

Good to see you here this morning, church. Do me a favor if you would. Go ahead and grab a Bible. Turn to James, chapter 1. That's where we're going to be anchoring out of here. As you're turning there to James, chapter 1, as has already been mentioned, Matt is gone here for a few weeks on vacation with his family, getting some time together.

In that absence I have the opportunity to think through where we need to press into, where the Lord would lead us here to press into these next few weeks. For me the one thing I've noticed over and over at this campus for a while in the short time I've been here, honestly, is the great deal of suffering by which many of you even in this room have walked through, not only this past year, but maybe in the past few years here.

Almost to an incredible weight of all the different places I've been, suffering is always there, but there's something about this particular place. It just seems like the number of folks who have walked through cancer here, the number of folks who have tragically lost loved ones, the number of circumstances that we've just seen so many in our body walk through in the past year that have been so painful and difficult, it's one of those things.

From my vantage point, you're not really sure if it's just the "We're going to play the numbers on this thing. When you get 5,000 people at one campus, you're going to get 5,000 of everything. So it's just all going to be there. Maybe it's just the numbers," or you don't know if this is kind of an Acts 5 type of deal when the disciples were arrested, beaten, released, and they came out rejoicing because they were counted worthy to suffer.

You just wonder, "Has God appointed us for a certain reason or not to suffer for his name's sake?" Regardless of what it is, suffering is part and parcel to life. My hope is for the next few weeks here we can spend some time really laying some foundations of what it means to have a healthy, biblical perspective on suffering and how to respond appropriately as the Lord would have us in the midst of suffering and to do so.

So this week we're going to take a look at God's purposes in trials, next week we're going to look at our specific response as believers in trials, then we're going to spend some time looking at our hope that we have in the midst of trials, and then finally we'll conclude with our security in the midst of trials. Again,

laying a foundation or, if nothing else, for many of us in this room a fresh reminder that we need to kind of bathe in in terms of God's perspective of trials.

The Dutch priest Henri Nouwen said this concerning sufferings: "We fail to see the place of suffering in the broader scheme of things. We fail to see that suffering is an inevitable dimension of life. Because we have lost perspective, we fail to see that unless one is willing to accept suffering properly, he or she is really refusing to continue in the quest for maturity. To refuse suffering is to refuse personal growth."

C.S. Lewis said this really famous quote when he said, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world." So there is a place and there is a purpose and there is a perspective of suffering we need to have heading in. To do so, we're going to start with a classic passage in the book of James. We're going to spend this week on the first half of this chapter and next week on the last half.

If you're not familiar with James, many would agree this is most likely Jesus' little half brother, who would eventually be appointed one of the leaders of the Jerusalem church along with Peter. He's writing to a very interesting group of Christians at the time. These were some impoverished, blue-collar Christians who had been oppressed by the wealthy ruling authority of their day.

Because this was such a new embryonic little church, many of these were brand new believers, new converts to Christianity, probably very immature to some degrees in their faith and had been blindsided by the difficult time they're having in living out what it was they believed. In many ways they were shocked by how quickly life was getting difficult.

Specifically in verse 1, we notice something about the audience of this letter. It's written to the twelve tribes of the dispersion. These were Jewish converts who had been scattered outside of Jerusalem because of persecution and in their scattering were encountering much persecution. So the thought here is again early on they were discovering the Christian life wasn't as easy as they thought it was going to be, that following Jesus Christ was costing them more than they probably originally had intended.

Has anybody ever been there, by the way? Has anybody ever felt that before, where you come to faith in Jesus Christ, and whether it's due to your own faulty thinking or deception or whether it's due to some joker on TV who lied to you, who tried to tell you that somehow because you follow the sovereign and supreme God of the universe and you're his adopted child, he's not going to let anything bad happen to you.

The more you follow Jesus, the healthier you should get, the more money should be in your wallets, the more people will like you and love you. Life should be blissful and peaceful all your days, only to come to find out it's probably actually the exact opposite, isn't it? Many of you who have put your faith in Christ soon found out after following Christ that, man, things got even more difficult.

