he prayed. James prayed. You may hear that last one and think, "Okay, big deal. I pray. How come I don't have a cool nickname." No, no, James prayed. James prayed so much that he earned a lesser known nickname of old camel knees. You heard me right. Old camel knees. His knees were so calloused from prayer, from praying for the saints of God, that his knees bore the brunt of his piety. Not convinced? Well, I'm glad, otherwise I wouldn't be able to share this next story.

According to an early Christian scribe that recorded James' death, his martyrdom, we learn that the Pharisees came to James for help in putting down Christian beliefs, specifically that Jesus was the Christ. This is what the record says from that scribe:

They came (the Pharisees), therefore, in a body to James, and said: "We entreat thee, restrain the people: for they have gone astray in their opinions about Jesus, as if he were the Christ....Take thy stand, then, upon the summit of the temple, that from that elevated spot thou mayest be clearly seen, and thy words may be plainly audible to all the people. For, in order to attend the passover, all the tribes have congregated hither, and some of the Gentiles also."

To the Pharisees' dismay, James boldly testified that "Christ himself sitteth in heaven, at the right hand of the Great Power, and shall come on the clouds of heaven". The Pharisees then said to themselves, "We have not done well in procuring this testimony to Jesus. But let us go up and throw him down, that they may be afraid, and not believe him."

Accordingly, the Pharisees... threw down the just man... [and] began to stone him: for he was not killed by the fall; but he (James) turned, and kneeled down, and said: "I beseech thee, Lord God our Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

And, while they were there, stoning him to death, one of the priests... began to cry aloud, saying: "Cease, what do ye? The just man is praying for us." But one among them, one of the fullers, took the staff with which he was accustomed to wring out the garments he dyed, and hurled it at the head of the just man.

And so he suffered martyrdom; and they buried him on the spot, and the pillar erected to his memory still remains, close by the temple.

This was, is, James' legacy. One of humility, prayer, and a fervor for the Lord. Even as he was realizing his own death, he was on his knees praying for those who persecuted him. What would you say is the legacy that you're leaving behind? Is it one of humility where you can admit wrong, confess, and repent? Is that the character that you're known to have by your fellow

saints? Or is it a legacy of discipleship, opening yourself up to the people of God so they can speak truth into your life? Or perhaps a legacy where you seek the Lord in all things instead of your own agenda? I would bid you contemplate that question Christian: what is the legacy you are leaving behind? Because James' legacy is clear.

As a matter of fact his legacy is so clear that this letter to the twelve tribes of the Dispersion, the Jews that were scattered due to persecution, was likely received with utter and complete joy. What does our dear friend James have to share with us? What good news will our friend camel knees be bringing us today?

Let's look at our text. We'll be covering three main points this morning. It's like god rained down these three points in perfect order for us this morning. It couldn't have been ordered any better.

First off, God causes, that can be found in verses two through four.

Next, God counsels. This can be found in verses five through eleven.

And finally, God comforts. You'll see these in the final verses, twelve through eighteen.

Let's jump in. God causes. This is not only the longest point, but also the heaviest point, so just stay with me.

Friends, **suffering will be the lot for all Christians, at some point, no matter your position with God.** I've heard it said that if you're not suffering as a Christian then you probably need to consider what comforts you're idolizing. Because here we see the 12 tribes of Israel, those people whom God loved the most for generations, knew by name, gave them a land, wrote their names in the book of life, dispersed! Cast out of a land! We must not think it strange or out of order that God would introduce trouble into our days, with the people next to and around us. God intends to do something in those moments of discomfort, frustration, and suffering. And unless we turn to him we will have far less understanding of the why behind any of his actions.

