

James 1 and perseverance

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[0 : 00] Whenever, not if, but when, whenever you face trials of many kinds, what brings us joy? Well we might say, if we weren't sitting with James chapter 1 open, we might say, what brings us joy? Health and wealth, peace and prosperity.

James says no, that's the wrong answer. What brings you pure joy is trials of many kinds. In school, a part of education is learning maths.

Some of our girls don't mind maths, some of our girls cannot abide in maths in any way, shape or form. But it's necessary that we grasp some basic maths.

2 plus 2 is 4. 3 times 3 is 9. And these are the kind of things that we, they're basic calculations, times tables, addition, subtraction, long division.

It's past me now actually, I'd have to go to the calculator to work that out. But we need basic maths to be able to function properly in day to day life. When we're standing in the shop, when we're making decisions about what we can and can't afford, as we charge around the supermarket, we need to have some grasp of these basic principles of maths.

[1 : 29] So we're just struggling in daily life. And James is giving us spiritual maths here. He's telling us the answers to some of the most important questions that we're going to have to grapple with as we're Christians.

And here's one of the calculations that he gives us in verse 2. Trials plus trials plus trials plus trials plus trials equals joy.

And subsequently it equals maturity and spiritual muscle. This world, those people in the world who do not know Christ, and who have no sense of God and who he is and who they are in relation to him, this goes over the head.

This is gobbledygook. But this is the truth. Because the Bible is the place that we find the truth.

If you and I want to know pure joy, it isn't found in a life of health and wealth. It isn't found in a life of perfect peace and prosperity.

[2 : 47] It's not found in having lots of money. It's not found in having your dream job. Grace's dream job, she keeps telling me, is she wants to have a horse riding school in Luskentown.

So she's saved up about £6. When she gets to £7.50, she's going to make Farrakhan an offer for his crop. But even if she gets her dream job, and even if you get your dream job, that's not going to bring us pure joy in itself.

Even if we get the fast car that we always wanted, even if we get the big house, even if we get fame, even if we get fortune, even if we get everything that we always thought we wanted, that will never bring us joy.

Because pure joy is found in knowing Jesus, and following Jesus. And the fact of the matter is, when we know Christ, and when we are following Christ, there will be trials.

We don't seek them, in some masochistic way, but they will come. Jesus said in Luke chapter 9, in verse 23, whoever wants to be my disciple, must deny themselves, and take up their cross, daily, and follow me.

[4 : 11] The New Living Translation puts it this way, if any of you wants to be my follower, Jesus' words, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, daily, and follow me.

So Jesus didn't ever pretend to us, that following him would be easy. He didn't spin some kind of, positive sales picture away, in the hope that we would turn to him, and we would believe in him.

Jesus made clear from the outset, that if we follow him, in response to his call, there will be trials of many kinds. But James reminds us, as the Spirit guides him, and leads him, and writes him, when we're following Christ, on the path that he marks out for us, the trials that we encounter, they don't bring misery, they actually bring pure joy.

Do you believe that? Are there witnesses that we could call to the stand, that will bear witness to the fact that that is truth?

Well, from the point of view of Scripture, there's many witnesses that we can call, to speak into this one. Head to Acts chapter 5, just for a moment. Acts chapter 5, I am going to take the time to, to read through all the verses, but you can take a note of them, and you can read through them, tonight at your own convenience.

[6 : 01] And in Acts chapter 5, we have, the apostles, who are being persecuted. And the persecution, that they are enduring, is a persecution that is, it's violent, it is hostile, it's, it's painful, to say the very least.

They must have been in their humanity, terrified by what they were enduring. And yet, what we find, as we step through all this list of persecution, that the apostles were enduring, the intimidation, the beatings, the scolding, the threats, the imprisonment, that we see right away through the book of Acts.

If we look at the end, of all of this, what we find, is that the apostles, having endured the flogging, at verse 40, they left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing, because they had been counted worthy, of suffering disgrace, for the name of Jesus.

Acute persecution, that we don't find them, in a state of misery, we find them rejoicing, because of the trials, that they were having to suffer, for the name of Jesus.

Flick on a few pages to Acts chapter 16, is for a second illustration. And this is a very familiar passage for us.