In some ways new trials began to set in. Maybe because of your faith in Christ your parents began to turn their back on you and friendships began to get severed. Maybe there are some circumstantial hardships. Maybe you lost your job. Maybe you suffered the tragic loss of a loved one. Maybe some diagnosis came along of some chronic illness or terminal disease you found out you had.

You began to think to yourself, "Man, I don't get this. I'm a Christian now. I'm following Jesus Christ, the One who's sovereign over everything, and now all of a sudden my whole world seems to be turning upside down." If we're not careful, in those moments a temptation can set in much like we saw in the garden when the Serpent approached Adam and Eve and simply said, "Man, you don't think God really said that, do you? I think maybe God's holding out on you right now."

In the midst of trial, you and I begin to suffer the same temptation where we go, "Man, the thing is so difficult. Maybe God has forgotten about me. Maybe God doesn't love me as much as I thought he did. Do you know what? Maybe because of what's going on right now in these trials, maybe I've done something wrong and God is judging me because I've done something and he has brought this upon me as this affliction, because I know all these other people out here who do not follow Jesus Christ and they seem to be flourishing. Here I am following Jesus Christ, and the wheels of life are falling off right now."

Has anybody ever felt that way in the midst of a trial? I know I have felt that way many times. It's exactly what the audience of James's letter here was feeling as well. What James is going to do in verse 2 and following is he's going to provide for these struggling and persecuted Christians a biblical perspective concerning why trials exist and then what a healthy Christian response should be when you find yourself going through them.

If you're a note taker, if you have a pen and you kind of like to outline things, next to verses 2 through 4 just write the word *perspective*. How do you perceive as a Christian the hard times you're going to go through from a theological point of view? Then in verses 5 to 11, write the word *response*. Once you have had a correct biblical perspective, how do you then proceed in that trial when life literally turns into a sinkhole that is swallowing you alive? Lastly, by verse 12 you can write the word *result*. For what purposes will God ultimately use that trial in your life? What is the eventual hope?

Before we get into this, let me just ask a question here. Is there anybody in the room who has not gone through a trial ever in your life? Anybody? I just want to make sure how applicable this is, because if you're in here and you've never gone through trials, chances are you're under the age of 5, you've never had a spouse, you've never had kids, you've never paid a bill, you've never publicly proclaimed your faith in Jesus Christ, or you're not human.

Maybe you're a Cyborg that's among us here today, or you're dead. One of those scenarios. We have no hope for you, but for everybody else who knows what a trial is, knows how painful a trial can be, let's take a look at how James shows us the type of perspective we're to have on trials.

Look at verse 2. The first thing he says is, "**Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.**" Notice first of all, what he didn't say in verse 2. He didn't say, "Count it all joy, my brothers, *if* you meet various trials." What does he say? When. The idea of trials in a Christian's life, the idea of trials in anybody's life, is they are a required course in God's economy.

There is no exemption that you can kind of CLEP out of this somehow and miss out on trials in your life. None of us has that. We're all going to walk through trials. In fact, if anybody knew about suffering in our Bible, it's Job. Even Job said, "As surely as sparks fly up from a fire, so a man is born for adversity. He is born for trouble." It is part and parcel to life. James shows us none of us can escape a life of testing, a life of trial. Notice also the word *various* there. It's a word that means plentiful, meaning trials won't just be one and done.

It's not as if you just have this one trial and then your hope is, "If I can just get through this trial, then everything is going to be easier." You're going to have all sorts of trials, a variety of trials, an abundance of trials. I can't tell you how many collegians would come to me in my years as a college pastor and just go, "Shea, I just cannot wait until I get married because then life is going to be so much easier on the other side," and I'm like, "You fool. You have no idea what's waiting for you." It's wonderful.

