

Introduction:

As I have shared, today we are looking at what it means to live by faith in God's promises as part of our Culture of Grace sermon series this morning. If you are new with us, this is a series we work through periodically throughout the year to help unify our church around practices and habits we want to prioritize at GracePoint Church. We prioritize these practices and habits because they are means, or channels God uses to supply His grace to us. Over the next three weeks, we will be taking a break from our study of the Gospel of Mark to consider 3 more practices and habits we want to prioritize as we continue to pursue God's grace together. Today's focus is a vital part of the Christian life because Christians are people who live by faith. Now, before we consider this together, it is important to distinguish what Biblical faith is. Biblical faith is not a blind belief. Biblical faith is a confident hope, and trust, in all that God promises to be for us in Jesus Christ. Compare this to how we normally think of believing in something. As you may know, I love the Georgia Bulldogs. As a fan, I blindly believe they are always the best team and will win the national championship every year. That kind of belief is not the same as Biblical faith, because that belief isn't anchored to something sure. It is really just wishful thinking in the end because I can't trust the Bulldogs will always have the best team, and I can't even trust they will always play their best even if they do. Our faith isn't built on something unstable like that. Our faith is built on the promises of the God of the universe. And we can trust in God to keep His promises because He has the power, authority, and perfect trustworthy character to do so. And I want to show you how the scriptures teach us to live by faith in God's promises. Charles Spurgeon once said, "Faith without a promise would be a foot without a ground to stand upon" (Charles Spurgeon, *According to Promise: or the Method of the Lord's Dealings with His Chosen*, p. 44). God intends for us to live by faith in very real and tangible promises from His word as the ground for our faith to stand upon. To see this, I want to look at the call of James 1:2-4 that teaches us how we, as believers in Christ, should approach the various kinds of trials we face of life and then point out how James supplies God's promises to help us live out that calling. Look with me first at the call, in James 1:2-4 to,

Count All Our Trials as Joy

Trials, as I have mentioned, are the difficulties we face in this life, the problems we encounter, and even the suffering we may experience. Trials are hard and difficult things to experience, and they can lead to various temptations like becoming overly discouraged or anxious, impatient, bitter, or angry, the list could go on. In these verses James gives a radical call on how we should approach these trails or problems. Look at verses 2-4 with me, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds." Pause there. How many times have you been in a season difficulty and said, "I think this is full of joy? Probably rarely has this been the answer for even the strongest believer in this room. This has to be one of my greatest struggles in life. Anyone who knows me long enough will discover I have great battles with discouragement and anxiety in seasons of trials. Yet, I know the call of scripture here well. This doesn't mean we won't have other responses. It isn't saying joy will be the only, or even natural response to the trials we face. What it means is Christians should be able to meet that trial and count it, or consider it, a chance for real rejoicing. Notice why in verses 3, "for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness." The reason we should count trials as joy is because they are testing our faith and producing something called steadfastness. Steadfastness is perseverance. The word here carries the idea of remaining under something. Think about someone carrying a really heavy load, like a refrigerator, on their back and doing so for a very long time. The idea is endurance of faith. Consider two things this is telling us. One, trials are intended to test our faith but that testing is producing something good. This means that the testing of our faith caused by trials is for our good, and therefore are intended by God for a purpose. The second thing this tells us is that we can rejoice in trials because we know it is producing good for us.

Now, look at verse 4 with me, “And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” This is always the hardest part of this verse for me. You see, sometimes I can meet a trial and rejoice in it at first because I know it is producing good, but as time goes on that rejoicing gets harder. Do you see what verse 4 tells us do? James says, “let steadfastness have its full effect.” He is saying remain under that trial as long as it is needed to produce the full effect of steadfastness. That is tough. I want to escape the trial right away. I want a way out. Pay attention to the purpose in verse 4, “let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” I want to be perfect and complete, don’t you? I don’t want to lack anything. That is a great good, isn’t it? James is telling us the purpose of our trials is to produce a steadfastness which needs its full effect to produce that good for us. That is the call for every trial and difficulty we face. That is why we should count them all as joy. But the question is how can we live like this? We live by faith. But living by faith doesn’t mean we just believe trials are for our good, and we are good to go. What I want to show you is how James teaches us how living by faith actually means trusting in some very real and tangible promises of God. He does this by pointing to two real promises in verses 5 and 12. Let’s look at verse 12 first to see the ultimate promise, which is,

The Promise of the Crown of Life

Pay attention to how James uses similar language in verse 12 to what we have seen in verses 2-4 revealing that verse 12 is a concluding comment linking all of verses 2-12 together. Look at verse 12, “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.” Did you see the repetition of terms? James repeats the words steadfast, trial, and test to help us see he is bringing the thoughts from verses 2-4 to a conclusion. Now, note what he says here. First, that the person who remains steadfast under trial is “Blessed.” That term is one of the most fascinating terms in the Greek language. Some try to translate this as happy, but it doesn’t fully capture the point. The idea isn’t just happiness from good fortune, but full satisfaction. Regardless of circumstances, the person who remains steadfast under trial is fully satisfied. There are no more heart hungers. Why is we blessed like this? Verse 12 again, “for [or because] when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life.” The reason for full satisfaction is because they will receiving the crown of life. And notice James says this is what “God has promised.” God’s promised crown of life is what motivates us to remain steadfast under trials. That specific promise from God satisfies the heart hungers we have during trials so we can count them all as joy. So, living by faith in our trials means living by trusting in God’s promised crown of life to help us count those trials as joy and not buckle under the pressure of them. Do you see how we live by faith in God’s promises? Well, you might say, that is a future promise of eternal life with God, is that all I have to help me in my trials? The beauty of God is that answer is no because, even in this passage, James gives another promise, in verse 5, to help us count all our trials as joy.

