



Everything Sacred

Kicking It Off

What's one thing you know you should do regularly (like flossing or exercising) but consistently forget or skip?

Read

James 1:22-25

Summary

When you look in a mirror first thing in the morning, you see everything, the bedhead, the sleepy eyes, maybe yesterday's makeup? The mirror isn't being mean, it's just showing you what's really there. That's what the Bible does for our lives. It shows us the real picture, not to make us feel bad, but to help us see things clearly.

We spend so much time trying to stay positive and upbeat about everything, but real faith isn't about pretending everything's perfect. It's actually about looking at your messy life and realizing that God loves you anyway. Like, really loves you, mess and all. The thing is, we're all playing this short game, making five year plans, ten year plans, trying to control everything. Meanwhile, God's working on an eternal timeline. It's like we're planning what to have for lunch while he's planning the rest of forever. When you really get that, when you understand that the stuff we stress about is temporary but God's love is forever, it changes how you see everything.

It's not enough to just know this stuff in your head. You can know gossip is wrong, but if you're still talking about people behind their backs, what good is that knowledge? Real faith shows up in what you do, not just what you know. It's about actually living differently because you believe God's way is better than your way.

Stop trying to run your own show. When you really understand that God's got a better plan than your best ideas, you can relax a bit. Do the right thing not because you have to earn points, but because you trust that his way actually works better. That's what real faith looks like in everyday life.

Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?
2. Scripture acts like a mirror that shows us both our brokenness and God's love for us. What area of your life have you been avoiding looking at honestly, and what might God be wanting to show you about it?
3. We often make plans for the next 5 or 10 years while God operates on an eternal timeline. How does focusing on temporary goals sometimes prevent you from seeing what God might be doing in your life right now?
4. There's a difference between knowing what's right and actually doing it. What's one area where your knowledge about following Jesus hasn't translated into action, and what's holding you back?
5. When God blesses us, we sometimes forget the source and start taking credit ourselves. Can you share a time when success or blessing led you to rely more on yourself than on God?
6. If you truly believed that everything you do could be done in Jesus's name, from work tasks to casual conversations. What daily activity would be most challenging for you to approach as sacred rather than ordinary?

Significant Quotes from Sermon

"Faith is not blind. It is a faith that's the opposite. It's that our eyes have been opened to see things as they really are. I think at the end of the day, the biggest issue I have when people think of faith is thinking that we're irrational, that we aren't acting and operating in reality. Faith is seeing the world as it really is."

"When you look in a mirror and see your reflection and you see your face and you see all the details and you see all the pores and you see all the dirt and all the grime, it's not offensive. It's not offensive in the sense that it's saying you're a bad person or you're terrible. It's showing you as things really are."

"The Bible is not all about knowledge. The Bible is about submission. And again, this is where it's like, 'Submit? I'm never going to submit. I know we're very American. I'm not going to submit under anyone.' No, no, no. The Bible is about submission to God's perfect will."

"If God was calling you to a dinner where you are going to sit at his right hand, would you dress up? Would you clothe yourself with good works? You could come in filthy rags and you're still welcome. The question is: you've been invited by the King of Kings, by the Lord of Lords, by the Creator of the universe. He has invited you to eat with him."

Sermon Notes

James 1:22-25

22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. 25 But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

Outline

1. The Mirror of Scripture Reveals Truth

- a. Faith is not blind belief but seeing reality clearly
 - i. The world cannot view God correctly due to sin's filters
 - ii. Special revelation through Jesus was necessary to comprehend reality
 - iii. Faith begins by seeing our brokenness, not through optimism
- b. Scripture functions as a spiritual mirror (James 1:23-24)
 - i. Shows us as we really are without condemnation
 - ii. Reveals we are special, sacred, loved by God despite our sin
 - iii. We are granted eternal life with no condemnation in Christ
- c. The problem of being hearers only
 - i. We have extensive Bible knowledge but lack submission
 - ii. We make God a sidekick to our will instead of submitting to His
 - iii. We look in the mirror, agree with truth, then live by our own will

