

We Are Called To Suffer Well

I want to tell you a quick story about a guy named Joe. Life was not kind to Joe. He was forced out of his family by his own brothers, framed for a crime he didn't commit, thrown in jail, and forgotten by his friends and the people he counted on. But through all of these things God was with him, and he was paying attention to where God was working these things for his good.

Years later, Joe was given a position of great authority and given an opportunity to pay his brothers back for the grief they put him through. His brothers had come upon hard times and Joe now had the ability to give them exactly what they needed for their families to survive or not.

But the response he had to them is the framework of our study this morning.

He looked at his brothers and said "What you meant for evil, God meant for good". (x2?)

Some of you might have recognized that story as Joseph of the old Testament. A life that is full of hardships and times that tested his faith.

Joseph saw an opportunity for God to work for good through the trials of his life and he chose to participate in it.

Though this story happened thousands of years ago, the truth of the matter is

trials are just as prevalent in our lives today as they were then.

Trials look different to all of us

- Problems with our kids
- An unexpected traffic jam on the way to work
- When the bills don't match the balance in your bank account?
- When you get the diagnosis.....it's cancer

Trials are a part of the human experience. We all have them. In fact we have such commonality in trials that we actually have begun to gather into groups based around them. It has become a sort of bonding agent for many of us.

- There are groups of veterans that gather together to help unpack and process trauma from their war experiences.
- We have recovery meetings for people who deal with similar addictions or vices.
- We even have groups of people who gather to help other people that are suffering from trials. (I.E. non-profit groups and humanitarian efforts, missionaries)

Trials form and shape our lives whether we like it or not. But..... we have an opportunity to choose how we are being shaped.

And THAT is what we are going to look at this morning.

We are going to be working our way through James over the next couple months. Before we get into it, I want to recap what we learned last week.

James, also known as Jacob, was the half brother of Jesus and was considered a pillar of the early church. He was known as a peacemaker and a man of prayer. A man who lived his faith so earnestly that around 62AD he was beaten to death for following Christ.

James is writing this letter to “the twelve tribes scattered among the nations” people that are facing immense persecution, loss of their homes, major trials. These people believed the truth of Christ, and James’ letter was meant to be an encouragement and a challenge to them.

The primary purpose of this letter was to teach us what it looks like to live as a follower of Christ.

Weldon summed it up like this: James is teaching us that...

“Authentic faith produces authentic deeds”

My lovely wife Linsey read through the passage for us a few minutes ago, and now we are going to break it all down together.

So, first section...

James 1:2

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds”

So let me ask you....Have you ever found trials to be a joyful time in your life?....

I didn't think so.....But isn't James saying we should be joyful in times of trials?

woohoo my car just died and I have 17cents in the bank, God is good!

No! Of course not. He's not saying we should be happy about trials.

I heard a quote about recently, maybe this is more what James is saying...

“Trials are not a reason to give up, Our pain is not an excuse to quit. Be strong!”

This sounds more like a grit your teeth and wait it out kind of thing. I don't see “joy” in that.

This is the same line of thinking that give us thoughts like “If I could just learn the lesson God is trying to teach me then the storm will pass, and then I can move on with my life”

Granted these are all ways of suffering, maybe even the ways we tend to suffer, but NONE of them offer lasting joy.

What I think we will find is that there is a way to suffer that allows us to engage with the truth of Christ and grow in the process.

James is telling us that

We are called to suffer well (repeat)

So, how do we do that?

First we need to...

I. Choose joy in the trial

Verse 2 says to [“Consider it pure joy”](#)

The word “Consider” is intended to mean an immediate, once and done action.

We are planting our flag.

We are saying “Right now, I am deciding that in my trials, I will choose pure joy”what the heck is pure joy?

It’s not *some* joy mixed with a bunch of grief. It’s whole, unmixed joy

My friends please understand that pure joy is not an merely an emotion, It’s...

a conscious decision to view your trial in light of the truth of Christ.

Why should we consider it pure joy?

James goes on in verse 3

[“**because** you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance”](#)

Check this out

That word *testing* is a really cool word.

It comes from the greek word **Dokimion** - That by which something is tried or proven.

It’s a word that refers to the refining process ancient silversmiths used to purify precious metals.

They would put their metals into a pot and heat it with fire. At a certain temperature the impurities of the silver would rise to the top where the smith could scoop them off. They would repeat this process over and over and over until all that was left was pure silver.

They would know that process was finished when they were able to look down and see their reflection on the surface.

The word “perseverance” comes from the Greek word **Hupomone** - cheerful or hopeful endurance.

So let’s just rephrase this verse with these new definitions in mind...

When you allow your faith to be purified through fire, you will develop hopeful endurance.

-read again slowly-

When you allow your faith to be purified through fire, you will develop hopeful endurance.

This is the first step to suffering well,

Now if we're honest, we're just not as smart as God, so the next step we need to take is to

II. Ask God for wisdom

Verses 4 & 5

*“Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything, **If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.**”*

Ok , but how does this wisdom actually help me in our time of need?

You might be on the verge losing your house and James is telling you to ask God for wisdom?

You don't need wisdom, you need a pile of cash to fall from the sky.

James warns us about this way of thinking. That's doubt. Doubt that God is all we need.