I remember my dad caught up in corporate world. I remember having a conversation one time about, "Man, I just hate these crooked CEO's who are all about the money here, who are so deceitful. They're lying and they're corrupt and they create such back corporate environments. If only I could just switch my job and get a healthier corporate environment, that would be fantastic." Do you know what he did? He did. He switched jobs in the middle of it, and he landed this incredible job with this company called Enron, and it worked out really well for him.

Let me just tell you. You can't escape trials. It's like digging out of one cell and then climbing right back up into a different one. They will find you. In fact, the Greek word there for the word *meet*, when you meet

trials, some translations say, "When you encounter trials," the Greek word literally means to walk into, meaning you don't have to go looking for it. You're just going to walk right into it. They are out there, they are waiting for you, and they will hunt you down.

James's main point here is *when* you encounter the abundance of trials that you're going to encounter, when they find you, and they will, what is the perspective you're to have, not as the rest of the world who does not know God, but as a Christian? What's the perception you're to have in this trial? He says there in verse 2 you're to consider it all joy. That word *all*, by the way, is in first primary position in the Greek, meaning you can't pick and choose how to look at different trials. Big trials, little trials, all of them need to be perceived with an attitude of joy.

I don't know about you, but the very first time I ever came across this verse was right before my college year, right at the start of college, when I got dumped by my first girlfriend. Somebody slid this verse along to me right here and said, "Hey, brother. You just need to view this with joy." I thought, *What in the world? Who would write such a thing? Surely James was under some other influence besides the Holy Spirit when he wrote this. Surely James was single when he wrote this and never had been dumped, because anybody who has been dumped knows that ain't joy. That ain't fun.*

What in the world does this mean? Who would say that? What kind of person would say, "Hey, bro, I know the wheels are falling off right now. I know life is tragic for you, but this is joyous. This is the sweetest time in your life. Just embrace it"? Who comes in and goes, "Hey, guess what, guys? I got prostate cancer. Isn't that awesome? Let's just receive this with joy, sweet Jesus"? Is anybody going to say that? Nobody says that. At first, that exhortation sounds really foolish until I came to understand exactly what James was getting at.

Notice the imperative in verse 2. It doesn't say, "Act joyous in the moment that you encounter trials," but rather, "Count it as joy." Some translations say, "Consider it as joy." What James isn't doing here is dismissing the emotion of trials. He's not telling you when trials come you just need to put on that smile and, "Yes!" He's not telling you that. He's not dismissing the emotion. He's not wiping away grief and pain.

I know some of you in this room I've seen and sat with you in the ashes of pain that you've walked through in this past year. I've been in some of the hospital rooms with you. I've officiated or co-officiated some of the funerals in here. What James is not doing is saying, "Hey, when trials come along, you do not need to have grief. You do not need to be broken. You do not need to be wounded. You do not need to have sorrow." He's not dismissing the emotion of it.

This is a mathematical term that is applied towards the believer here that you have to have a different perspective than the rest of the unbelieving world. You have to calculate. You need to consider. You need to count what is happening to you through a completely different lens, and that is one of joy. What does that mean?

It's viewing this trial through a different lens than the rest of the world. It's having a theological view of your hardship in such a way that doesn't allow your mind to conclude in what you see to hopelessness and despair, to assume that because what's happening to you there is just nothing else that could be but hopelessness and despair.

James, having a divine understanding, a theological understanding of suffering, says, "No, there's something happening here that you can't see." Because of that the Christian can find a joy, not necessarily happiness that's fleeting, but a joy that can transcend the circumstance because you know something to be true about what's happening here.

Remember, this is being written to an audience of persecuted Christians who were being put to death for what it was they believed. James is saying, "You need to view this and rejoice in it rather than concluding that somehow God must be evil in this and God must be doing some bad things here to me because of some judgment and that's the only conclusion that's here."

James says, "No, you need to look at this through a different lens, because it's based on something you know to be true about God, something he's doing in this trial that you can't see that is actually glorifying himself greater and for your good. You're going to have to receive that in joy as an act of faith, not just by what you can see."

