

1. INTRODUCTION: FROM 30,000 FEET TO GROUND LEVEL

- For the past two weeks, we've been looking at the book of James from approximately **30,000 feet**.
- We've talked about who **James was**, how he went from being a **skeptic**
- To become one of the **primary leaders** of the early church,
- Who he was **writing** to, when he **wrote**, and what was happening **historically**.
- Was there anything that surprised or spoke to you?**

2. EXEGESIS

- We've also spent time talking about why we **study Scripture** exegetically.
- We looked at Romans 12:2 and the importance of **transformation**.
- We examined 2 Timothy 3:16–17 and established that Scripture is **God-breathed**,
- and useful for **teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training** in righteousness.
- We **believe** Scripture has the **authority** to shape what we believe and how we live.
- Now we're ready to **come down** from 30,000 feet.
- We're going to begin examining what James wrote, **verse by verse**.
- Just as a reminder...exegesis means **drawing meaning out** of the text.
- rather than reading our **own ideas** into it...which is **Eisegesis**.

3. HERMENEUTICS

- There's another word I want to introduce tonight: **hermeneutics**.
- Hermeneutics is the study of the **principles** we use to **interpret** Scripture correctly.
- While exegesis focuses on **understanding** what a particular **passage says** and **means**,
- Hermeneutics gives us the **principles** that guide that **interpretation**.
- 1. **Context:** What comes before and after the passage?
- 2. **Historical Setting:** Who wrote it, who was it written to, and what was happening?
- 3. **Literary Genre:** What kind of writing are we reading?
- 4. **Scripture Interprets Scripture:** How does this passage relate to the rest of God's Word?
- 5. **Authorial Intent:** What was the author intending to communicate?

-Exegesis asks, "What does this passage mean?"

-Hermeneutics asks, "How do we determine what it means?"

- And both are important because we **DON'T** want to make Scripture say **what we want it to say**.
- We want to understand what **God intended** to **communicate** through the biblical **authors**.

-Then, once we've **established the meaning** of the text...

-We can ask how that **truth applies** to our **lives** today.

*****Our goal is not simply to interpret Scripture correctly, but to allow Scripture to transform us.**

4. THE DESTINATION: SPIRITUAL MATURITY, JAMES 1:4

-Before we **begin examining** James 1:2, I want us to do something a little **different**.

-I want us to **begin** at the **end**.

-Look at the **last part** of James 1:4:

"...so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

-Now, let me start with a few **questions**.

-How many of you want to be spiritually mature?

-How many of you want to grow in your relationship with Jesus?

-To have a stronger faith? To become more Christlike?

-I would imagine there's not a **single person in this room** who would say...

-*"No, I'm really not **interested** in spiritual maturity."*

-I think we all **want** that.

-And that's **exactly** what James is **describing**.

-The **Greek** word translated "mature" is **teleios**

-It carries the idea of being **brought to the end, finished**, or having reached an **intended goal**.

-The **Greek** word translated "complete" is **holoklēros (ho-lo-k'lay-ros)**

-It means **whole, complete**, or **sound** in all one's parts.

-James **ISN'T** describing **sinless perfection**.

-He's describing **spiritual maturity** and **wholeness**.

-That's the **destination**.

-But here's where things **get interesting**.

-We all **want** the destination.

-But are we willing to go through the process?

-Because when we work **backward** through these **verses**, James tells us how that **maturity develops**.

-Verse 4 says **maturity** is the intended **result** of **perseverance**.

-Verse 3 says **perseverance** is **produced** through **the testing of our faith**.

- And verse 2 tells us that our **faith** is **tested** through **trials of many kinds**.
- So, here's the progression: **TRIALS ► TESTING ► PERSEVERANCE ► MATURITY**
- We all **want** spiritual maturity.
- But I **doubt** many of us would **volunteer** for the **trials** that can help **develop** it.
- And that's the **tension** James **introduces** in the very first **paragraph** of his letter.
- He's **NOT** telling us to **go looking** for suffering.
- And he's certainly **NOT** saying every **painful experience automatically** makes us spiritually mature.
- But James **IS** telling us that when **trials come**.
- God **can** use them to **develop** something in us...
- That might **NOT develop** in quite the same way **without them**.
- We want **maturity** and James wants us to **understand** the **process**.
- I want us to look at **another passage** that helps us understand something else **God can accomplish** through our **difficulties**.