We must believe and not doubt

“But when you ask you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. 8 Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.”

If we are going to ask for wisdom, we must believe. James isn't pulling any punches here.

If you don't truly believe, don't even bother asking, you will receive nothing.

He calls them double minded and says they are unstable in all they do.

They say they believe but act as if they don't.

We are all guilty of this sometimes, this is the truth and we all need to remember that...

The riches of this world are fleeting

We have the freedom to choose them over God, but If we build our life holding on to our prosperity, our money, status, career, we will...

“... pass away like a wild flower.”

“For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.”

So now that we know what NOT to do...Let's better understand what this whole wisdom thing actually means here.

The word “wisdom” isn't just knowledge, it's the wisdom of God. The ability to see the bigger picture in light of the Gospel.

You see these lights up here? I can make these lights essentially any color I want to. All I have to do is swap out the lens to the desired color.

Though we may not see in colors like this, we have a tendency to view our trials through different lenses as well.

Most commonly through the lens of “why”

“God, Why are you letting this happen to me?”

“God why are you punishing me?”

“Why won't He just fix this for me?”

Do you see who the focus is here?

Me.....me.....me

This perspective paints a very selfish view of God. It sets us up for disappointment, unmet expectations, and honestly it makes God out to be our adversary.

Through the lens of “why” we will almost always find ourselves asking God to heal us, fix our situation, pay our bills, and so on.

Don't misunderstand me, prayer is essential, God loves for us to come to Him with our needs, and we are free to ask anything of Him.

But consider with me for a second that...

When our focus is only on ourselves, we may be trying to “pray away” the very thing God is using to grow us.

Let that sit with you for a minute

I once heard someone say “Please stop praying for me, I need all the problems I can get”

It sounds crazy but it's really true!

Trials are essential for our growth.

So..... what is wisdom?

Wisdom allows God to swap our lens of “why” for a lens of “how”.

God, *how* are you going to redeem this in my life?

How are you using this for good?

God *how* can I experience you more in this trial?

Lord *how* can you be glorified through this?

Now who is the focus?

This perspective is looking for God in our trials, looking for God's Glory, looking for growth.

That right there is the key to what we are talking about today.

We are called to suffer well

We must...Allow God to change our faulty lens of why, into a new lens of how

There's one more thing to keep in mind as you navigate through your trial remember to...

III. Recognize your favor

You see it's because of our favor that we can have such confidence in this.

But I want to warn you, trials are really good at causing us to doubt God's faithfulness and His affections for us.

God wants to redeem our trials

Look at verse 5 again...

*"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God **who gives generously to all without finding fault...**"*

He wants to see us all become mature and complete.

But we are masters of convincing ourselves that our circumstances are an indicator of our standing with God.

As soon as the trial hits me, I go into it:

"Ok God, what did I do this time?"

"This is probably because I said that thing that I shouldn't have said"

"God must be punishing me for not forgiving so and so"

That's simply not true.

God desires us all to be made whole

We have favor with God....

He is for us.....

We carry the favor of the Almighty God, do you believe that?

That's good news right thereAmen?

With that truth in mind we get to ask God how He is using the trial to grow us. When we hear Him, we can filter out all the fake news we tell ourselves, and know that God is good and for us even in the midst of trial.

You might struggle with this at first, that's OK, go back and ask God for more wisdom.

When we do, He will show up every time.

It's hard work, and it's not our natural human response, but when you choose in and allow God to work, you then have to honor of going to The Father to

IV. Receive your crown

James wraps all of it up with this ...

Verse 12

“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord promised those who love him.”

We say we believe when Jesus said, “come to me all who are weary and I will give you rest”

We say we believe when Jesus says “My yoke is easy and my burden is light”

So let's live like it.....

Don't fall into the patterns of our culture

We love to flaunt our hardships. We wear them like a badge of honor.

Just the other day I watched as a customer and a cashier argued over who had the more difficult upbringing. One girl was telling the other how broken her family was, then the other would pile onto that with how much more broken her family was. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Two perfect strangers arguing about who was more hardened by life. Proving their worth by the trials in their past.

It goes back generations, every one of you has a grandfather walked to school barefoot, in the snow, up hill both ways.

There is no honor in simply suffering

But there is a crown of life available to those who suffer well.

Let's shed this badge of honor and receive our crown of life.

We are children of the King, co-heirs of Christ

Abundant life is available to us now, if we believe

I have a friend who had a whole run of hard times, trials in his life. But he engaged with God in that process. He allowed the refining work of the Spirit to show him his favor, and his high position.... And his faith grew to new heights.

I think some of you may know him. I see him often and I ask every time, "how are you today?" And without fail, He smiles and says "I'm blessed brother".

Wholeness, Pure joy, Wisdom, Perseverance, Abundant life

It's all on the table If we choose into the refining work of The Father....

We are called to suffer well

And what better way is there than with our Heavenly Father?

And just like the ancient silversmiths, when our faith has been fully tested by fire, God will be able to look down on us and see His reflection. Perfect and whole, lacking nothing.

It's not the easy way, but I can guarantee that if you engage with Him in this process and let go of the fleeting things of this world, you won't regret it. In fact I'd be willing to bet that you will get to experience God in ways you never could have before.

You'll experience freedom, joy, and a new emboldened faith.