2. The Sacred Versus the Natural

- a. The natural is temporary, the sacred is eternal
 - i. Natural world operates as survival of the fittest with no spiritual mirrors
 - ii. Sin pervades the natural order (Ecclesiastes: life is a breath/wisp)
 - iii. Error comes when we try to make the temporary eternal
- b. God makes everything sacred through creation
 - i. We are special because our Creator deems us significant
 - ii. The gospel transforms the broken/temporary into eternal/sacred
 - iii. Baptism represents death of old nature and resurrection to new life
- c. God's will is eternal while ours is shortsighted
 - i. Our plans may be good for 10-50 years; God's will is eternal
 - ii. Even 10,000 years is but a speck to God
 - iii. Choice between temporary goodness or eternal blessing should be obvious

3. Living as Doers, Not Just Hearers

- a. The call to remember and not forget (Deuteronomy 8:11-14)
 - i. Following God's will brings blessing
 - ii. Danger of attributing blessings to ourselves when prosperous
 - iii. Temporary blessings fade but eternal blessing never leaves
- b. Doing is response, not earning salvation (1 John 2:3-6)
 - i. Simple response: Love God and love others like Jesus
 - ii. Obedience matters more than knowledge (example: knowing gossip is wrong vs. not gossiping)
 - iii. Walk in the same way Jesus walked
- c. Make everything sacred (Colossians 3:17)
 - i. Do everything in the name of Lord Jesus

- ii. When we fail, seek confession and repentance
 - iii. Doing becomes pathway to blessing, not burden
- d. The eternal blessing is God's love
 - i. Not temporary prosperity but eternal relationship
 - ii. God loves you, wants to be with you forever
 - iii. If invited to dine with the King, would you not prepare yourself?
 - iv. Give God your will: "Not my will but yours be done"

Notes

When we talk about faith, we need to strip away the religious veneer that has accumulated over centuries, all the anecdotes and definitions that have made the word feel distant and abstract. Faith isn't about blind belief or irrational hope. It's actually the opposite: faith is about seeing reality with new clarity, understanding the world as it truly is rather than as it appears through our limited, temporary perspective. The world around us, whether by deliberate choice or simply because it exists in darkness, fundamentally misunderstands who God is and what reality consists of. Sin creates filters and distortions that prevent us from seeing God correctly. This is why special revelation was necessary, why Jesus, the Word of God, came to reveal divine truth to humanity. We could never figure out the intricacies of God's character on our own. The reality we inhabit needs divine illumination for us to truly comprehend it.

Think about what happens when you look in a mirror. You see your face with all its details, the pores, the dirt, the imperfections. The mirror isn't being offensive or cruel; it's simply showing you things as they really are. Scripture functions as this kind of spiritual mirror, revealing deeper truths about our condition. This revelation isn't meant to condemn us or make us feel guilty. It's meant to show us reality. Here's where many of us get it wrong: we approach Christianity and scripture thinking that being positive and optimistic is the goal. We want to focus on the good, to be happy, to see only the bright side. But the word of God doesn't begin by trying to make you feel happy. It begins by showing that you are broken. This is where real faith starts, because while God is good all the time, unchangeable and perfect in his characteristics, faith isn't just knowing these facts about God. Faith begins when you see your sin, your brokenness, your insufficiencies, and understand that God sent his son to die for you despite all of this. Faith isn't about positivity or being overly optimistic, thinking that God will make everything work out perfectly because he's good and everything follows his plan. While those things are true, faith is actually about realizing your brokenness and your need for a God who makes all things new. It doesn't deny the brokenness; it looks that brokenness directly in the face.

