

JAMES 1:2-4
Benefits of Trials pt 2

I came across this statement this past week. It may resonate with where some of you are right now. **Life is an onion. You peel it off, layer by layer, until you find there is nothing left of it – except tears in your eyes’.** BIG God by Orlando Saer

Honestly, that is a perspective from one who has a small view of God and a big view of man, politics, trials, and the world in general. If there’s ever been a time when we need a BIG God, it is NOW.

EX: I don’t say this in a partisan way, but when any one government employee dies, it shouldn’t cause the kind of meltdown displayed by so many people this past week. In a nation of 340 million people, if any one person is that powerful, then it seems like something is out of whack. When God is down-sized in a culture, then people get big. Biblically, God IS BIG, and we are small.

Isaiah 40:15 **Look, the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are considered as a speck of dust in the scales; He lifts up the islands like fine dust**

Last week we started with the gut punch from James – “Count it all joy when you encounter various trials”. We got an initial glimpse at how God uses trials for our benefit when we let endurance have its perfect result so that we might be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.. James can say this because he has a BIG God.

We’ll get back to the theme of suffering in a moment, but first we need an overall perspective on James:

This is a very practical book. Some of you will love it for that reason. Others will want more of the theological and doctrinal context that serves as the basis for what James is saying. But James doesn’t offer that.

I guess he is assuming that his audience is grounded in the context – THE LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION OF Jesus – James’ brother.

James is NOT writing a book about biblical wisdom to show us how to live our best life now and become champions for Christ so that we can feel good about ourselves. A lot of people think that is the purpose of church and that is my job as a pastor. IT’S NOT.

My job is NOT TO give you nuggets of wisdom so you’ll be inspired to be a better you. That’s NOT what scripture is about. It’s not about you or me or us, in that sense. It’s about God and our need to lean on Him in every area of life BECAUSE WE CAN’T CHANGE OURSELVES.

The Disney philosophy of “look inside yourself” to find your truth and the strength to carry on IS NOT BIBLICAL. Nor is the Osteen tag line of “discover the champion in you.”

The message of the Bible is to face up to your moral and spiritual brokenness so that you’ll throw yourself on Jesus’ mercy – Charles Garland

There is a healthy tension in the Christian life between facing our brokenness as we rest in Christ and “being doers of the Word.” That tension is real in scripture and in our own lives. The religious side of us wants to motivate people to try harder to do better. The Gospel side of us wants to motivate people to trust Jesus because we can’t do better. Healthy Christians wrestle with that tension. That’s not a bad thing when it causes us to feel our need for Jesus more deeply. James

wants us to feel our need for Jesus more deeply. He does that by exposing the hidden areas of our lives.

With THAT UNDERSTANDING in mind, James proceeds to lay out numerous areas where we must face our own frailty. We want to invite Jesus into our lives as a guest and only let Him see the areas where we think we've cleaned up so we can feel good about ourselves. Jesus comes in as the new owner and he wants to see all the cracks in the foundation, the leaky roof, and the squirrels in the attic. He refuses to be treated as a guest. He demands to be seen as the owner who has who has access to everything.

Don't act as if He doesn't already know the trouble spots.

The good news IS NOT "Jesus and James have a word of wisdom for you so that you can try harder to do better in order to be approved by God." That is NOT good news. That is a burden, but some of you like the challenge and think, "Oh boy, a TO DO LIST. I've got this."

The Good News is that Jesus already accomplished everything on the list so that we just need to trust Him. As we trust and rely on Him we can expect to see change in our lives, but that is NOT the basis for God's approval, nor should it be our primary motivation.

Now, back to the question of trials and their purpose in our lives.

Benefits of Trials James 1:1-4

1 James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.

2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

From a human perspective, there are lots of reasons NOT to obey 1:2-4. We can rationalize or tell ourselves all sorts of things...

"God didn't really say that."

'If He said it, God didn't mean it in MY situation'

"God's not in this so I'll pass on the counting it all joy part"

But there is ONE EXCELLENT reason to obey it.....GOD SAYS IT.

There is a big hurdle that we have to get over in the Christian life – Trusting that God is in control of all things and that He is not dodging that reality.

When we stop trying to cover for God and start Trusting Him, our lives get ALIGNED with the God of the Bible. That alignment may be painful, but that's OK. Just read the Psalms

God is not like most politicians or US – when something goes wrong He doesn't blame someone else.

As we read the Bible, we don't find God washing his hands of the troubles of the world. He doesn't say 'Not my fault'. Quite the reverse. He takes responsibility. He's quite clear that these things would not happen but for his decision. Big God 772

With the context of the persecution and dispersion of believers, feel the force of v. 2

James gives a divine perspective of their trials – designed by god and come from God, so they are to be a subject of joy because of what trials produce in us – endurance so that we are complete, lacking in nothing.