[7 : 40] We, I'm sure, know it well, many of us. And we've got the account, where Paul, and Silas, they are persecuted, they are arrested, they are thrown, into prison.

And at verse 22, we see, how the judgment, falls to them, the crowd joined, in the attack, against Paul and Silas. And the magistrates, ordered them to be stripped, and beaten.

Ever been stripped, and beaten. That's what happened, to Paul and Silas, for the name of Christ. The magistrates, ordered them to be stripped, and beaten.

After they had been, severely flogged, they were thrown, into prison. And the jailer, was commanded, to guard them carefully. Upon receiving, such orders, he put them, in the inner cell, and fastened their feet, in the stocks.

So there's Paul and Silas, battered, bloodied, bruised, broken. In the inner, part of the cell, imprisoned, and fastened, with chains.

[8 : 53] Verse 25, about midnight, Paul and Silas, were, well what would you expect them to be, if it was you, in that state, having endured all that, how would you expect to find them?

What were they doing? Crying and wailing? Complaining and protesting, about the injustice, of all this? Well that's not what we find, we find, Paul and Silas, having endured, all these trials, in verse 25, they are praying, and they are singing, hymns, to God.

They were considering, the trials, that they were, facing, as nothing short, of pure joy. A reason, to sing praise, to God.

So that's two, biblical illustrations, of those, who back up this principle, this, that James, speaks out for us. But you know, there are those, in this fellowship, I won't ask them to, but I can ask them to, come out just now, and I can ask them, to speak about, some of the, the trials, that they've had to suffer, in their lives.

And there's some, in this room tonight, who have gone through, the most acute, trials, of various kinds. And yet, the joy of the Lord, is so evident, in their lives.

[10 : 23] And conversely, there's many people, in this world, who seem to have it all, and seem to be, untouched by all the trouble, that hit so many people, they've accumulated wealth, they have the popularity, they have the reputation, they have it all, and they have no joy.

Speaking to, someone this afternoon, who was, who moves in circles, amongst actors, people that we looked up to, people that we think, they're just the kind of people, that the culture, has up there, as role models, the type of people, we want to be.

And yet, he was remarking, how, so many of them, are so vulnerable, and so insecure, and so absolutely joyless.

And James tells us, what's going on, in that kind of life, and in a Christian life. And the teaching, the application from this, is if we want to live wisely, as God's people, if we want to live, holy, God-honoring lives, if we want to live, joyful lives, the way, that we see, and respond to trials, is

hugely important.

So how do we respond to trials, when we, have them in our Christian, experience? But what does James say? Just two short points, we're still on track, for seven o'clock, boys and girls.

[12:02] Two things, in relation to trials. The first thing is, we're to face them, and not flee from them. And the second thing is, we're to persevere through them, and not pull out, and withdraw from them.

So first of all, in relation to trials, we're to face them, and not flee from them. Verse two, consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials, face trials, of many kinds.

speaking to Alistair from Scadabee, Alistair MacLeod, for a wee while, in the week just past, and he was talking about, how he was heading, back to sea, I think it was on Thursday, he was heading back out, to sea, and he was talking about, some of his colleagues, who were heading out, on cargo ships, for nine months at a time.

And that was the image, that was in my mind, when I was coming to, James chapter one. That of the cargo ship, and these treks, as they leave one shore, and they head for another shore.

This image of a cargo ship, heading for the harbour, on an island, loaded with goods. Now if you think about that picture, if those on an island, see a cargo ship, on the horizon, heading towards the harbour, and they know that that vessel, is coming with good intentions, no ill will, and if they know that the cargo, on that ship, is of value, and it's meant for them, then as they see that ship approach, they won't, flee from it, they won't turn it away, and refuse it access, but they'll face it, and they'll willingly receive it.

[13:59] And that's the picture, that was in my mind, and I think it's a helpful picture, to import, as we think, through trials. Sometimes, we can see trials coming, sometimes, part of the agony of trials, is seeing them on the horizon, and seeing them coming ever closer.

We scan the silhouette, of life, and we see, we see this kind of, apparently sinister trial, heading our way, and our natural fallen tendency, is to flee from such things, to turn them away, and to resist anything, that will bring disruption, into our lives, but James, as the spirit leads him, is saying, if that's your perspective, you need to change it.