The world operates in an existence without spiritual mirrors, without ways to reveal deeper truth. Everything is viewed as merely natural. Many people today see value only in what is natural, in letting things be as they are. But there's a problem with this perspective. The natural world is a dog eat dog existence where the strong survive and those with more resources come out on top. When people tout the natural as good, as the way things should be, they're missing something crucial: sin pervades the natural order. This doesn't mean we should throw away the natural world entirely. When we read Ecclesiastes, Solomon, the wisest man in the world, understood that existence is like a

breath, a wisp. The natural isn't inherently bad; the problem comes when we take this temporary breath and try to make it eternal, when we try to give it ultimate importance. The natural is temporary. The supernatural, the sacred, is what is eternal. And the natural world is yearning for the sacred, longing for something more significant than what we can see, feel, and touch. The word of God serves as our lens into this higher reality. When scripture redefines the natural, it's no longer just matter, just molecules bouncing around. The word of God begins by declaring that God made everything, and therefore, because God made it, it is sacred, special, and significant. The world wants to hear that individuals are special and significant, that each person has their own unique personality and importance. But the natural worldview can't truly support this. It can only say that we're molecules and atoms in motion, that consciousness is just a survival mechanism, and when we die, we return to nothingness. The significance the world tries to speak about is inherently limited. When God sees you, he declares, "You are mine. You are my creation. I have made you in my image." The word of God isn't meant to condemn; it's revealing a deeper truth meant for eternity, that you are God's creation. You are special not because of something inherently special within you, but because your creator has deemed your identity special, significant, important, and sacred.

As we learn to follow Christ's example, we see that Jesus was less interested in the temporary and more interested in what was sacred and eternal. This didn't mean he discarded everything temporary; rather, he prioritized correctly. The father's will, God's plan, these were sacred and eternal. Human will, desires, and temporal problems were secondary. The beauty of the cross is that it's where the sacred and holy meets the broken and temporary. The entire gospel is about how God takes what was broken in the temporary realm and transforms it to be eternal and sacred. We are being transformed from our broken, sinful, temporary natures into an eternal nature. When someone is baptized, when they're immersed in water, it represents an understanding that the old has gone, that this temporary nature is being transformed. But first it must die. As it dies, the person is raised into new life. This isn't just cause for polite applause; it's a celebration because we're witnessing something being transformed from the ordinary into the sacred. The word has given new identity, new definition to what it means to live.

James provides a striking image: if anyone hears the word but doesn't act on it, they're like someone who looks intently at their natural face in a mirror, then goes away and immediately forgets what they looked like. The mirror of scripture shows us that we are special, sacred, loved by God, deemed children of God, given new identity in Christ where we are beloved by the King of the universe. We've been granted eternal life to be with him forever, not just for this life but for all eternity. There is no condemnation now in Christ Jesus, nothing that can separate us from the love of God. Looking into scripture

should be like looking into a mirror and having a conversation. In our temporal, mortal, sinful bodies, we look and see how broken we are, all the cracks and dirt and grime. And God, through his word, responds: "And yet I love you. And yet I want you as my child. That's why I sent my son to die for you, because despite your sin, despite your brokenness, despite all these things, you are special." But here's the problem: we're really good at Bible study. We have extensive knowledge, years of learning and understanding. But the Bible isn't primarily about knowledge; it's about submission. Not submission in some oppressive sense, but submission to God's perfect will. Sometimes we don't have faith that our will is inadequate. Sometimes we have faith in our own inadequate will. We're excellent at making plans, creating checklists of things that will make us good, and we turn God into a sidekick to our own will. The word shows us that our will is broken, temporary, shortsighted. We play the short game, thinking if we do certain things, they'll be good for this year, the next ten years, maybe even fifty years. But even ten thousand years to God is but a speck. God's will isn't bound by timelines; it's eternal. When we look into the word, we realize our will might be good for the next decade, but God's will is good forever. If given a choice between ten years of goodness, where everything goes according to plan, or an eternity of blessing, an eternity with the Lord where everything he touches turns into blessing, which would you choose? The answer seems obvious, yet if we choose the Lord, why don't we live our lives that way?

