

The Pathway To Perfection

James 1:1-12

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We introduced this series last week and I want to encourage you if you miss any of these messages to go back online and catch up. When we do a series like this each message builds on top of one another, and we don't have time to go back and review each week, so I really encourage you go to our media page on our website or to our YouTube channel or to our podcast and you can download the messages and listen to them or watch them on your own time.

I also want to remind you that I put the manuscript that I preach from online each week as well and so if you miss any of the verses that we are looking at - I know I sometimes am flying through points and passages up here faster than you can take notes...all of the sermons are in pdf form for you on our media page.

While I'm talking about this and in this zone, I want to tell about a brand new page we just released this past week we're really excited. www.championforest.org/articles - we have different people writing on various topics, interviews with church planters we partner with through CF Connect, different podcasts you can listen to (**SHOW PAGE**) – it's a resource page for you that will be updated continuously.

This is just another way that we are trying to fulfill a couple of our FOCUS Priorities of making disciples and strengthening the Church. Check that out when you get a chance.

Last week we unpacked one verse in the book of James. We talked about who James was and the audience he was directing his letter to. This week we're going to look at eleven verses.

I'm entitling this message: **The Pathway to Perfection**

James 1:2-12 – “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. ⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶But 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. ⁷For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. ⁹Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, ¹⁰and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. ¹¹For 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. ¹²Blessed 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.”

Do you remember saying tongue twisters as a child? I remember a few of them.

- “Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.”

- How much wood could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?
- “Betty bought butter but the butter was bitter, so Betty bought better butter to make the bitter butter better.”

They are fun to say...you have to pace yourself and really think about what you’re saying or you will get twisted up – hence the “tongue twister.”

Well, today I’m going to give you the entire sermon...a synopsis of what we just read in (v. 2-12) in the form of a tongue twister. Here it is...I’ll put it on the screen for you:

Prayer provides a proper perspective on pain and problems that produces perseverance and helps us find purpose on the pathway to perfection.

Say this fast five times! This is the point James is making in this first section of scripture we are looking at today. Let’s look at it phrase by phrase and scripture by scripture.

First: **Prayer provides...**

Now, rather than starting with (v. 2), I want us to see what’s in the very middle of this passage because I believe this middle part is what is MOST crucial to this entire passage...to understanding it and walking in it! It brings and holds (v. 2-4) and (v. 9-12) together!

James 1:5-8 – “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.”

- If we are going to see trials as God sees them...i.e. have a proper perspective...
- If we are going to persevere in painful times and when problems of all different sizes come our way...
- If we are going to value what God values and find purpose in what it is we’re going through...

It will ONLY come through prayer. And James mentions here believing prayer! It’s a deep down confident trust in God type of praying – it’s NOT understanding God – because as we will see, we’re not going to understand everything that happens to us.

Believing prayer is asking the Lord for wisdom and having in your heart a commitment to obey when he answers the prayer and gives the wisdom. This is praying and really wanting God’s will – John Bunyan in *Pilgrim’s Progress* called the double-minded man character “Mister Facing Both Ways”.

Believing prayer faces one way – eyes are on God. And when we do this, he will help give wisdom to see a proper perspective on what we’re going through!

Prayer provides a proper perspective...

This is what we find in the first part of (v. 2). Look at it again: **James 2:2 – “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds...”**

We said last week that James is a get right to the point kind of guy. He loved his people, but he was very direct with his people. And I just want us to put ourselves in the place of these people receiving this letter.

They have been scattered due to persecution...kicked out of their homes. The mass majority of them are extremely poor. Some may have made it to a relative’s home IF they haven’t been completely abandoned by their loved ones for believing in this person, Jesus they say has raided from the dead. Others are living in strange or unfamiliar places, not knowing anyone– either way, it’s all new to them!

Chances are they are gathered in groups in someone’s home or out in a field under a tree on the first day of the week worshipping and praying. Most probably think they are a part of a cult. They’ve no doubt been mocked...ridiculed...their security is at stake!

And all of the sudden someone delivers a letter to them from their pastor. Finally!

- What’s our spiritual leader going to say?
- Surely he has some good news!
- Maybe he’s going to tell us it’s safe to come back to Jerusalem and come back home.

They open up the letter and start reading: “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” This is him!!! It’s actually Pastor James writing us! They keep reading: “To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings” – That’s us! He’s writing us...and they lean in closer...what’s he got to say:

“Count it all joy, my brothers (okay...joy), when you meet trials of various kinds...”

Now, I want you to keep in mind here what we said last week. Of the 108 verses in the book of James, over 50 of the verses are imperatives...they are commands – this is the first of them!

“Count” – some of your Bibles use the word “consider”. It’s this idea of making a deliberate decision...making a conscious choice.

Has Pastor James lost it? “Count what I’m going through as joy?”

What?! At first reading this sounds crazy...more than that it sounds unrealistic and insulting!

Illus. Visiting Hospitals - I was in our hospitals this week visiting and do you know what has never occurred to me? NOT one time as a pastor have I thought about walking into a room to see

someone that has cancer and said to them, “Oh, you have cancer? Count it joy? Oh, you’re going to be here longer than expected...pain is about a 10 on the smiley face chart there – consider it joy!”