James is saying, when the Lord, allows trials, to come into your life, and mine, we're not to flee from them, but we're to face them.

Because the Lord's, intentions, are never malicious. He doesn't ever deliver, the cargo of trials, into our lives, for our harm, but he allows them to come.

For our good. One of the commentators, he said, Christians, are like, a teabag.

[15:31] Their real strength, is drawn, only when they get into, hot water. Christians, are like a teabag. Their real strength, is drawn, only when they get into, hot water.

And so, James is saying, learn to view, the trials, that God, allows to come into, your life, in that way. These trials, are necessary, verse 3, for the testing, of your faith.

And as you face them, you'll find, that God is with you, in them. Isaiah 43, we could go to, and read these verses, that are so familiar.

The waves, and the fire, all these trials. The reality is, when we face them, we know the reality, of God with us.

peace. And we find, contrary to what we might expect, a peace. It's not all of this world.

[16:37] And we find, a pure joy, that we cannot find, any other place, other than, in intimacy with God, as he holds us, in the middle of the storm.

Nehemiah, chapter 8, and verse 10. He teaches us, something of the same thing. The joy, of the Lord, is your strength.

But the thing is, the joy, of the Lord, is more often than not, found, not in the calm, but in the storm. Not in the, not in the easy times, but in the trials.

Because that was Nehemiah's, experience. Remember, God said to him, John Nehemiah, I have a job for you. I want you to build, I want you to build, to my glory. God, called Nehemiah, to build him, build for him, to serve him.

Now, did Nehemiah, have a trouble free building project? Far from it. He encountered, he encountered, he encountered, he encountered, many trials, but he didn't flee, from the sight.

[17:50] He didn't give up. He faced, the trials, in God's strength, and he experienced, the Lord's joy. And so must we, if our faith is to develop, any sense of perseverance.

Consider the pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials, of many kinds, because you know, that the testing, of your faith, develops perseverance.

And that takes us, to our second, to our final point. How do we deal with trials? How do we, how do we respond to them? We face them. We don't flee from them. We realise, this is part, of what God has, for the life, of the Christian.

And so we face them, in God's strength. And we expect, and we experience, the Lord's joy, as we do so. But the second thing, and it's just another, logical step, is we persevere, through them. We don't pull out, of them. We see them coming, sometimes, and we face them. But then we're, in the middle of them, and when we're feeling, the stress of, these trials, of depressing, in our life, and our experience, we persevere.

[19 : 09] When we feel the heat, we don't give up. We don't jump out, the frying pan, as the phrase goes. We carry on. We look to God, for strength, and we persevere.

We don't pull out. We don't withdraw, from the path, that God, has led us to. Even if it's, stinging us, but we persevere. Perseverance, verse four, must finish, its work, so that, you may be, mature, and complete.

Not, lacking anything. What I was hoping to do, tonight, I asked you, was to get one of these, dumbbells, you know the dumbbells, and you pick up the dumbbells, and there's a weight in them, and you start to, go like that, with the dumbbells.

And for the first few, they're not bad. But then as the, the reps, start to accumulate, you start to feel the burn. But if you want to develop, some mass, some muscle, you have to keep on going.

Because the muscle, doesn't develop, if we just put it down, anytime it, starts to burn. Got to work through the burn, got to persevere, if there's to be any, muscle in us, physically, and in the spiritual sense, it's the same thing.

[20 : 30] The, the providence, that God, has for us, when, it involves trials, we must persevere. Or there will be no muscle. There will be no maturity.

There will be a, a gathering of baby Christians, who are going over there, they will end. James is a book about, spiritual maturity.

It's a book about, how we grow, how we become, more, like, Christ. Looking, to God's grace.

Looking, for God's strength. But persevering.

Jonathan Land, the commentator, he says this, by God's grace, trials produce a, the strength to stand firm, the determination, not to give up.

Trials build, spiritual muscle, and produce, an adult godliness. Land goes on to say, we would prefer, to run away from trials. But this is, where James is so helpful, the wise way, to confront trials, trials, is to see that, however painful, it is productive.

[21 : 42] So with that view, with James' view, which is God's view, a God's eye view, on our trials, we are called to persevere. Never give up.

And McGoran was here, a couple of weeks ago, from the faith mission, and he gave us that, um, story about church. He went back to the school, that he was, he was in, as a boy.