What is it we're to know? What is it that we need to know that's true about who God is and what he's doing? Well, in verses 3 and 4 he tells us, "For you, the Christian, know that the testing of your faith produces something. That something is steadfastness. And let that steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."

Verse 3 tells us that in trials in God's economy are literally the testing of our faith. That's what's happening there theologically. A trial is the basis for which my faith in Christ, my proclamation of faith in Christ, will be tested. Literally, the word *tested* is the word *proved*. It's validating what I confess to be true about God that it's actually true when the wheels fall off, not just when things are good.

Do you all remember the story in Mark, chapter 6, the feeding of the 5,000? Here's this massive crowd that had been following Jesus all day long. They're tired, they're hungry, they're exhausted, and there's nothing

to eat anywhere around them. The disciples look at this crowd, and their paradigm is, "I can only do what I can do with what I do have, and I don't have anything. So let's send them away."

Jesus is going to teach them this incredible, miraculous lesson there about what it means to trust Jesus to provide when you don't have any other way. That's the idea of the miracle. So Jesus' attitude is, "You must do what you cannot do with what you don't have. That's by bringing it to me. I'll provide, and I'll take care."

Jesus has them sit down on the green grass, tells them, "Bring to me what you do have, and I'll multiply it," multiplies it, and you can almost see the disciples high-fiving each other at the end going, "Okay, I get it now. I get it, so I have to bring the little I have to you, and you'll take care of us. I have to trust you. You're sovereign, and you're in control. I can trust you with everything. I get it!"

What's the very next line say at the end of that story? They immediately got into the boat and headed out across the lake as if Jesus is about to test something. You know the story. They go out on the lake. The wind and the waves start crashing over them. They're straining at the oars, and here comes Jesus walking on water. Instead of believing this is Jesus and Jesus has the power to control this situation as they just saw, they think he's a ghost, and they miss it.

What is interesting is what Mark comments at the end of that passage. He says the reason they could not believe, the reason their hearts were hardened, was they had not gained any insight from the incident with the loaves. Mark says that. In other words, Jesus says, "Fantastic, you learned in theory what my provision is like when we sat on the green grass, but we're going to have to take you out on the lake. We're going to have to see how that theory holds up when it's you who's in the midst of the trial."

God always uses a testing. God is in the business of making sure our faith and our worship in Christ isn't just theory, but in many ways it gets tested in the acid bath of reality. So God is in the business of using whatever means, trials included, to develop within us something that is so precious even if it means using the worst of pain to do it at times.

Time out for just a second, because I know there are some of you in here who are going, "Wait a minute. That sounds great and all, but you don't know me. You don't know what he did to me when I was little. You don't know what it was like in that hospital room when I had to turn off the life support and watch my son or my daughter or my sibling or my spouse die, and you want to tell me that event was God testing me to produce something within me? What kind of sick and cruel God is that? Surely, there was another way God could've used something to teach me a lesson than that. What kind of wickedness is that in our God?"

If that's you, if that's where you are, I want to affirm that as an honest struggle with some honest questions, but I want to encourage you to hang in there. That is exactly what we're going to deal with next week in verse 13 and following when we deal with the problem of evil and how God uses it in his sovereignty to accomplish his goodwill and how we are to respond and how we're not to respond in those particular settings.

For right now, what James is trying to do is he's simply trying to shape the perspective a Christian is to have concerning trials, because you know you can have an attitude of joy because God is working something out in you and through you that maybe you can't see right now. James says in verse 3 that one of the goals of trials in our lives is to produce steadfastness or, in some translations, endurance or perseverance.

It's the Greek word *hypomone*, which means to abide or to cling or to sink deeply over the long haul. James says one of the purposes of trials is to bring you to the place where you can trust God in a whole new category, in a way you couldn't have otherwise before. The ultimate goal James says in verse 4 is to make you complete, to perfect you, so you lack nothing. It's to work out within you the character of Christ.