Like...I would NEVER think about saying that! But, James right out of the gate, doesn’t hold anything back and says, “As you go through this trial...these troubles...think about it...consider it...have a perspective of joy.”

Now, we’re going to see here in just a moment WHY he says these things. He’s not insinuating that we take joy in the trial itself...he’s not suggesting that we try to deny the pain or problems we are up against – James knows that’s not logical or possible.

What he is saying though is, “As we go through trials in life, if we will think about what it will produce in us...what these trials will do FOR us – more specifically what they will do for our faith, then we can look at them from a proper perspective and count these pains and problems as joys.

And remember, it’s prayer that will help us see things this way!
Let’s unpack what we mean when we say pains and problems...that’s the next part of the tongue twister.

Prayer provides a proper perspective on pain and problems...

James is writing and uses the phrase “trials of various kinds” to be a one size fits all word for whatever it is we may be going through that is causing pain...whatever it is troubling us.

Now, we know pain and problems come in all different shapes and sizes. Around this room, there are all kinds of different pressure points that if we were to list it out, we could put a check mark by it and affirm, “Yes, that is a trial.”

- It could be as devastating as the loss of a loved one that you are having to endure...
- It could be the breakup of a marriage or family...
- It could be some tension in the workplace that is unsettling your spirit...
- It could be your kids having a rough start to the school year...

It could be anything...this is why James uses the word “various” here...literally the word is “multi-colored”...multifaceted.

And notice James doesn’t say here, “Count it joy IF you face trials...” He says, “Count it joy WHEN you face trials...” In other words, problems and pains not only come in different shapes and different sizes, but they are a part of life!

Trials are the great equalizer! It doesn't matter who you are, you are going to experience them. This is actually the point of (v. 9-11) – this whole section on the rich and poor.

James 1:9-11 – “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.”

At a first reading it sounds a little disjointed from what James is talking about as it relates to trial, but it's not at all. He's writing poor people for the most part – and guess what? Poverty can be considered a trial.

What about the rich? Some of you are thinking, “If that's a trial, sign me up!” If being rich is a pain or problem, I'd like to experience a few pains and problems.”

But, truly – think about it! One of the highest rated Netflix shows right now is Depp vs Heard – it's the story of the lawsuit between Hollywood actors Johnny Depp and Amber Heard...gives an inside look at their lawsuit and court trial, and in so doing their life. They are some of Hollywood's best.

- Leading actor.
- She was up and coming.
- They are married.
- Rich.
- Houses everywhere.
- Private planes.
- Ability to go where they want, do what they want – and guess what?

They are absolutely miserable. You could say their riches destroyed them – they could afford to feed their selfishness and greed and it's led to trials literally and figuratively.

What is James calling for here? Proper perspective. Rich or poor...young or old...if you breathe, you will experience trials in life...for the non-Christian and get this for the Christian as well.

Illus. Expectation vs. Reality – I think what James is doing here is setting expectations. You ever heard of the “frustration gap”? I think I've shared with you before. You met our residents earlier in the service, we had our resident orientation this past week and this was one of the things I talked to them about as it relates to their time here at CF (talk through Expectation vs. Reality).

This is what James is saying about trials. He's setting realistic expectations so we don't get frustrated as Christians. Isn't it true that sometimes we think...and we've even heard it before, “Come to Jesus and your problems will go away!”

NOT TRUE! What's true is if you come to Jesus, you will have someone with you in the middle of your pain and suffering, but there is NOT one promise in scripture that as a Christian we are somehow exempt from hardship or trials.

I know we KNOW this, but sometimes when we're in the middle of the fire, it's easy to forget! The thought sometimes is (internal – we'd probably never voice it, but it's there), "Surely, God is going to go lighter on us because we're believers?!"

Remember the reason James is writing this letter! He's writing TO Christians that have been forced to leave their home...they are scattered among various places and nations – forced out from where they were living!

- And why were they forced out?
- Why have they fallen on hard times?

Precisely because they ARE Christians! James exposes this horrid theology that God just wants you healthy and wealthy...happy and comfortable and builds on the whole of scripture that pain and problems are a part of life!

Trials are for the just and the unjust...it rains and sometimes pours on the sinner and the saint!

Ps. 34:19a – “Many are the afflictions of the righteous...”

Jesus taught in **John 16:33b – “...In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”**

Peter writes in **1 Peter 4:12 – “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.”**

Paul in **2 Tim. 3:12 – “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...”**

If you are going to make it through the pain and problems of life with your sanity, you've got to know up front they are a reality. We can't be taken aback when trials come our way. We accept them knowing they are producing something in us.

This is the next part of our tongue twister: **Prayer provides a proper perspective on pain and problems that produces perseverance...**

Another word for perseverance is steadfastness. And look at what James says in **James 1:3 – “for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.”**

In the workout world there is an entire training system known as “resistance training” which is meant to help strengthen your body and build endurance. If you want more strength, you have to have more resistance.