5. THE MINISTRY: COMFORTING OTHERS, 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–5

2 Corinthians 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort

-Then, in verse 4, he says:

2 Corinthians 1:4 ...who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

- Think** about what Paul is saying.
- God doesn't **simply comfort** us in our difficulties for our **own benefit**.
- The comfort we **receive** from God can become the comfort we **extend** to someone else.
- There are two **Greek** words worth understanding in this passage.
- parakaleō*** to call to one's side, call for, summon for **comfort, encouragement, consolation**.
- Paul describes the comfort God provides to His people in their suffering.
- thlipsis*** which describes the **pressure** and **hardship** believers may experience.
- Notice the relationship between these two ideas.
- Paul doesn't say **God will prevent** every affliction.
- He says **God comforts** us **IN** our afflictions.
- And then **our comfort** becomes something we **can share**.

-Have you ever noticed how someone who has walked through a particular difficulty can often minister to another person experiencing something similar?

-Pastor Jarred Leading the Grief Group.

-Someone who has **experienced grief** may understand the **pain** of another **grieving** person.

-Someone who has **experienced financial hardship** may recognize the **fear** and **uncertainty** another person is facing.

-Someone who has **walked** through a **difficult season of marriage** or **family life** may be able to offer **encouragement** that comes from **personal experience**.

-That **DOESN'T** mean we have all the **answers**.

-And it **DOESN'T** mean we **understand exactly** what someone else is **experiencing**.

-But our **experiences** can help us be more **compassionate** to the **suffering** of others.

-And there's another **important truth** in verse 5.

2 Corinthians 1:5 For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.

-Paul **connects** the **comfort** believers receive with Jesus **Christ**.

-Our comfort isn't **merely the result** of having **survived** something difficult.

-**God** Himself is the **source** of our **comfort**, and that **comfort comes** through **Christ**.

-Our **ability to help** others isn't simply **based** on having **experienced** the same difficulty.

-It's **based** on the **comfort** and **grace** we've **received** from God.

-And that's where I see a beautiful connection with James.

-**James** teaches us that **trials** can develop **maturity** in us.

-**Paul** teaches us that **God's comfort** in our **trials** can become **ministry through us**.

-So, perhaps there's other **questions** we should **ask** when we're **walking** through **difficulty**.

-**Not** simply, ***"God, when will this end?"***

-Or even, ***"God, what are You developing in me?"***

-But: ***God, how might the comfort You're giving me become an encouragement to someone else?***

-Sometimes the very **experiences** we would **NEVER** have **chosen**...

-Become **opportunities** for us to **demonstrate** the **compassion** of **Christ** to others.

6. BACK TO JAMES 1:2

-Now, let's **return** to James.

- We've already seen the **destination** in verse 4: **spiritual maturity**.
- And we've seen from Paul that **God** can use our **experiences** to develop **compassion**
- and **equip** us to **comfort** others.
- But James wants us to **understand** how **SPIRITUAL MATURITY** develops.
- And here's what makes his **opening instruction** so **challenging**.
- He **begins** with something **none of us** particularly **enjoys**.

Trials.

7. CONSIDER IT PURE JOY — JAMES 1:2

James 1:2–4 (NIV) Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

- Consider it **pure joy**, my brothers and sisters, whenever you **face trials** of many kinds...
- Now, that's an **interesting** way to **begin** a letter!
- At first glance, this is a **difficult command**.
- But we need to remember the context of his **audience**.
- James is writing to the **scattered believers** who may have experienced;
 - persecution,
 - economic hardship,
 - displacement,
 - and opposition because of their faith.

-And the first thing he tells them is to **consider** their **trials** an **occasion** for **joy**.