This is what James addresses. We look in the mirror of scripture, we come to church, we hear sermons, and we say, "Yes, Lord, your will is good. Your way is perfect. Thank you for Jesus. Thank you for all you've done." And then we go live our lives for the next ten years based on our own will, saying, "Let my will be done." We look in the mirror of scripture and completely miss the point. We say we submit to God's will, but we're just hearers. What does it mean to be a doer? A doer sees the value of God's will, sees that the things of this world will pass away, and recognizes it would be foolish to choose the temporary ten years because they will fade. It would be wise, blessed even, to choose the way of the Lord. Paul writes in First Corinthians about how love never ends, but prophecies will pass away, tongues will cease, knowledge will pass away. We know in part and prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. He explains that now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now we know in part; then we shall know fully, even as we have been fully known. Your physical life will pass away. That's reality, regardless of your faith. We all must wrestle with this existential truth that we exist in a temporary system. We will all die. This isn't optimistic, but it's true. The mirror of scripture reveals this mortality to us. But the beauty of scripture is that it also shows that perfection will come. There is eternal life to look forward to, a life we call heaven, but heaven is really just living with the Lord forever, walking with him, being with

him. If heaven were simply a continuation of this life forever, without the perfect presence of God, just us with wings and our friends for eternity, it would become unbearable. But heaven is when the perfect comes, when the sacred mirror is no longer just a lens into the sacred but becomes reality itself. All things become part of God's kingdom, where there is no rust, no thieves breaking in to steal, only perfect peace. That's the eternity we long for.

The application isn't just to do good works and love each other. It's about remembrance. Deuteronomy warns: "Take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes... lest when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply, and your silver and gold is multiplied... then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God." When you start living in the reality of God's will, recognizing that everything is in his hands, that your ten year plan pales in comparison to God's eternal will, you will be blessed. God tells the Israelites they will follow his will and their herds will multiply, they'll build nice houses, they'll become rich. But the application isn't to become rich. The application is to remember who provided that blessing. The problem comes when we make our temporary success, our riches, gains, and comforts into our god, saying this is what life is all about. That's being stuck in the temporary. We need to remember the God who saved us. For believers, as we look in the word and follow God's will, we will be blessed. This isn't prosperity gospel; it's simply true that following God's perfect will brings blessing. The issue is that we forget. We forget that God is good, faithful, gracious, and forgiving. We begin to claim credit for the blessings God has given us, saying, "I made that. I did that. See what I accomplished." We make God our sidekick and boast about how our faithfulness earned us blessings. This toxic thinking suggests that more faith equals more material blessings. The point isn't about the blessing itself, whether temporary or eternal. It's about the fact that God loves you, wants to be with you, wants relationship with you. The blessing will fade. If you connect God's love to temporary blessings, when those blessings disappear, as they're meant to, you'll lose faith. Christians need to understand this: when we complain to God about temporary blessings going away, we need to look at the cross. All temporary blessings may disappear, but you'll never lose your eternal blessing.

James continues: "But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourself." Your response to the word is what matters. This was never meant to suggest you just need to do good things and be good people. It's about response. When you see sin in the world and in your life, when you see all the dirt and grime, you have a responsibility to respond. The response is simple: be like Jesus. Jesus explained that the commandment is to love God and love others. That's how we respond to the word. First

John tells us that whoever says they know God but doesn't keep his commandments is a liar. But whoever keeps his word, in them truly the love of God is perfected. Whoever abides in him ought to walk in the same way Jesus walked. When you have this lens of viewing reality on this higher, supernatural level, there's only one way to live: like Jesus. Living sacrificially, graciously, with forgiveness, in obedience and submission to the Father's will. In light of scripture, there should be a desire to follow the word above all else, primarily above our own will. Consider something simple like gossip. We all know it's wrong. If knowledge were all that mattered, we'd be fine. But the issue isn't knowledge; it's obedience. In those moments when you're about to talk behind someone's back or mock them without their knowledge, it's not about your righteousness. It's about understanding that you proclaim Jesus as your savior, that he rescued you though you were a sinner. Would Jesus gossip about you? When we realize the answer is no, we should ask why we're still living according to our own will instead of becoming more like him.