And so, first question, **WHAT are we to do when, not if, but when we are presented with a trial?** When we read James it simply says in verse 2 to: count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds. Count it all joy - that's the answer! Well, great! That sounds like an easy thing to do, right? Not so much. No that can be a fairly difficult thing for many of us to do. Finding joy in the midst of a trial. Think about it. When was the last time you counted it joy when you unexpectedly lost your job? Or you counted it joy when you lost a dear family member? When have we ever counted it joy that a natural disaster struck an area of our country or the world and wiped away not only precious property, but precious lives? All of these potential trials put our faith to the test. Think about it: job loss - do I have the faith that God will provide for me knowing that all is his? Family loss - do I have the faith that God is sovereign in this moment and will showcase the beauty of family through his people? Natural disasters - do I have the faith that in the wake of mass destruction that God will piece together the brokenness and create a wonderful tapestry of grace? Do I have faith that God intends to do something far greater than what I can see right now? I'm not saying that these things shouldn't hurt, and that we shouldn't grieve, and that we shouldn't cry out to God. Not at all. I have feelings and emotions just like the rest of you - weird salty discharges that sometimes come from my eyes that I can't explain to this day. It happens! And, as a matter of fact, we see this kind of mourning and crying out happening all throughout the Psalms. But in the midst of that crying out, what is the Psalmist doing? He is crying out to God, acknowledging the Lord's character, and trusting that all things will be made right one day.

Mercy Hill, what I am saying is it is hard, bordering on impossible, to find joy in these fiery trials if we do not acknowledge God's hand in it, and know that he is in control of the storm. So we have to ask the question and prove, with scripture: **Who is it that brings trials into our lives?** Is it God? Satan? God's people? Our spouses? Our children? Our coworkers? Friends, I'm here to tell you that **God is the one who oversees, allows, and in some cases causes the calamity and suffering we experience in our lives.** That's a tough pill to swallow, I know. But, listen, and please don't see me as heartless here, if we continue to go throughout our lives simply blaming others around us, or simply blaming Satan, or simply blaming nature or karma or chance or anything else rather than acknowledging the supremacy and sovereignty of God in

these trials, then we will never, ever put suffering in its right place. Let's look at scripture so we can prove this out. We'll read through two pretty familiar accounts here.

First, Genesis 19:23-29 - God allows Abraham to intercede on behalf of Sodom and its people several times. And after God saw there was no saving this city, what did he do?

23 The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar. 24 Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven. 25 And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. 26 But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

27 And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord. 28 And he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the valley, and he looked and, behold, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace.

29 So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived.

God was the one who rained down sulfur and fire and destroyed both Sodom and Gomorrah. And yet, after witnessing such carnage, Abraham still trusts God not to destroy his nation like he did with Sodom and Gmorrhah. The father of many nations, of many sons. Abraham would prosper because of his faith in YHWH.

Acts 9:1-9 - Saul, a devout Jew, has been ravaging the early Christian church by imprisoning anyone claiming to believe in Jesus as the Christ. And this is the account of when he was on his way to try to arrest more Christians.

But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3 Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. 4 And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" 5 And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 6 But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." 7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. 8 Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9 And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Now it's not clearly spelled out here, but I think it's safe to assume that the light from heaven that blinded Saul, later called Paul, was from God. So, let's run with that. God was the one that blinded Saul for three days and seemingly took away his appetite. This is more than just an

inconvenience, it's a handicap! But what God was doing in this time was giving Saul a chance to reflect on his actions and how he should be serving the Lord, not persecuting his people.

We could go on and on here with countless examples from the Old Testament and the New Testament that show God putting trials in front of those he loves the most. And to put it into perspective, he placed the weightiest trials in front of THE ONE he loved THE MOST: his one and only begotten son. And I'm not just talking about when Jesus went to the cross. Though, yes, the cross was a cosmic, radical showcase of scandalous grace that absolutely nothing can be compared to. But I'm talking about the countless other trials Jesus experienced during his earthly ministry. Like being tempted in the desert by Satan after fasting for forty days and forty nights. Or needing to respond in a holy and just manner when challenged by the religious elite. Or how about just being surrounded by twelve yahoos that the average person would've lost it with, and yet still not sinning. It wasn't just one trial that Jesus faced, but multiple trials on his way to Calvary.

So we answered the question of **what** we are to do when we experience trials: count it as joy! Now let's peel this back another layer and ask a second question: **why does God bring these trials into our lives?** Why did he bring these trials into Jesus' life? James gives us the answer in verses three and four. It tests our faith! It produces steadfastness, or as some bible versions put it, it produces perseverance. And, if we allow the trial to run its course, we are made perfect, that is spiritually mature, complete, lacking in nothing.

So let's use some imagery here to bring this to life a bit. Look at verse three where it says the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. Well, in the Greek, the phrase "testing of your faith" is one word. It closely translates to "purify by going through heat."