God uses trials to create spiritual bodybuilders. You've seen those huge musclemen and women – they can't even scratch their back, their muscles are so big!

Well, spiritually this is what God wants for us. "Persevering faith" is a muscle and the PRIMARY way it gets bigger and stronger is resistance – i.e. pains and problems in life.

1 Peter 1:6-7 – “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

God allows pains and problems in our life because he knows this is what grows us. It's been said that a faith that can't be tested can't be trusted!

When we know this and really believe this...when we have a proper perspective on pain and problems that produces perseverance...we realize God is after something in all this AND look at this next phrase:

Prayer provides a proper perspective on pain and problems that produces perseverance and helps us find purpose...

Often times when a trial comes we're not trying to discern the purpose of the trial...more times than not we are trying to figure out the reason for the trial – isn't this true?

And I'm not knocking this, it's the natural thing to do. We think what did I do to deserve this, and we start confessing sin like crazy thinking how do I get out of this?

Now, we know God is sovereign and nothing happens in our life outside of his divine purview. And typically pain and problems occur in our life...God allows them for one of two purposes:

- 1. Discipline reasons** – some trials enter our life because we are living disobedient to God! A biblical example of this would be Jonah! God gets our attention through these trials. (Heb. 12)
- 2. Development reasons** – some trials come our way as we have already stated simply to make us stronger...to develop our faith! I think of Daniel!

He was right in the middle of God's will when confronted with the choice to either stop praying three times a day or enter into the Lion's den. That trial was not for the purposes of discipline, but rather the development of his faith (even others faith!) – God is (Rom. 8:29) “conforming us to the image of Christ.”

Either way...whether God uses pain and problems as instruments to discipline or to develop, there is a purpose in it! Don't seek out so much the REASON for the trial you may be enduring, instead seek to discern the PURPOSE in it.

And you know what? You may not discover that purpose until sometime down the road maybe not even until eternity.

James 1:12 – “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.”

Maybe that’s when God will show us the reason he allowed a certain trial in our life. When we stand before him having stood faithfully under the test he sent our way or allowed...maybe he’ll explain and answer all our questions while bestowing upon us the crown of life.

Warren Wiersbe: “Nobody yet knows all that is in store for us in heaven; but this we do know: life today is a school in which God trains us for our future ministry in eternity. This explains the presence of trials in our lives; they are some of God’s tools and textbooks in the school of Christian experience.”

Illus. Teaching Team – We met and were discussing this text and someone brought up an exercise that psychologist Jonathan Haidt encourages people to do.

He encourages people to imagine you have a child to be born. And just before that child’s birth you are handed a script for that child’s life. And you are given an eraser and 10 minutes to edit your child’s life story. You could erase anything...delete anything. What would it be?

- You start reading and find out your child has a learning disability. What’s easy for most kids is going to be difficult for yours. Well, you don’t want that, so you quickly erase that part of your child’s life.
- You find out that your child will be especially strong-willed, and it’s going to cause quite a few problems. You don’t want that, so you erase that part of their personality.
- You see your child in college going through a difficult breakup. It creates depression and leads to 2 years of loneliness. You don’t want that for your child, so you erase the breakup.
- Your child is diagnosed with cancer and has to go through surgery, chemo, and radiation. Of course, you erase that.

But then you have to deal with the “what if”?

- What if you erased the challenge that teaches your child the strength of God and developed a deeper faith in you?
- What if you erased the struggle that’d give the rest of their life purpose?
- What if you erased the pain that would’ve taught them compassion?
- What if you erased the suffering that was meant to lead them and others to turn to God?

The point of the exercise is we have a limited view and we don't know what all is going on and why things happen the way they do!

We don't know what God is up to or what is best for our lives or the lives of our loved ones.

We can TRUST that God does though! Listen: Let's not fixate on the reason for the pain or problem, fixate on discerning the purpose behind it and trusting the Lord in the midst of it.

Illus. Aaron House

That trial God has allowed in your life may just be there so you can do what Paul says in:

2 Cor. 1:3-4 – “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 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.”

Sometimes, we go through situations in life so we can minister to those walking through the same kind of situations. Whatever it is you are going through, James makes very clear one purpose.

Look back at **James 1:2-4 – “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”**

This is the last part of our tongue twister: **Prayer provides a proper perspective on pain and problems that produces persevere and helps us find purpose on the pathway to perfection.**

The word “perfect” in (v. 4) means having reached its end! Maturity is another way it's been translated. This is God's top priority - NOT our comfort...NOT our convenience...he's after our completeness.

And in his economy, pain and problems help bring us to maturity. It's just part of the pathway to perfection.

Prayer provides a proper perspective on pain and problems that produces perseverance and helps us find purpose on the pathway to perfection.

Let's pray.

Lord's Supper

Hebrews 12:2 – “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

The cross was a trial...it was a pain...how did Jesus endure? The joy set before him – he had a proper perspective on what his trial would produce and result in – and it enabled him to endure.

Let this Supper today remind you that you have one that went through a trial...and therefore can identify with you in your trial...and is with you and will see you through the trial.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.