Paul put it this way in Romans 8:28-29, a famous passage here that's applied to the believer in Christ, which says, "**...all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.**" Have you ever asked, "What's his purpose?" It's the very next verse. Verse 29 says, "**... to become conformed to the image of His Son...**"

Trials are meant to mature us into the likeness of Christ Jesus so we lack nothing in our demonstration of who he is to the world around us. It's God using trials as a divine chisel to shape away those things. When Michelangelo was asked to create the statue of David, many asked him, "How in the world can you take that big chunk of marble and make David out of it?" Do you know what his response was? "That big chunk of marble is David. I'm just chipping away what ought not be."

In many ways trials in God's economy become the divine chisel that takes away what ought not be, both in helping us wean from unhealthy attitudes and actions that would not portray the image of Christ needing to be manifest in us, but also weaning us from our own propensity to look to ourselves for our own self-sufficiency and instead cling to Christ for his sufficiency, not just for a season, not just to make it through this trial, but over the long haul. That's what steadfastness is.

In verses 2 through 4, do you see the perspective we're to have concerning trials? We're not to view trials as some sort of cosmic accident from a God who's just toying with us, detached from any purpose in a way that leaves us in continual hopelessness and despair, nor are trials God just puppeteering evil over us and taking us through what we feel is unneeded pain so we can spend the rest of our days just angry and bitter

at God for what he has done. That's not the lens by which a Christian is meant to view trials. Those aren't God's purposes there.

Instead James paints a picture for the Christian here to view trials with joy as an act of faith for what God's divine plan is working out in our lives to produce in us what we could not produce on our own. That is a trust and a Christ-likeness that makes Christ look glorious and allows him to be sufficient over the long haul. That is where you can find an infinite joy that transcends circumstances, not a finite happiness that fades away with each trial that comes and goes.

Once you understand that perspective, the next question becomes, "Well, what do I do?" We're going to camp more on this next week, but James gives us a little snapshot here. "What do I do in the meantime?" You say, "Shea, great. Thank you. I have my theology down now. God is doing something in the middle of this mess. I don't know what it is, but I'm going to trust him. In the meantime, what do I do with this pain that I'm walking through? What do I do when I don't know where to turn next? I don't know how I'm going to make it through this. Give me some answers. How do I run through this?"

James says, "Well, here's what you do." In verse 5, for those of you in trials, **"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."** The word *wisdom* there is the biblical term for God's enigmatic ways, the plan of God that you and I just can never seem to figure out. Isaiah says his ways are higher than our ways. Our finite minds can't comprehend his infinite ways.

God has a different context for wisdom than man's wisdom. Think about this. All throughout the Scriptures, God's wisdom almost runs counter to everything we would naturally think of. God says in the Scriptures, "What's the way that you become strong? By becoming weak. What's the way that you become rich? By becoming poor, by giving everything away. What's the way that you become wise? By becoming foolish. What's the way that you become exalted? By humbling yourself. What's the way that you become beautiful? By looking inward as God sees you, not outward as man sees."

God's wisdom is almost the complete opposite of everything we've been taught in our culture. It doesn't work like man's wisdom works. When you're going through a trial and you don't know what to do, you're going to pursue God's wisdom, not man's; but understand, in pursuing God's wisdom, it isn't like man's wisdom.

The answer may not come like you think it should come because God doesn't operate on man's wisdom. He operates on his own, which is perfect, which is holy, which is sovereign, which is good, which is loving.

That's how God operates. Oftentimes, he will ensure your needs are taken care of long before you feel your wants should be.

You're sitting there praying, "God, I have no clue what's going to happen right now. I don't know why this is happening. I don't know why me. I don't know why now. I don't know how I'm going to make it through this, but, God, I know something to true about you. I know you're good. I know you're sovereign. I know you're holy. I know you're loving.