-How does that make sense?

-Why would James tell believers to respond to difficulty with joy?

-And how can trials possibly contribute to the spiritual maturity we all desire?

A. What Does James Mean By “Consider”?

- hēgeomai (hay-gay-o-my)** to **regard**, **evaluate**, or **reckon** something to be **true**.
- James is **instructing** his readers to **adopt** a particular **way of evaluating** their **circumstances**.
- This is important because James **ISN'T** commanding an **emotional reaction**.
- There's a **difference** between **what we feel** and **how we evaluate** something.
- For example, when we **experience** something **painful**...

- our **immediate emotional response** might be fear, grief, frustration, or disappointment.
- James **ISN'T** telling us those **feelings** are necessarily **wrong**.
- He's **asking** us to **evaluate** the **experience** from the **perspective** of what God can **accomplish** through it.
- The command is **NOT** to **feel happy** about **suffering**,
- but to **recognize** that God can **accomplish** something **valuable** through it.
- James begins by addressing the way believers think about trials.
- Spiritual maturity** involves learning to **evaluate life** through the **truth** of **God's Word**
- Rather than through **circumstances alone**.

B. What Does James Mean By "Pure Joy"?

- chara** -cheerfulness, gladness, calm delight.
- James uses the phrase **pasan charan**, translated in the NIV as "**pure joy**."
- The word **pasan** carries the idea of **all**, **whole**, or **complete**.
- James **ISN'T** saying: "Be **glad** that you're **suffering**."
- He's saying: "**Recognize** that even **in suffering**, your **faith** can be **strengthened**."
- Consider what **Jesus taught** in **Matthew 5:10–12**.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

- NEITHER** Jesus nor James **denies** the **pain** of trials and persecution.
- Both **direct believers** to see **beyond** their **immediate circumstances**.

C. "Whenever You Face Trials of Many Kinds"

- peirasmos (pie-ras-mas)** trial, testing, or temptation, depending on the context.
- This is a **important word** because James will use the same Greek word family **later** in the chapter when **discussing temptation**.
- In verses 2–4, the context **concerns trials** that **test faith**.
- In verses 13–15, James will address **temptation toward sin**.
- The phrase "of **many kinds**" translates **poikilos (poi-ki-los)**, meaning various or diverse.
- James **DOESN'T** limit trials to **one particular experience**.

-They may involve:

- persecution,
- financial difficulty,
- relational conflict,
- sickness,
- loss,
- or other hardships.

-The **immediate context** of James's **original audience** gives us reason to think it's **persecution**.

-Notice something else.

-James says "**whenever**" you face trials.

-**hotan** when, whenever, as long as, as soon as

-He **DOESN'T** treat trials as **unusual interruptions** in the **Christian life**.

-He **assumes** believers will **encounter** them.

-Jesus made a similar statement in **John 16:33**:

In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

-**Following** Jesus **DOESN'T** exempt us from **hardship**.

And **experiencing hardship DOESN'T** necessarily mean we're **outside God's will**.

-Sometimes **faithfulness** to God **brings** us into **difficult circumstances**.

Discussion

-Why do you think James begins his letter by addressing trials?

8. THE TESTING OF YOUR FAITH — JAMES 1:3

"Because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance."

-Verse 3 explains verse 2.

-This is **essential** to understanding the **passage**.

-James doesn't **command joy** without **providing a reason**.

-He says "***because you know...***"

-The **joy** of verse 2 is **connected** to the **knowledge** of verse 3.

A. "Because You Know..."

-James **assumes** his readers understand something about the **relationship** between **testing** and **perseverance**.

-Their **response** to trials should be **shaped** by what they know about **God's work** in their **lives**.

- This isn't **positive thinking**.
- James **ISN'T** saying that if we **maintain** a **positive attitude**,
- everything will **work out** the way we **want**.
- He's **teaching** a theological **truth** about the **development of faith**.
- God can **accomplish** something through **circumstances** we would **NEVER** willingly choose.