So let's talk about silver. The jewelry silver. Did you know that when silver is mined, it's really not that attractive. It has impurities in it like lead and copper that make it look dull and well, worthless. Not many people would want this silver once it's mined. However, when you add it to some heat, to some really extreme heat, you begin to melt off those impurities. You melt off the lead and copper and, once the silver is cooled from that heat, you get this incredible, shiny metal that is precious and treasured. The beautiful thing about silver is that when it's brand new and all clean and shiny, you can even see your reflection in it. It's actually quite amazing. Friends, God wants to see his reflection in us. We have so many impurities in us because of the sin we are born into. Yes, if we are of Christ then we have been forgiven and we are made spotless, but we would be totally mistaken if we believed that God was done with us. He wants to make us holy. And sometimes, to make us holy, we have to go into the fire to burn off those impurities, so that, SO THAT, we can reflect God to those around us, and back to our heavenly Father.

One more use of imagery. Steel. Iron is also made hot, extremely hot, to make steel. We are taking this human element, iron, putting it through a scorching process to make it into something stronger. Something that will not rust with time. Something that will help hold up some of the

tallest structures known to man in the form of beams and braces. Something that will fend off an enemy in the form of a sword. Well in the same way, God wants to take our existing faith, and make it stronger. God doesn't want your faith to wither with time, but rather he desires for your faith to harden and be unshakable. God wants your faith to hold up the structure of your family, your church, your brothers and sisters. Friends, God takes the iron that we are, sharpens us, yes, for sure sharpens us just as Proverbs 17 says, but then desires to transform us more into his image.

Every trial is a test from Almighty God designed to strengthen, not weaken us. Paul writes in 2 Cor 4:16-18

16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Your suffering matters! It is producing an eternal weight of glory that we will redeem when we are with our Father in heaven.

Think of a trial that you are going through right now, or maybe one that you just came out of. Can you see God in the trial? Can you see the purification that God did? Can you see the transformation that happened? Search for God in those trials, you will find Him, and he will continue to glorify you.

I had some stuff on Daniel's three friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, but unless you all want to hang here until the evening we should probably move along. Just so you know, it was really good stuff.

Daniel 3:16-18 <going to skip this part and not expound on it for now>

"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. 17 If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. 18 But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

So that was point number one with God Causes. Don't worry, that was my longest point, these last two will go much quicker.

Point number two: God Counsels. The book of James is full of promises and commands, and verse five is one of those promises. **God promises to give you and me wisdom in the midst of the trial. And how do we attain that wisdom? Prayer.** But in verse six James warns us that our prayer must be confident, trustworthy, we must not doubt God's ability or willingness to provide this wisdom. For those people who have a distrust of God, the lack of belief that He is in the midst of the trial with you, or a lack of belief that he can provide wisdom to you, James describes these types of people as double minded in verse 8: the person who professes Christ with their mouth, even their prayers, but in their heart doubts the sovereignty of the Almighty. In those moments of feeling divided - is God with me or against me? - we should find a Psalm like Psalm 86:11 that speaks specifically to our struggle:

Teach me your way, Lord,
that I may rely on your faithfulness;
give me an undivided heart,
that I may fear your name. NIV

We have to trust that God means for something good to come out of this trial, for he is the one who holds the wisdom that will guide us through the trial. Now you're probably thinking, wait, wisdom? That's it? That's what God promises? Wisdom? Look, I don't want wisdom I want a way out. When we're in the midst of this trial, all we care about is it ending. If you're truly God, you would end this suffering for me!

And I want you to know that I hear that, I truly do. I can relate with you a quick personal story. When Christina and I have challenges in our marriage, when we're at odds with one another, I can tell you that I'm not always seeking that wisdom from the Lord like James tells us to do. I'm not wanting to lead us back to the Lord for wisdom and reconciliation. Many times I'm seeking an answer to the problem. God, how can I make this problem go away? Just do what you have to to fix this mess! Well, unfortunately, many times I am the problem, I am the mess that's caused us, as a couple, to sin. So if I'm asking God to take away the problem well then, the end result would not go well for me. Instead, I need to come to God with an undivided heart, in humility, asking for wisdom and counsel, and waiting on him to speak. Being ready to hear the hard stuff, knowing that his never ending grace will follow through.

