

"WHY STORMS ARE NECESSARY FOR SURVIVAL"

EASTER IN THE EVERYDAY SERIES

INTRODUCTION – **THE TREES IN BIOSPHERE 2**

"Not my circus, not my monkeys...but for some reason the clowns seem to know me on a first-name basis." Humor certainly helps us deal with challenging realities we face in life, right?

I always loved this graphic, about trusting God. It strikes at the struggle of walking by faith—not sight—when everything around us seems to say otherwise.

In the early 1990s, scientists built Biosphere 2, a massive sealed environment that attempted to simulate our Earth's ecosystems. They planted trees inside, expecting them to grow strong and tall. **But something strange happened—the trees kept collapsing. Without storms to challenge them, their roots remained weak, unable to support their weight.**

In today's reading from our Lent devotional, *Easter in the Everyday*, Christian writer and filmmaker, Robert L. Fuller uses the Biosphere illustration of collapsing trees in this closed ecosystem: "Though the trees...had all the sun, soil, and water they needed, in the absence of changing winds they built no resilience, and eventually fell under the weight to their own abundance. Could it be that our difficulties, more than our delights, are what drive us closer to God? They remind us of our desperation and lead us back to the sole source of abundant life."¹

If trees in Biosphere 2 needed storms to grow strong, could it be that we also need the storms of life to develop a resilient faith? We will see today that God allows stormy trials in our lives—not to break us, but to strengthen our faith, deepen our roots, and prepare us for endurance.

Today, I want us to wrestle with this question: **"What if the stormy trials we try so hard to avoid are actually the very things God is using to shape us into who we're meant to be?"**

The goal of today's teaching is **not just to endure life's storms, but to embrace them**—trusting that **God is using every challenge we face for our good, His glory, and to shape us into the image of Christ.**

¹ Robert L. Fuller, "Why Storms Are Necessary for Survival" in *Easter in the Everyday: A Lent-to-Easter Devotional from Christianity Today* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 2024), 30.

Weather Radio serves as our illustration. Tune in when storms are approaching. This morning, let's squelch the noise and tune into the Holy Spirit.

LET'S PRAY AND ASK GOD'S SPIRIT TO OPEN OUR HEARTS AND MINDS TO HIS WORD SO WE MIGHT GLEAN SOME WISDOM TO APPLY TO OUR LIVES.

RECAP ON JAMES FROM OUR "PRACTICAL FAITH" SERIES:

- James written earlier than most of our NT books – 45-47AD
- Firsthand account from Jesus' brother
- Pivotal Leader in Church at Jerusalem (Acts 15) with Deep Jewish Bckgrnd
- Themes of James:
 - Tension/Acceptance of those who embraced Jesus as Messiah vs. those who did not
 - Emphasis on Ethics – practice of faith
 - Jesus as Messiah, the fulfillment of what OT prophets spoke
 - **Trials that lead to maturity**
- James had the Law / Prophets / Writings (Wisdom Literature), but even more so the words and life of Jesus. Gospel accounts still in works—not written just yet.
- We see practical application from James from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount references (recorded in Matthew 5-7) and wisdom from Proverbs literature (primarily chapters 1-9) through 12 interconnected arguments. Many of which Pastor Steve has unpacked over the last few weeks.
- From these lessons, we see we have the choice for repentance or discipline. **Disciples are not born—they are made. It is a process.**

"²Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:2-4, NIV).

I. STORMS ARE INEVITABLE [1:2]

"²Consider it **pure joy**, my brothers and sisters, **whenever** you face trials of many kinds," (James 1:2, NIV).

- **Storms Are Certain** – James says "**when**," not "**if**."
- **Storms Come in Different Forms** – Financial struggles, health issues, spiritual battles, relational conflicts.
- **Storms Have a Purpose** – They are not random but allowed by God for our growth.

In his commentary on James, New Testament scholar and professor, Dr. Luke Timothy Johnson states: "**Most paradoxically, counting trials completely as joy (v.2), an attitude possible only to those who believe in a God who gives the crown of life to those who endure such trials because of their love of God (v.12)...**

"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 has promised to those who love him" (James 1:12, NIV).

Dr. Luke Timothy Johnson also highlights something, I didn't see when I first looked at this passage. In his commentary on James, he shows the emphasis these first few verses place on "...*understanding*". The very first exhortation is cognitive: They are to 'reckon/calculate/consider' trials in one way rather than another (v.2). **In the first twenty-seven verses, James uses the terms of knowing or perceiving some seventeen times**, and in the remaining eighty-one verses only seven times....**Prior to speech or action, in other words, is proper perception.**"²

Before developing its implications, James insists that we pause and ask ourselves: **"Do we believe this is the reality to which we are committed?"**³

"¹² Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But **rejoice** inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶ However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name....¹⁹ So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good" (1 Peter 4:12-16, 19, NIV).

The Apostle Paul writes: "¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us....²³ we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.....²⁸ **And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose**" (Romans 8:18, 23-25, 28, NIV).

- **"Smooth Seas never made a skillful mariner".** - Just as sailors prepare for storms at sea, Christians must expect and prepare for life's spiritual storms. This leads to our next point.

² Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*. New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in 12 Volumes, ed. Leander E. Keck et al, vol. XII (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 187.

³ Ibid.

II. STORMS TEST OUR FAITH [1:3A]

³because **you (all) know** that **the testing of your faith** produces perseverance" (James 1:3, NIV).

- **Trials Reveal What's Real** – Faith that is never tested cannot be trusted.
- **Trials Purify Our Trust in God** – Like gold refined by fire (1 Peter 1:6-7).
- **Trials Teach Dependence on God** – They remove self-sufficiency and deepen our reliance on Him.

"It is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace" (Hebrews 13:9, ESV).

"For you have been my hope, Sovereign Lord, my confidence since my youth" (Psalm 71:5, NIV; cf., James 5:7, 11).

In his sermon, "God Is Able," Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. shares powerful truths to help anchor our souls to God. **Hear these soul-stirring words this morning:** "When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds and our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, let us remember that there is a great benign Power in the universe whose name is God, and he is able to make a way out of no way, and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows...."

He offers neither material resources nor a magical formula that exempts us from suffering and persecution, but he brings an imperishable gift: "Peace I leave with you." This is the peace that passeth all understanding. At times we may feel that we do not need God, but on the day when the storms of disappointment rage, the winds of disaster blow, and the tidal waves of grief beat against our lives, if we do not have a deep and patient faith, our emotional lives will be ripped to shreds....God is able to give us interior resources to confront the trials and difficulties of life."⁴

The write of Hebrews reminds us that: "¹⁴we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:14-16, NIV).

⁴ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love, Pocket Edition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 130-132.

He also offers this challenges: "^{1b} Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For **the joy set before him he endured the cross**, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Heb 12:1b-3, NIV).

Jesus lived the prototype life in the Spirit as an example for us to follow. He endured His trials, with joy set before Him and He can help us endure.

"You will show me the path of life; in your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand there are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11, NIV).

III. STORMS PRODUCE ENDURANCE [1:3b]

³ because **you (all) know** that the testing of your faith **produces perseverance**" (James 1:3, NIV).

- **Steadfastness (Perseverance/Endurance) Leads to Maturity** – Growth comes through perseverance.
- **Commitment in Community** – "you all know..." James is addressing this as a virtuous community—not just the virtue of the individual. We miss this in the English translation ("you" is plural).
- **Humor** – diffusion (This too shall pass).
- **Attitude and Outlook** – Problem (Avoidance) vs. Test (Trust God's grace)

In his commentary on James, Seminary professor, Dr. David P. Nystrom highlights that: "James addresses the question of trials: What is the source of misfortune? Why does God allow difficulties in our lives? How are we to respond to them? To these questions James answers that **prayer**, and specifically **the wisdom of God**, are the tools necessary to negotiate successfully the minefield of trials and the questions they spur in our minds."⁵

James continues by saying: "⁵ 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. ⁶ 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" (James 1:5-8, NIV).

- **We live by promises**—not explanations. Trust God with the outcome.

⁵ David P. Nystrom, *James*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 68.

"¹Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because **we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us**" (Romans 5:1-5, NIV).

PEACE WITH GOD & PEACE OF GOD.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW I AM GOING TO GET THROUGH THIS: "⁵Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight " (Proverbs 3:5-6, NIV).

I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY I AM NOT WORRIED ABOUT IT ANYMORE: "⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7, NIV).

Resources of Prayer and help from Holy Spirit and Jesus:

"²⁶In the same way, **the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God....Christ Jesus is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us**" (Romans 8:26-27, 34, NIV).

IV. STORMS MATURE US IN CHRIST [1:4]

⁴Let perseverance **finish its work so that you (all) may be mature and complete, not lacking anything**" (James 1:4, NIV).

- **Spiritual Maturity Is the Goal** – God is more concerned with our holiness than our comfort.
- **"Faith matures by what it endures."** – Dr. Luke Timothy Johnson⁶
- **Lacking Nothing** – Trials equip us with spiritual strength, wisdom, and Christlike character.

The Apostle Peter writes: "³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the

⁶ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*. New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in 12 Volumes, ed. Leander E. Keck et al, vol. XII (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 190.

resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. **This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 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"** (1 Peter 1:3-7, NIV).

Paul's exhortation in Romans offers us all encouragement that God will not fail or forsake us: "³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' ³⁷ **No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.** ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:31-39, NIV).

In closing, I would like to read Robert L. Fuller's final words from our devotion for today: "**As we journey through the struggle-filled season of Lent, we can begin to see trials and storms in a new way. Though we may still have a strong aversion to pain, we can see the hand of God when the winds of trial come to buffet, and we can take solace in the fact that our roots are growing deeper.**"⁷

Let's embrace our trials and know God's will prevails. Not all things are good, but God will work everything together for good and ultimately His glory.

We have the resources of prayer, along with God's promises and His presence. Let's walk forward in confidence knowing He who began a good work in us, will NOT fail to complete (Philippians 1:6).

// LET US PRAY //

⁷ Robert L. Fuller, "Why Storms Are Necessary for Survival" in *Easter in the Everyday: A Lent-to-Easter Devotional from Christianity Today* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 2024), 30.