

SERMON NOTES

From the desk of Pastor Zim Khan
September 6, 2026

FAITH THAT WORKS

Week 1 — When Life Gets Hard

When Life Gets Hard

James 1:1–8

God can use what tests your faith to mature your faith.

Hard seasons do not have to be wasted seasons.

I Want an Answer

Uncertainty is often harder than bad news. When life gets hard, our instinct is usually, “God, make this stop.”

Ask: What if the first question isn’t “How do I get out of this?” but “How do I walk through this faithfully?”

James writes to Christians whose lives have been disrupted. He doesn’t give them a trick for avoiding hardship, he teaches them how hardship can form them.

We Want Relief More Than Formation

Nobody naturally calls a trial “joy.” We assume that if life is difficult, something has gone wrong. Pressure exposes what we actually trust: control, money, approval, our own plans and competence.

We can spend so much energy trying to escape a season that we miss what God wants to grow in us during it. We want God to change the circumstances before we’re willing to let Him change us.

James 1:1–8

1. Trials test faith (vv. 2–3)

James says “when,” not “if”, difficulty is part of the faithful life. Joy isn’t pretending pain feels good; it’s the settled confidence that God can work even here. The testing of our faith produces steadfastness and that is spiritual staying power.

2. Let perseverance finish its work (v. 4)

Our goal is usually relief; God’s goal is maturity. James uses completion language: mature, complete, lacking nothing. Don’t confuse a hard season with an abandoned life.

Sanctifying grace: God is still working after conversion, shaping our loves, habits, reactions, and character toward Christlikeness.

3. Ask God for wisdom (vv. 5–8)

James doesn’t say, “If you lack an explanation, ask.” He says ask for wisdom: knowing how to live faithfully when you don’t control the outcome. God gives generously, without shaming us for asking. Double-mindedness is trying to trust God while still demanding that control remain ours.

Jesus doesn't give us advice about suffering from a distance. He entered it, endured the cross, and was raised from the dead. The gospel doesn't promise that faithful people avoid pain; it promises that suffering and death don't get the final word. We can ask for wisdom because the God we ask has already come near to us in Christ.

What is the hard thing you're carrying into this fall?
Don't spiritualize it, name it honestly:

1. Each morning this week, pray: “God, give me wisdom for this today.”
2. Ask: What faithful response is actually mine today?
3. Consider one step: a phone call, an apology, a boundary, an act of patience, or simply enduring today without quitting.

Imagine Gravel Hill becoming known as a church whose people don't fall apart every time circumstances change. We grieve honestly. We ask for help. We pray. We keep showing up, loving, and trusting.

Remember: Mature Christians aren't people who never struggle... they're people learning where to stand when they do.

Real faith becomes visible in real life — especially when real life gets hard.

Bring one hard thing to God each morning and ask specifically for wisdom before you ask for escape.

“Don’t just ask, ‘How do I get out?’ Ask, ‘God, what are You growing in me?’”

[illegible]