I know you have me in the palm of your hands, and so, God, right now I'm crying out. I don't know what to do. I need your wisdom. I need the strength to view this in a completely different way, a way that will press me further into your Son, that will allow him to be my sufficiency and not myself. God, I need you to carry me through this."

Do you think you pray a prayer like that and God is up in heaven just going, "Nope, not going to happen that way. In fact, to be honest I had actually completely forgotten about what happened with you. I was up here pressing buttons, and all of a sudden this happened"? Do you think God is doing that? No, God delights when his children come to him on their knees in an attempt to empty ourselves of our wisdom in exchange for his wisdom. God delights in that. So we can cling to him. We can trust him. We can believe him.

In verse 6, James gives us the heart, though, by which we need to come in asking for that wisdom. How do you perceive God? How do you call out to God in the midst of trial? Look at this in verse 6 and following. **"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. 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."**

What in the world does that mean? Does that mean when I come to God I need to come in 100 percent confidence and articulate perfectly what it is I need to say to him to get what I need in that moment? No. Does that mean there's no room to struggle and doubt? I wrestle in my own doubts. I struggle in it, but this is the exhortation in this verse. When you come to God, you come all the way. You come in full trust.

Here's what this means. Any of you dads in the room, have you ever tried to teach your children what it means to trust you during swim lessons? Have you ever done this? It's an amazing phenomenon that happens. In the past few years with my three daughters, I've been walking through this. Here's how it typically plays out.

You have your son or daughter on the edge of the pool. Usually they have their floaties on or something. They're sitting there, and where's dad? He's in the pool. What's he saying? "Jump. Just jump. Right now. Jump. I've got you." By the way, moms are horrible at this. Dads are about 50 feet off. "Jump. I got you." Moms are right up there, "Jump. Oh, you don't want to jump? Come here, baby. I got you. We'll deal with this next month." That's how moms do it. Dads...no. That's why I have to use dads in this illustration.

They're sitting there. "Jump. I am your father. Now jump." What's the kid thinking? The kid is right there on the edge of the pool, just kind of shriveled up, looking over at the water, looking back at mom, wetting themselves. They're sitting right there on the pool, and they're terrified. What's going on within them? Do you know what's going on within them?

In that moment, they're double-minded, because they're conflicted about what they know to be true about dad and what they know to be true about water and concrete edges. They're conflicted. That's what it means to be double-minded. "I trust you, but I don't like what is in front of me. I don't like these circumstances right here." You're split, and what's dad doing? "Jump. I'm your dad. I'm not going to drop you. You're not going to die on my watch. I've got you, and I will carry you. I will hold you. You can just jump," but that kid is torn.

The reality is as a father, I'm sitting there talking to my girls, going, "If you don't jump, as your dad I can't offer you anything, because until you jump, you want the thrill of jumping, you want the thrill of the excitement, but you are so terrified. Until you jump, the best you're ever going to get in that situation is sitting on the side of the pool in groveling regret of what could have been." Dad is sitting there saying, "Jump. I won't drop you."

In the same way, God says in the pool of divine trials you can't have both. You can't come with a half-trust in God and a half-trust in your circumstances. You can't be like that kid in the pool who believes dad but thinks the circumstances are greater than him. You have to come fully trusting that your God, your heavenly Father, is good and he will not drop you. That's what it means to have unwavering trust in the moment of trial. God's intent is in the darkest hours of your life, whatever it may be, you can cling to him. You can trust in his wisdom that's going on behind this trial, and you can know he will carry you through.

In verse 9, he's going to give two specific examples, two specific camps, that both struggle with trials. One was the poor people of the day. The other was the wealthy of the day and the big gaps that occurred between those two. He speaks to both of them about what it means to rejoice in the midst of trials. He says in verse 9 and following, **"Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation..."** I love the way the New American Standard translates this verse. It says, **"But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position..."** In other words, the first guy he's speaking to

is this lowly, broken guy who has never known what it's like to have anything. He's going to equate the rich and the poor with trials, with hardships

So the poor guy has always known difficulty, has always struggled, has always been hand-to-mouth, and it has always come the hard way. He's in the midst of this situation. He's watching everybody else flourish and assuming that's blessing and watching his brokenness and concluding that's judgment. He's struggling in that.