Paul writes in Colossians: "Whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." We should make everything sacred, not just our time at church. Literally everything should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus. When you attempt to do everything in Jesus's name, you'll quickly see how sinful you are, because you can't do everything in his name. That's part of the process, recognizing your sinfulness. When you do things you can't do in the Lord Jesus's name, seek confession and repentance. He will forgive you. But our work is to do everything in his name. When you come to church, do it in Christ's name. When you eat, that's why we pray, doing it in his name. When you drive, do it in Jesus's name. When you do household chores, do it in Jesus's name. Make it sacred. You're not making it holy; God has made your life holy. He has marked you by the blood of the cross, so now everything can be done in Jesus's name. You'll make mistakes, but he's already forgiven them, so continue doing everything in his name.

James concludes: "But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing." It is about blessing. The sacred will of God knows no other way than to be a blessing. God is so good that everything he does is a blessing. Everything he touches becomes holy, everything he speaks is perfect, everything he does is good. Even his judgments are better than we could ever make. The more you see God's goodness and blessings, the more you see how everything God does is a blessing, it doesn't create pride and arrogance. It humbles you because you realize you don't deserve any of it. The sinful part of you wants to claim you deserve more, but the reality shown in scripture's mirror reveals how broken you are and how deep God's love is. So you look and say,

"God, I don't deserve this," and God responds, "You're right, you don't, but I deem that you are worthy because of what I've given to you through Christ." Doing is no longer a burden; it's our pathway to blessing, not just temporary blessing but eternal blessing. Doing is a response to what God has already done. This isn't about working for salvation or fearing its loss. It's about responding to what God has already done for you. If you respond in faith, understanding that all things are made for him, by him, and through him, you'll begin to realize that living for eternal things rather than temporary ones brings God's blessing time and time again. The sacred blessing is that God loves you. This isn't a temporary blessing that will fade like lottery winnings. The eternal and sacred blessing that will never leave you is that God loves you, cares for you, wants to be with you, wants to live with you, wants relationship with you. This is where faith comes in: Do you actually believe he loves you? The Bible shouts at you that you are a sinner, broken, messed up, deserving of all the brokenness you've caused because you've lived life on your terms. But God loves you and sent his son to die for you. If you profess his name, proclaim him Lord and savior, if you desire forgiveness, God will grant you forgiveness and new identity. This blessing is sacred, eternal, forever and always. If God were calling you to a dinner where you would sit at his right hand, would you dress up? Would you clothe yourself with good works? Not because it affects your invitation, you're already welcome, you could come in filthy rags and still be welcome. But you've been invited by the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the creator of the universe. He has invited you to eat with him. God has given you a gift that will never go away, and if you truly see the depth of his love for you, you would be humbled and in awe.

We need to begin seeing everything as sacred, our lives as sacrifice unto him, giving him our will and saying, "Not my will be done, but your will be done," because our will can only produce the temporary. When you give your will to him, God will bless you and transform you to be more and more like Christ.

Blog

As many of you know, I've caught the running bug, and ran the Seattle Marathon last year. I'm currently in the thick of training for the Portland Marathon right now. Marathon training has taught me so many lessons, but in a nutshell endurance training has taught me that in order to go far you must learn to slow down, eat enough, and train consistently. There's something special about mile twenty of a marathon. Your glycogen stores are depleted. Every muscle fiber screams for rest. The finish line exists somewhere beyond the horizon, invisible but promised. In that moment, finishing isn't about speed or strength. It's about something deeper. It's about trusting your training, believing in the process, and taking one more step when everything in you wants to stop.