And he's asked to, address the pupils, who were then, in the school, and, uh, in his speech, his speech was along, the lines of, of this, young men, never give up.

Never give up. Never give up. Never, never, never, never, never, never, never. End of speech.

Or so the story goes. I told you before, about the wise old minister, used to say the same thing, every week, to the congregation, to the Lord's people, as they walked out of the door, shake their hand, and he'd say two words, keep on, keep on, keep on, keep on.

[22 : 52] And that's what James is saying, or God is saying to James, keep on, keep on. That's what I, I, I say to myself, day by day, keep on, keep on.

That's what I want to say to you this evening, keep on. If you're a Christian, keep on. And that's what I want you to say to each other, day by day, look around, and encourage each other, to keep on.

We do lots of small talk, don't we? Lots of chit chat and coffees. How many times do we say to each other, having a hard time? Keep on.

Keep on. Through the good times, and the bad. Through the treats, and the trials. Keep on. Keep on. In Acts, we've dipped into Acts a wee bit tonight, you never hear of lone rangers, do you?

We never hear of single men, and women, going out alone, like mavericks, in the Lord's work. There's Paul and Silas, there's Paul and Barnabas, there's Peter and John, there's Paul and

Timothy, there's the apostles, Pluto.

[24 : 17] Why do they minister together? Why are there so many partnerships, and teams, and no lone rangers?

It's so that they'll encourage each other. Why? Or to encourage each other to do what? Well, something to keep on. Keep on.

Persevere. Hebrews 10, 25, let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another. Even the fact you're sitting here tonight, that's a huge encouragement. But we should look for every means to encourage each other. There's a picture that I came across. Did you get it, man? Yeah. He's a techno-genius.

He never felt it's afternoon, but he managed to get it during the service. Or maybe he did. He did. Do you remember seeing that picture just a few weeks ago?

[25 : 26] It was from the London Marathon this year. And the wee story that I read, I'll just read out the short digest of the news story. Matthew Rees of Swansea Harriers, that's in the white shirt.

Matthew Rees of Swansea Harriers, sorry, he's the man in the black shirt, stopped running 200 metres from the finishing line. But the... Sorry, let me start again.

Matthew Rees of Swansea Harriers, in the white right now, stopped running 200 metres from the finishing line, sacrificing a strong finish to help injured runner David Wyeth of Chorton Runners to complete the race.

Wyeth's legs went just 200 metres from the finishing line as the exhaustion of the 26.2 mile race took over his body. He crumpled to the floor and as other runners raced past, Reece stopped and helped his fellow competitor to continue those final few steps.

And so there we have a picture of the stronger man holding up the weaker man and encouraging him to persevere right to the end.

[26 : 37] And James in this letter, we need to brace ourselves because he has a lot still to say to us about how you and I pull each other down. But he begins by saying, brothers, sisters, remember who you are, you are eternally related, brothers, brothers, sisters, hold each other up.

And especially in trials, persevere. Help each other to persevere. The fact is, just as I finish, there are some days you won't want to.

Nice to sit here tonight, nice to talk about these things, especially if we're not feeling the crush of trials. But there are some days and we won't want to hear this.

And there are some days that we will feel indignant as trials crash in. And the pain will seem too much. And the calling will seem too hard.

And we will want, with all of our being, to give up. We will want to flee and not face the trial. We will want to pull out and not persevere.

[27 : 59] So what do we do in these days? Well, in these days, come back to James and listen to us. Listen to him as he exhorts us.

And encourage each other, yes. Hold each other up in prayer and in practical terms. But above all of that, look to Jesus and think about his perseverance.

Think about what he came into this world to face for you. Therefore, since we are surrounded, Hebrews 12, by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our 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.

Consider him who endured such opposition from sin. so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

[29 : 24] Lord God, we pray that you would enable us to fix our eyes upon Christ and enable us not to grow weary, not to lose heart, but to persevere through trials, to face the trials that sometimes you allow us to go through.

And enable us to keep that perspective that you love us and all that you allow to come our way is for our good, for our maturity and for your glory.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. We will sing to finish 757.

When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea below's roll, whatever my lot you have taught me to say, it is well with my soul.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all both now and forevermore. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[30 : 35] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
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Amen.