James, again, having a divine, theological understanding of suffering says to him, "No, to the brother who is in humble circumstances, you're to glory in that position. Why? Because in your state of brokenness, Christ can be made great. He can be made glorious because in your weakness he is strong, and you can revel in that because you know what it means to cling to Jesus. You know what it means for him to be your sufficiency instead of all these other little comforts around you that lull you into thinking you don't need God."

He tells them here, "It's better in your suffering the way that you are that Christ can be made much of than to be sitting high and pretty without Christ in another situation." Do you all remember the story of the blind guy in John, chapter 9? The disciples come to Jesus, and they say, "Hey, why is this guy blind? Was it his sin or was it his parents' sin?"

Because that's how the natural world always concludes. Something is wrong. Something is broken. Somebody did something. What does Jesus say? He says, "No, the reason he's blind is so the power of God can be manifest through him, it could be put on display. That's the reason he's in a broken situation right now."

These past couple of weeks, we've put before you our preschool minister Carl Brower and the fact that his young 9-year-old daughter Katherine had been diagnosed with a malignant tumor behind her right eye. Like you and I, if we were in that situation, the temptation in that moment is to go, "Why is this happening? Did we do something? Is God punishing us right now?" Anybody can have that temptation.

I love Carl because Carl, though it has been painful, though they have shed tears, and it has been hard to walk through this diagnosis, his hope is firmly planted in Jesus Christ. He sent out a tweet the day she got diagnosed. This is what he said in the tweet, very simple but very profound. "God is good. Our daughter has cancer. Those two statements do not contradict each other." It's Carl in the midst of grief and in the midst of pain, learning Christ has a glorious purpose that's going to be made through this. He, therefore, can perceive this with a sense of joy.

James says you find yourself as a lowly brother and broken situation, you rejoice because you know God is doing something amazing in and through this trial. James also says for the rich man as well. "You too need to rejoice in your humiliation." What does that mean? One of the thoughts here in this passage is the other camp James is speaking to are the wealthy, but in particular a group of wealthy folks who had recently lost their wealth. It had been stripped away, and in the midst of it they're in humiliation. They're in shame because they had all this stuff and it has all been taken away.

James says, "You need to rejoice in your humiliation of wealth because of a great lesson you are learning right now." That lesson is in the second part of verse 10 and following. **"...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,"** meaning you just learned a priceless lesson that riches and wealth are temporary.

If God takes it all away, then you rejoice in that trial as well. Why? Because you just found out what it means to cling to Christ for your sufficiency and not your wealth. I think it's interesting. Of all the godly people I've met in my life, like really-loved-Jesus, godly people, when I've asked them what has shaped them the most, it has never been the times of prosperity and blessing. It has always been the trials. That is where God shapes us the most.

It's in those moments that everything gets stripped away. There's nothing else to trust in but Jesus Christ to pull you through. Nothing else becomes more sufficient for you than him. He has always been your sufficiency. You just don't see it until everything gets stripped away. In other words, if all you get in the midst of your trial is more of Jesus, then you boast in it. You boast in it, and you rejoice in it. You glory in it, because that is worth everything.

Finally, we'll close here. In verse 12, he gives us the ensuing result of all this when he says, **"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."** Jesus put it this way in Matthew 5: **"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."**

Paul put it this way in Romans 8: "For I consider the sufferings of this present age, the present time, are not even worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Having a proper perspective of trials, you not only understand God is currently doing something in and through you in the midst of this trial, maturing you, sanctifying you, making his name glorious through this issue, but you also realize he has something for you on the other side of this thing called life.