The Promise of Wisdom in Our Trials

Chances are some of you may know this verse and have even used it before in your own life when you needed wisdom. What I want to show you is the promise of God within it and how it is intended specifically by James to connect that promise to our trials. Look at verse 5 with me, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.” The passage is clear, if anyone needs wisdom, they ask God, and He gives that wisdom generously. Notice how this is a promise. James says wisdom “will be given him.” not might be given him. Not will be given if God wants to, “it will be given him.” That is a promise. God gives wisdom generously to all who ask. And that promise, in the context of this passage, is wisdom to help you remain steadfast under the trial you are facing. Notice the connection at the beginning of verse 5 to verse 4. James says, “if any of you lacks wisdom,” in verse 5, and steadfastness having its full effect will help you be “lacking in nothing,” in verse 4. The idea is that God’s promise to supply the wisdom you need is what helps you remain steadfast under trial, so that you lack nothing you need.

The promise of God to give wisdom is a means of God's grace that helps you rejoice in trials and let steadfastness have its full effect. And living by faith means you cling to that promise in order to remain under that true as long as God intends. Look at how James shows our faith is in that promise in verses 5-6, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting." Think deeply on what James' is teaching us here. In verse 5, James says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God." Then in verse 6, he says, "But let him ask in faith." What comes between these two almost identical phrases is the promise that faith is clinging to. James is showing us that asking in faith isn't asking in a way that simply knows God can give wisdom if He wants to. Asking in faith means we ask while clinging to the promise that God gives wisdom generously to all, and wisdom will be given to the one who asks for it. Are you seeing how living by faith means living with trust in God's clear and specific promises? I hope you are because this will change your life if you can grab onto this truth. God's promises are the channels He uses to strengthen our faith and pour out His grace in our lives. Church, the way to live by faith is to trust in God's promises that are given to satisfy our heart hungers. Now, before we conclude, we must know that these promises are only available to those who have faith in Jesus Christ. God's promises exist for those who are united to Christ. That is where faith itself begins. The life of Christ on earth, death of Christ on the cross, and resurrection of Christ from the dead secured reconciliation, peace with God for all who trust in Him. When we trust that His death secured our forgiveness, and His resurrection life secured the promise of the Holy Spirit, when confess our sin and trust in Him, we receive forgiveness and the joy of receiving all that God promises to be for us in Christ, because all God's promises find their yes and amen in Christ. Our trust in the saving work of Christ opens the floodgates of God's promises. So, if you have yet to trust in Jesus Christ, that is the first step of faith you need.

Conclusion:

For those who are trusting in Christ, I want to end with the very practical way I have been taught to live by faith in God's promises through all of life. First you,

1) Search God's Word for His Precious Promises

Let's say you find yourself in a trial, or difficulty, where you would start is by going to this passage in James and finding one of the promises we have looked at today. Maybe you need verse 12 to remind you of the ultimate promise of the crown of life. Or maybe it is the promise of receiving wisdom when you ask for it. Let's say you find yourself in a situation you need strength to keep enduring something. You could turn to Isaiah 40:29-31 and read the promise there that says God, "gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." Or perhaps you find yourself anxious about something and in need of peace, you can turn to Philippians 4:6-7 for God's promise there that says, "do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Whatever your need may be, you find a promise like these in God's Word. Next you,

2) Meditate on that Promise to Really See it's Truth

For God's promises to really settle on our hearts we need to meditate on them. This isn't worldly meditation where you try to clear your mind. Biblical meditation involves thinking deeply over it. Don't just read the promise and move on. Think about what it is saying and what it means. Dwell on words like "will," "shall," "He gives," or "He increases." Remember our faith in God's promises is what needs to be strengthened not just our circumstances changed. Our real problem is a heart hunger, so that means we need to think deeply on God's promises and His ability to keep them. The last thing you do is,

3) Pray Over that Promise Until it Strengthens Your Faith

After you find the promise, think deeply on what it says, pray over that promise until it strengthens your faith and places your heart back on Christ to satisfy your every need. It may take only one prayer for God to move in your heart, or it may take days, or even weeks of prayer. Keep meditating, keep praying, and let God do the work on your heart that is needed. Church, do you see how that is different than just believing God will work all things out? God gave us these tangible promises so we would have them to cling to, and He calls for us to trust in those tangible promises to strengthen our faith. Run to God's Word to fight the fight of faith and find a treasure trove of promises to cling to as you live by faith in all the God promises to be for you in Christ. As the worship team is coming up to lead us in a time of response, I want to encourage you to take time to reflect on where you are at when it comes to living by faith in God's promises. Have you trusted in God's promise of salvation through faith in Christ? Have you confessed your sin and found forgiveness and peace with God? If you haven't, turn today and cling to that promise. If you are trusting in the promise of the gospel for your salvation, are you living by faith in God's promises? Or are you trying to live in your own power? Do you even know God's promises? Respond to God's grace through His word today by praying for more of His grace as you lean into living by faith in His promises. As always, if you have any need for prayer, we have a team of people ready to pray for you. You will find them worshipping during these songs on the front row, or at the bottom of the stairs in the back. Cry out to God and respond to His amazing grace.

Would you pray with me as we move into our time of response?