James understood this kind of endurance. When he writes about perseverance under trial in James 1:12-15, he's not talking about a sprint. He's describing the long, steady faithfulness that characterizes genuine faith. The blessed person, James tells us, is the one who perseveres under trial. Not the one who avoids it. Not the one who conquers it quickly. The one who endures. The Greek word James uses for "perseveres" is *hupomeno*, which literally means "to remain under." Picture someone carrying a heavy load up a mountain trail. They don't throw off the weight. They don't run ahead recklessly. They remain under it, steady and determined, one step at a time. That's the image James paints of faithful endurance.

But here's where we often get confused. We think the work of faith means we're supposed to muscle through trials with our own strength. We imagine God standing at the finish line, arms crossed, waiting to see if we're tough enough to make it. That's not the gospel. The work of faith during trials is actually the work of waiting on God's power. We're not proving our strength to God. We're learning to trust His strength in our weakness. James promises something for those who persevere: "having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him." Notice the progression. Perseverance leads to being tested and approved (the Greek word *dokimos* means something proven genuine, like metal refined by fire). This approval leads to receiving the crown of life. But look at how James ends verse 12, because it changes everything. This crown is promised to "those who love him."

Love is the secret ingredient. We don't endure trials to earn God's love. We endure because we already love Him. Love sustains us when our strength fails. Love keeps us faithful when the path seems impossible. A spouse sits by a hospital bed through long nights because of love. A parent works multiple jobs to provide for their children because of love. We persevere under trial because we love the One who first loved us.

Now James takes a sharp turn in verse 13, and we need to pay attention. "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil,

nor does he tempt anyone." Wait, didn't James just say God tests us through trials? Yes, but testing and tempting are fundamentally different, even though English uses similar words for both. Think of it this way. A good coach puts athletes through grueling training. The purpose? To make them stronger, faster, more capable. Every drill, every exhausting practice session has a constructive purpose. That's testing. But imagine someone who secretly hopes the athlete will fail, who sets traps designed to cause injury, who whispers in the athlete's ear that they should just quit. That's tempting. God is the coach who trains us through trials. But He never, ever tempts us toward evil.

This distinction matters enormously for how we understand our struggles. When you're facing a difficult season at work, when your marriage hits rough waters, when health problems arise, God isn't setting you up to fail. He's not dangling temptation in front of you to see if you'll bite. These trials come because we live in a broken world, and God uses them to strengthen our faith. But the temptation to sin in response to these trials? That comes from somewhere else entirely.

James pulls no punches in verse 14: "but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed." The language here is visceral. "Dragged away" translates a Greek fishing term that describes a fish being lured from safety by bait. "Enticed" means to be trapped or caught. James paints a picture of our own desires acting like a hidden hook, pulling us away from God's path. This is humbling, isn't it? We want to blame someone else for our temptations. The devil made me do it. My circumstances forced my hand. My coworker pushed me too far. James says no, look inside. Your own desires are the problem. When trials come, they don't create new sins in us. They reveal what's already there, like squeezing a sponge shows what it's been soaking in.

Consider how this plays out practically. You lose your job (that's a trial). The temptation to despair, to become bitter, to compromise your integrity for quick cash, those temptations arise from desires already within you: the desire for security, for control, for comfort at any cost. God allowed the trial for your growth. But He's not the source of the temptation to sin in response to it. Or think about relationship conflicts. Your spouse disappoints you (a trial every marriage faces). The temptation to withdraw emotionally, to seek comfort elsewhere, to nurse resentment, these don't come from God. They bubble up from our own wounded pride, our demand to be treated better, our unwillingness to forgive. The trial tests us, but our own desires tempt us.

James then shows us where unchecked temptation leads, and it's not pretty. "Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." Notice the birthing metaphor. Desire conceives. Sin is born. Death results.

It's a genealogy of destruction, and it starts with entertaining wrong desires when trials come.

We see this pattern throughout Scripture. Eve saw the fruit was good for food and pleasing to the eyes (desire), she took and ate (sin), and death entered the world (death). David saw Bathsheba bathing (desire), committed adultery and murder (sin), and brought death to his household (death). The pattern repeats endlessly when we give in to temptation instead of persevering through trials. But there's another pattern available to us, and James has been pointing to it all along. Trial produces perseverance. Perseverance produces proven character. Proven character receives the crown of life. This is the pattern of faith, and it's the exact opposite of the pattern of temptation.