I used to think that I could somehow convince God to expedite the process with these trials. Father, if you just give me what I need to resolve this tiff in my marriage, I promise that I'll serve your people double for the next week. Now how sinister is that? Thinking that the wisdom of God can be bought, bribed, or bartered with. God's wisdom does not have a price tag where we can pay for wisdom. The price tag looks far different, and it comes with laying down our lives to

hear what God has to say. Now this idea of laying down our life means so many different things to so many different people. So let's just set out a basic challenge for us here in Silicon Valley: **laying down your life in the midst of a trial means being still.** How many of us are excited about the idea of being still? No projects to queue up (house chores or errands to run), no social gathering or family function to run to next, no technology or work related tasks to distract us. Nothing! Just being still, in the quiet, with God while the trial is gnawing away at us. Now I just gave you the sins that I run to when I want a distraction from the trial. Maybe you can't relate with these examples and if not I would challenge you to identify what it means for you to lay down your life in the midst of a trial. What are the things that are stopping you from being still? Because I can tell you that in the midst of my productive actions, I'm not seeking God's wisdom.

And, what's more, it even seems holy to be doing these distractions! I know that these chores gotta get done so let me help my wifey out. I haven't hung with that brother in a while, no time like the present to do something about that. I really want to honor my employer so let me bury myself in some backlog of emails that I should respond to right now. Or, the best one, God says that I should Sabbath so I'm going to Sabbath right now as this trial is ongoing. Just kick back, relax, and binge watch some YouTube for a bit. Don't mishear me: we should do all of these things at the right time as many of them are Christian disciplines, well except the binge watching of TV. What I am saying is don't neglect to spend time with God, asking for his wisdom when the heat gets turned up on the trial.

This is exactly the warning that we read about in verses 9-11 with the lowly brother and the rich man. This idea of boasting in verse 9 refers to the pride that a person has with their status or their possessions. Well, what status or possession does this lowly brother have? Nothing! Nothing at all! Except the Father's love, which is all he needs because it gives him the pinnacle of all statuses and possessions that will never wither or rust. This is what the lowly brother boasts in. But the rich man has to be brought low through trials. The hope is that these trials will help the rich man rejoice and realize the genuine happiness and contentment found only in the true riches of God's grace, not earthly wealth. Not the created thing. And just so you know, the idea of wealth here is not solely financial wealth. It's everything we were talking about earlier: a wealth of friends, a wealth of time, a wealth of technology, a wealth of work to do. All of these things are fine to have, but unfortunately they can get in the way of worshiping the Creator and seeking him out during our trials. And so knowing that all these things on earth will perish one day, just totally wither away and turn to dust as James tells us in verse 11, why wouldn't we pursue the Lord with tremendous fervor during our trials?

So, **how do we count these trials as joy?** Ask for wisdom, pray for wisdom, from the all wise Father who gives generously to all without reproach.

So we said in point one that God Causes and we saw how God's hand is in the trials. Then we said God Counsels and we saw that God desires to give us wisdom in the trial. Now, finally, God Comforts - God desires to showcase his comforting nature before, during, and after the trial.

Friends, blessed are those who endure, persevere in trials. The Greek word for perseverance here in verse 12 is *hupomoné*. It means "remaining under" or "staying under." So those who remain under trials are what? Blessed! They receive the crown of life! Now look, the Bible says to ask for trials to go away. And yes, we should do that. We should pray for healing, and for reconciliation, and for safety. We should pray for God's supernatural powers to remove this thorn and repair the wound. We see Jesus doing this very thing just days before he is crucified. He retreats for some solitude away from his disciples and prays to his Father, and this is what he prays in Luke 22:42

... "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."

But as we know, the cup was not removed from Jesus but rather he drank the full cup of wrath on our behalf so that we could be redeemed and have full access to the Father. And it's for that reason that we can say Hebrews 4:15 is true, that we have a great high priest, Christ, who can sympathize with our weaknesses, and who was tempted in every way as we are, yet did not sin.

When Jesus' trial didn't go away, what we don't see is Christ continuing to pray the same prayer but with different words. Instead Jesus stayed under the suffering knowing that the Father would offer ultimate redemption on the third day.

So don't always be looking for the quick way out with suffering. Sometimes God allows certain trials to run its course for a purpose. Sometimes those trials are lifelong trials and we will only see relief when we are with God in heaven. Regardless of the length of the trial, verse 12 says that God will count your perseverance as blessed.