-And what does James say is being tested?

- Our **faith**.
- Not merely our **patience** or **emotional strength**.
- Our **faith**.

B. What is the “Testing” of Faith?

- dokimion (do-ki-m'ee-on)** testing, proving, or the **process** by which something is **shown** to be **genuine**.
- It derives from the Greek family **dokimazo** (to **test** or **examine**) and **dokimos** (approved, **genuine**, or of **sterling worth**).
- The terminology grew out of **testing metals** (like **gold** or **silver** in fire)
- Or **inspecting coins** in the **marketplace** to ensure they were not **counterfeit**
- Items that **passed** were **stamped** as genuine (**dokimos**)
- An important **parallel** appears in **1 Peter 1:6–7**.

⁶ In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

- Peter** uses the **illustration** of **gold** being **refined**.
- Gold** is **valuable BEFORE** it enters the **fire**.
- The **fire DOESN'T** create **gold**.
- It **reveals** and **refines** what is there.
- Similarly, **trials** can **expose** the **condition** of our **faith** while also **becoming occasions** for its **strengthening**.
- Think about how **easy** it can be to **express trust** in God when **everything** is **going well**.
- It's easy to say: ***“I believe God provides.”***
- When there's **money** in the **bank** or all the **farm equipment** is **running**.

-**"I believe God is faithful."** ...when **everything** is **going** according to **plan**.

-**"I believe God answers prayer."** ...when the **answer** comes **quickly**.

-**But what happens when circumstances change?**

-**Trials reveal** whether our **trust is rooted** in **God** Himself...

-or in the **circumstances** we **associate** with His **goodness**.

-That **DOESN'T** mean every **struggle** with **doubt** demonstrates an **absence** of **faith**.

-**Throughout** Scripture, **faithful** people **wrestle** with fear, **grief**, and questions.

-The **Psalms** are **filled** with such **examples**.

-The question **ISN'T** whether a **believer ever struggles**.

-The question is whether **faith continues** turning **toward God** through that **struggle**.

C. "Produces Perseverance"

-**katergazomai** (**ka-ter-gad'-zo-my**) work out fully, accomplish, achieve, produce, or bring something to completion.

-**Ancient** writers used **katergazomai** to describe the thorough **cultivation** of a **field**.

-It implied **labor** carried all the way through until a **tangible yield** or **harvest** was **produced**.

-**hypomonē** (**hoo-po-mon-ay**) Endurance, steadfastness, perseverance; the capacity to remain faithful under pressure.

-This is **MORE** than **simply waiting** for a difficult **experience** to **end**.

-The ability to **remain faithful** when **circumstances** become **difficult**.

-This word was used in Greek to **describe a soldier** who **stood his ground** in the **heat of battle**,

-**refusing to flee** even when the **enemy overwhelmed** him.

-We **DON'T** ordinarily **develop endurance** by **avoiding** every **difficult** circumstance.

-Endurance **grows** as we **continue faithfully** through **difficulty**.

-**Paul teaches** something **similar** in **Romans 5:3–5**.

³ but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

-Notice that **NEITHER** Paul nor James **teaches** that **suffering** automatically **produces maturity**.

-James is **calling believers** to **respond** to trials with **faith** and **endurance**.

-**Two people** can **experience similar** difficulties and **respond** very **differently**.

- The **circumstances alone DON'T** explain the **difference**.
- How we **respond** to God in the **circumstances** matters.
- And **THIS** is where we **need** to be **careful**.
- We should **NEVER** use James 1:3 to **minimize** someone's **suffering**.
- We **SHOULDN'T** tell a **grieving** person: *"God is just trying to teach you something."*
- James **DOESN'T** give us **permission** to explain the **specific reason** for every **tragedy**.
- But he **DOES** tell us that **God can** use trials to **develop perseverance**.

Discussion

Have you ever experienced a difficult season that exposed something about your faith you hadn't recognized before?