There is a day coming when there will be no more suffering. There will be no more pain, no more sorrow. There is always for the believer a crown that follows the cross. That's what our hope looks forward to. More on that in week 3, but do you see right now why verses 1 thru 12 are here? What James is doing is he's establishing for the Christian God's greater purposes in trials, how to perceive those trials, not as some cosmic accident by a God who's puppeteering evil in your life.

You're to see trials with joy because you know who God is and the fact that he is using this painful time to accomplish something within you that goes far beyond in his wisdom what we can even fathom or imagine. He is working it out to produce in us a steadfastness, an endurance, a trust over the long haul that will make Christ look great and will ultimately press you further into his sufficiency as the One you can cling to in your time of need.

There's a lady by the name of Verdell Davis, who is an author, and she lost her husband in a tragic plane crash. She penned these words:

"God is doing a greater work in us, and that can only come as we learn to trust him no matter how dark the days and sleepless the nights. And it is only as we have been through the darkness with him that what we know with our heads slides down into our hearts, and our hearts no longer demand answers. The Why? becomes unimportant when we believe that God can and will redeem the pain for our good and his glory.... When I put the sovereignty of God beside his unfailing love, my heart can rest."

I don't know where you're at this morning. I don't know what trials you're walking through right now, but I can tell you there's an enemy who wants to deceive you right now, who wants you to believe that God is inflicting this upon you, that God has abandoned you, that he has forsaken you, but I want you to know if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, Christ has paid all the price for you. There is no more condemnation, and he is allowing this in your life for a reason.

You're going to have to get to the place where you're not trusting God based upon what you see, but based on the faith you have in his character, that he is good, he is sovereign, he is loving, he has not abandoned you, he has not forsaken you, and you're going to have to take that by faith. You're going to have to anchor in and allow the Holy Spirit to teach you something in this and comfort you in the midst of it, as painful and as horrific as it may be.

We know for a fact trials happen usually for one of three reasons. Usually, it's because of sometimes our own sin that puts us into some pretty cruddy situations and inflicts collateral damage back on ourselves and others, or it's the sin of others that have victimized you and led you into some pain and trial. Quite

often it's just simply from living in a fallen and broken world, waiting for a Redeemer and our hope to come.

Wherever you're at right now, I want to encourage you. First, don't walk in this thing in isolation. Almost all the times we encounter people in the church who ping the pastors here and kind of go, "Hey, I'm suffering right now in this thing," usually they never let us know when it's at a two or a three. They let us know what it's about a nine or a ten.

Secondly, when we know, almost always the individuals are in isolation and don't have a community to walk with. God has not wired you for that. Here at the Village we have opportunities for you to press into home groups, to do gospel-centered community together, to have kind of some Aarons who can come alongside you like Moses and hold your hands up in a time of trial while the battle wages. They can be that for you.

For those of you who are walking through just a season right now of such intense trial and you are in a place where you need some specialized care, I want to let you know we have Recovery every Thursday night at 7 p.m., where you can come here and you can find support and encouragement and accountability, and we will press you into the Lord and cover you with gospel-centered community in that place. You can process those trials through a gospel-centered lens, and we can begin to see the healing that needs to happen there. I want to encourage you to press into that.

Wherever you're at, anchor yourself in the hope of the Lord. Let's pray and we'll continue next week.

Father, we thank you that you have not forsaken us. We thank you that you have not left us alone in this life. When the trials come and they come as floods, Father, we can have an anchor firmly fixed in you, an unwavering sense of hope that you give us. Father, I just pray for this room. I pray for wherever we're at, God, that whether you would use this today as a reminder or maybe some of this is the very first time they've heard some of this, that you would use it to lay some foundations in our lives and perspectives of suffering so we may not view these trials in blasphemy towards you.

Father, I pray that we may use these trials through the lens of a loving God, who doesn't let anything happen in our life outside of your sovereign control and your sovereign purposes, and we can cling to the hope that you are good. So I pray for healing and peace in this room as we continue to walk through the suffering that's yet to come. We love you, and we thank you in Jesus' name, amen.