Here's what makes this so practical for us. Every day, we face situations that test our faith. The difficult colleague who seems determined to undermine you. The chronic illness that won't improve despite prayers. The financial pressure that never seems to ease. The child who's walking away from faith. These are trials, and they're real, and they're hard.

In each of these situations, we face a choice. We can recognize the trial as an opportunity for growth, a chance to deepen our dependence on God, a training ground for stronger faith. Or we can listen to the voice of temptation that says God doesn't care, that says we deserve better, that says we should take matters into our own hands.

The difference between testing and tempting often comes down to the story we tell ourselves about what's happening. Testing says, "This is hard, but God is using it for good." Tempting says, "This is unfair, and you need to fix it yourself." Testing drives us toward God. Tempting pulls us away from Him. We need to be honest about something. Perseverance is exhausting. There's a reason James calls those who persevere "blessed" rather than "happy." Blessing in the biblical sense isn't about feeling good. It's about being in the right position relative to God, even when that position involves suffering. Jesus called the persecuted blessed. He called those who mourn blessed. Blessing is about God's favor resting on us, not about our circumstances being favorable.

This understanding transforms how we view our trials. We're not trying to get through them as quickly as possible. We're learning to remain under them faithfully, trusting that God is doing something in us that couldn't happen any other way. The runner at mile twenty doesn't sprint. They settle into a sustainable pace and trust the process.

But (and this is crucial) our perseverance isn't powered by our own determination. Remember how James ends verse 12? The crown of life is promised to those who love God. Our perseverance flows from our love for Him, and our love for Him flows from His

love for us. We can endure because He endured the cross for us. We can remain faithful because He remains faithful to us.

This reminds me of Jesus in Gethsemane. He faced the ultimate trial, knowing the cross awaited Him. He could have called down angels. He could have walked away. The temptation was real (the devil had offered Him shortcuts to glory throughout His ministry). But Jesus persevered. Why? "For the joy set before him," Hebrews tells us. Love for the Father and love for us kept Him on the path to the cross.

His perseverance becomes the model and the power for ours. When we're tempted to give up, we remember that He didn't give up on us. When we're drawn toward sin, we remember that He died to free us from sin's power. When the trial seems unbearable, we remember that He bore our sins on the tree. We're not alone in our trials. We're not dependent on our own strength. We're not trying to impress God with our endurance. We're learning to wait on His power, to trust His purposes, to believe that He who began a good work in us will complete it.

When you face your next trial (and you will), remember that God isn't tempting you. He's training you. The temptation to sin comes from within, from desires that want immediate relief instead of lasting growth. Recognize the source of temptation honestly. Don't blame God, don't blame others, acknowledge the desires within you that pull you away from faithfulness. Then make the choice to persevere, not in your own strength but in dependence on God. Perseverance isn't about gritting your teeth and pushing through. It's about continuing to trust God when trust feels impossible. It's about taking the next step of obedience when you can't see the path ahead. It's about remaining under the weight of the trial while believing God will provide the strength to bear it.

The crown of life awaits those who persevere. Not because they earned it through their endurance, but because their endurance proved their love for the One who promises it. Every trial becomes an opportunity to demonstrate that love. Every temptation resisted declares that God is worth more than temporary relief.

We're in this together, fellow runners. The path is long, and sometimes it's brutal. Mile twenty will come for all of us, probably many times over. But we don't run alone. We run with others who understand the struggle. We run with the power of the Spirit. We run with our eyes fixed on Jesus, who endured the cross and now sits at the right hand of the throne of God. So when you're tested (not if, but when), remember that the work of faith isn't about proving your strength. It's about waiting on God's strength. It's about trusting that He who called you is faithful. It's about believing that trials are transforming your work into worship, one faithful step at a time.