6. LET PERSEVERANCE FINISH ITS WORK — JAMES 1:4

Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

- Now James **moves** from what **testing produces** to what **perseverance** is intended to **accomplish**.
- And notice that he **gives another instruction**.
- "Let perseverance **finish** its work."*

A. Perseverance Has a Work To Accomplish

- The **verb** translated "let" introduces a **command**.
- James is **calling believers** to **allow endurance** to **carry out** its **intended work**.
- The **language** is significant because **perseverance** isn't **presented** as something we **possess**.
- It is something that **continues working** toward an **intended result**.
- James is **NOT** telling **believers** to **remain** in **dangerous** situations unnecessarily or to **refuse help**.
- He is saying **DON'T** abandon **faithfulness** when **following God** becomes **difficult**.
- Sometimes our **immediate prayer** during a **trial** is: *"God, get me out of this."*
- And there's nothing inherently wrong with that prayer.
- Paul **pleaded** with the Lord to **remove his thorn in the flesh** (2 Corinthians 12:7–10).
- But **God's answer** to Paul was **NOT** the **removal** of the difficulty.
- It was the **assurance** of **sufficient grace**.

2 Corinthians 12:9 My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

- Sometimes God **changes** our **circumstances**.

- Sometimes God **sustains** us **within them**.
- And in either case, we can continue trusting Him.
- Perseverance **ISN'T refusing** to **acknowledge difficulty**.
- It's **continuing** to **trust** God in the **middle** of it.

B. "So That You May Be Mature"

- teleios** – Here's our **Greek word** again.
- Mature, complete**, having reached an **intended goal** or **purpose**.
- The Greeks used **teleios** to **describe a person** who had reached **full physical** or **mental** maturity.
- An **adult** (*of full age*) rather than a **child** or **youth**.
- James **ISN'T** suggesting that **believers** will **reach** a **condition** in which
 - they never **struggle**,
 - make **mistakes**,
 - or need God's **grace**.
- The **emphasis** is on **spiritual maturity** and wholeness.
- Think about the difference between a **child** and a mature **adult**.
- Maturity DOESN'T** mean the **adult knows everything**.
- It means **growth** has **taken place**.
 - There is greater **understanding**.
 - Greater **stability**.
 - Greater **responsibility**.
 - Greater ability to **respond appropriately**.

- That's the kind of **development** James is **describing** in the **life of faith**.
- God's **desire ISN'T** simply that we **survive difficult circumstances**.
- He wants us to **grow toward spiritual maturity** through them.

C. "Complete, Not Lacking Anything"

- The **Greek** word translated "complete" is **holoklēros** (*ho-lo-k'lay-ros*)
 - It means **whole, complete**, or **sound** in all one's parts.
 - In everyday Greek **society**, the word was heavily **tied** to **physical health**.
- It described a **body** that was **completely sound, undamaged**, and **free** from **physical defects, blemishes**, or **missing limbs**.
- The phrase "not lacking anything" **reinforces** the same idea.

- He is **describing** the **goal** of well-rounded **spiritual maturity**...
- NOT promising** that **mature Christians** will **NEVER** experience **material need** or **personal weakness**.
- “Not Lacking Anything.” *leipō mēdeis*
- Ancient Greek **warfare** heavily relied on a **tight formation**
- Where **soldiers** stood **shoulder-to-shoulder**,
- Overlapping** their **shields** to **protect** the man next to them.
- If a single **soldier panicked**, lagged behind, or **fell out of formation** the entire line could **collapse**.
- Therefore, ensuring *leipō mēdeis* (**lacking or leave behind no one**) was **essential** to **survival**.
- This **principle** extended to **retrieving the bodies** of **fallen soldiers** after a **battle**...
- We still **practice** this in our **military** today...

7. WHAT'S NEXT?

- There's a **connection** I want to bring to your **attention** before **next week**.
- In **verse 4**, James says the **goal** is that **believers** will be **lacking nothing**.
- In **verse 5**, he immediately says: *“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God...”*
- That provides a **natural transition** to our **next lesson**.
- James has **described** the **goal** of **maturity**...
- But he **knows believers** still need **wisdom** to **navigate** their circumstances.
- And **God invites** them to **ask** for it.