TRIALS BRING THINGS THAT DON'T COME OTHERWISE

Christlikeness - God uses suffering, in the first place, to shape his children. He has a clear objective for us and that is to make us more like his son Jesus. And he will use everything at his disposal to achieve that aim:

Perhaps you've heard this by Robert Browning Hamilton – "Along the Road"

I walked a mile with pleasure,
She chattered all the way,
But left me none the wiser
For all she had to say.

I walked a mile with sorrow
And never a word said she,
But oh the things I learned from her,
When sorrow walked with me.

One aspect of Christlikeness is...

- **humility**- Paul, a great leader for the church with gifts and revelations, he has courage to face down others, yet 2 Cor 12 speaks of a thorn in flesh. Paul sees that without suffering he would have been too proud. Even Paul was given a particular thorn in the flesh in addition to all the other sufferings so that he might be molded into the likeness of Jesus.

-**Holiness** – God uses pain and trials for our growth. This is part of the fatherly discipline process described in Hebrews 12 – it is, or will be online (Feb 23, 2020)

CS Lewis – the Problem of Pain

"We are, not metaphorically but in very truth, a Divine work of art, something that God is making, and therefore something with which He will not be satisfied until it has a certain character. Here again we come up against what I have called the "intolerable compliment."

Over a sketch made idly to amuse a child, an artist may not take much trouble: he may be content to let it go, even though it is not exactly as he meant it to be. But over the great picture of his life—the work which he loves, though in a different fashion, as intensely as a man loves a woman or a mother a child—he will take endless trouble—and would doubtless, thereby give endless trouble to the picture if it were sentient. One can imagine a sentient picture, after being rubbed and scraped and re-commenced for the tenth time, wishing that it were only a thumb-nail sketch whose making was over in a minute. In the same way, it is natural for us to wish that God had designed for us a less glorious and less arduous destiny; but then we are wishing not for more love but for less."

When life is painful, it is not God punishing us for some particular sin we have committed. Rather it is God sculpting us into the spiritual works of art he plans to make of us.

-compassion- we learn to relate to others who suffer. Last week I referred to the event where I shattered my ankle – 1995. In 1998 I had it surgically fused. The whole process has helped me identify with those who suffer in various ways.

-faith - "Are you ready to give up on this whole faith thing"? Trials show if we want to EMBRACE God and His agenda for who He is, or if we want to get him to serve our agenda. Do you say, "God if you don't do this, then I'm out" Honestly, that may be your first response, but it won't be the final response if we are growing in our faith.

Trials show us where our heart is.

Spurgeon – trials focus our faith as we trust God in the affliction.

It would be a very sharp and trying experience to me to think that I have an affliction which God never sent me, that the bitter cup was never filled by his hand, that my trials were never measured out by Him nor sent to me by His arrangement of their weight and quantity.

“COUNT IT ALL JOY...”

EVERY TRIAL IS A THEOLOGICAL MOMENT; it is not some random event that slipped past God. It has a divine purpose- That we might grow in endurance. If you fail to do the theological work then you are prone to being overwhelmed up by your trial. You become spiritually vulnerable to the temptation that may be attached to the trial.

The biblical response is to lean into biblical theology and consider God's truth rather than giving in to the feelings of the moment.

**** But we live in an age in which emotions are king; they are supreme. Rather than being triggered by some event or offended by something that you count as a trial, try doing what God SAYS – count it all joy.**

**** That approach would be an end to much of the chatter on twitter and FB. Or, it would at least change the tone of social media. Insults, being offended, anger, and snarky comments would be replaced by expressions of joy, faith, and trust in the sovereign goodness of God and His divine plan for our growth.**

HOW DO WE GROW IN TRIALS AND count it all joy?

-Pray honestly before God

-Ask for spiritual endurance

-Give thanks in advance for what God will do through your trial – things seen and unseen

- Lean into God so that you don't give in to fear.

- Were you praying and obeying before the trouble, keep on doing it. Stand firm IN THE STRENGTH OF HIS MIGHT or you will become bitter and warped. Stand firm by Christ to become complete, lacking in nothing.

Consider **THE ONE** who persevered for us Heb 12:2 Jesus stood fast to save his sheep. Christ did this for us, took hell for us. He stood. "look what I endured for you."

He hyperstood against hell for us. His love endured hell, he can endure our sins. Stand your ground for Christ against, sickness, loneliness, oppression, death etc.

Consider also that you can persevere. We want and need endurance = hyperstand. stand your ground. **Col 1:11; 1 Pet 1:5-9**

COME TO THE TABLE to find spiritual refreshment

	THINK ABOUT THAT. AMEN