This Godly perseverance will push you past the dreaded snowball effect of the fruits of the flesh we read about in Galatians 5 and propel us to embrace the fruits of the Spirit. You see, when suffering happens, temptation occurs by the forces that God allows, and the devil sees this as an opportunity to cause us to stumble and sin. But these afflictions are NOT intended to cause us to sin, but rather grow us closer to God. It's intended to grow our dependence on God through prayer, waiting, action, speech, silence, and all of the Christian Disciplines we know about. God brought on the trial, it's up to us, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to respond in a holy way, not a sinful way. God presents all types of circumstances, but he does not tempt. Our sinful hearts are the culprits that draw us away from God, away from the sound counsel of the Holy Spirit, and towards the hiss of the serpent like we see in verse 14. And this is the

reason why we need to seek out the God of all Comfort, because without the comforting that can only come from the Holy One, we will only seek out comforts in this sinful world. Because God is present in the fiery trials, he is also there to comfort you. Let's look at second Corinthians chapter 1. Paul writes explicitly about the God of all Comfort, and the reason why he comforts us. It can be a little wordy, but I believe the key message is clear.

2Cor 1:3-7

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 5 For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. 6 If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. 7 Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

God sees it fitting to comfort us in our afflictions, to give us strength, boldness and courage, if we seek him out. He wants to comfort us, or said another way, come alongside us to help. But not for the sole purpose of making us feel all warm and fuzzy inside. Yes, that's part of it. But if we stop there we miss the point of this Godly comfort. It is so that we trust in the Lord's providence in the toughest of times, AND THEN move outward to what? Minister God's comfort to others. The same strength, boldness and courage that God showed us through the power of his Holy Spirit is also present in that brother or sister who lost their job. Or lost a family member. Or is mourning terrible disasters or atrocities happening around us. Show the same patience and grace that God our Father would show to us, and at the right time comfort that brother or sister with the same wisdom and knowledge that God has brought to you. This is all an outward display of God's presence in our lives.

What happens when we count it all joy? We are comforted and we begin to realize the height, depth and length of God's love for us. And so God is magnified in our lives, which then allows us to comfort others. And so God is glorified by shining through you. Do see that chain reaction? The awakening of our spiritual eyes and ears to the beauty of God's character, and then being propelled to live our elements of God's character to others around us. Incredible!

One more thing on comfort and then we'll close: The last day of his earthly life, when he had suffered lashings and beatings that made him unrecognizable, when he carried his cross to Calvary, when his hands and feet were nailed to the cross and he was hung up next to two criminals, Jesus makes a very unexpected promise. Let's read Luke 23:39-43.

39 One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the

due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” 42 And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” 43 And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Did you see that? What an incredible demonstration of comfort from the holy one Jesus in the midst of physical torment and the impending separation of community with his heavenly Father. Jesus still showcases the depth of his love, strength, and grace to save this sinner with the last bit of energy he had in the final moments of his life. This is the Jesus that bids you to come, taste and see that he is good. This is the rescuer that we need that will pay for the penalty of our sin. This is the Christ that will give us the Holy Spirit, the comforter, that will comfort us in all of our afflictions.

Mercy Hill I'm here to tell you that God bids you to come to him in the midst of your trials, sufferings and afflictions. He bids you to come to him to find joy, to find wisdom, and to find comfort. And from there, he wants to send us out to be a testimony of his character. Our heavenly Father will only bring good gifts into our lives, even if they are in the form of trials. Blessed be the day that a trial comes into our lives and we show total dependence on the one who has numbered our days, knows the hairs on our head, fully knows us and fully accepts and loves us. As a matter of fact, this God loves us more than we will ever know.

Let's pray.

Questions

James never made his blood relationship with Jesus a thing to be grasped, but instead showcased his unwavering allegiance to Jesus as Lord and Messiah. What do you say? Do you call Jesus Lord, or just your friend? Does Jesus rule and reign in your life, or is he a convenient genie that you access when you need something? What is the relationship you have with Jesus?

In James' final moments, he prayed for those who were about to kill him, much like Steven did in Acts 7. In the midst of a trial, how do you pray to God? Do you pray for those who are persecuting you and seemingly causing this trial?

James gives the promise that every good gift and every perfect gift is from God our Father. What gifts have you seen come out of trials in your own life? Do you acknowledge those gifts as being from God, or your own doing? How did God shape you from those trials?