8. A THEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION

- Notice the progression James establishes:
 - TRIALS – Our faith will encounter difficulty
 - TESTING OF FAITH – Our faith will be proved and exercised
 - PERSEVERANCE – As our faith goes through testing, a steadfastness develops
 - SPIRITUAL MATURITY – Our faith will continue to grow toward completeness
- James **ISN'T** giving us a **formula** that **guarantees EVERY** trial will immediately **make us stronger**.
- He's describing the **intended work** of **perseverance** in the **life of a believer**.

Discussion

Why do you think we often focus more on escaping difficult circumstances than on growing through them?

8. PRACTICAL APPLICATION: WHAT DOES FAITH THAT ENDURES LOOK LIKE?

-Let me suggest **three applications** from these verses.

1. Evaluate Your Trials Through the Truth of God's Word.

-James says to **consider trials** as an **occasion** for **joy**.

-That means we must **learn to evaluate** our **circumstances** through God's **promises** and **purposes**,

-Rather than **allowing circumstances** alone to **determine** what we **believe** about **God**.

-This **DOESN'T** require **pretending** that **pain ISN'T** real.

-It requires **remembering** that **pain ISN'T** the **whole story**.

2. Remain Faithful When Your Faith Is Tested.

-Perseverance **DOESN'T** mean we **always feel strong**.

-Sometimes perseverance is:

- Continuing to **pray**.
- Continuing to **worship**.
- Continuing to **obey**.
- Continuing to **trust** God's **character** when we **DON'T** understand His **timing**.

-Faithfulness in difficulty is one **expression** of **maturing faith**.

3. Recognize That God's Goal Is Spiritual Maturity.

3. Recognize That God's Goal Is Spiritual Maturity.

-We **naturally** want our **circumstances** to **improve**.

-And we should **pray** about those **circumstances**.

-But **James directs** our **attention** toward something **deeper**.

-God is **forming mature believers**.

-**Believers** who are **learning** to **trust God**, even when **life DOESN'T** go according to **plan**.

-**Believers** who are developing **patience, perseverance, and faithfulness** through **difficult circumstances**.

-In other words, **believers** who are becoming **more like Jesus** in how they **think, respond, and live**.

-This is **spiritual formation**: the **process** of God **shaping** our **lives** to **reflect** the character of **Christ**.

-And according to James, **trials** can **play** an **important role** in that **process**.

9. CONCLUSION: FAITH THAT ENDURES

-I want to **return** to something we **discussed** during our **introduction** to James.

- We learned that **James** himself **experienced** a remarkable **transformation**.
 - He went from **half-brother** of **Jesus** to **skeptic**,
 - to becoming a **follower** of the **resurrected Jesus**
 - and eventually a **leader** in the **Jerusalem church**.
 - But his **story DIDN'T end** with **leadership**.
 - According to the first-century historian **Josephus**, James was eventually **executed** around **A.D. 62**.
 - We **DON'T KNOW** James' **final thoughts** or **words**.
 - But we **DO KNOW** that the man who **wrote** about **perseverance**...
 - Remained **identified** with **Jesus** Christ through a **life** that included **significant opposition**.
 - James **WASN'T** writing about a **faith** that only **works** when **life is easy**.
 - He was writing about a **faith that endures**.
 - And his **opening instruction** is **challenging**:
- "Consider it pure joy...whenever you face trials of many kinds."***
- Not because **trials** are **enjoyable**.
 - Not because **suffering** is **insignificant**.
 - And not because we **always understand** what God is **doing**.
 - But because **God can use the testing** of our **faith** to **develop perseverance**,
 - and **perseverance** can **lead us** toward **spiritual maturity**.
 - That's the **truth** James **wants his readers** to **understand**.
 - And it's the **first challenge** he **gives** us in our **study** of **Faith That Works**.

Final question for reflection

When your faith is tested, are you only asking God to change your circumstances, or are you also allowing Him to change you?