

Trials/Joy

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James 1:2-8

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Big Idea: Through Jesus, we can find joy in trials

INTRODUCTION

- Welcome to family worship Sunday! We know there will be kids in here today and that kids are going to move around a bit and make a little noise. That's OK! If you are one of our CoaH kids, let me get your attention up here for a second.... Welcome! We're so glad to have you join us today! I want you to listen up, take notes, and when you go home quiz your mom and dad on today's message.
- Last week we kicked off our new series through the book of James. We talked about how James, the half-brother of Jesus has not always been a follower of Jesus. It wasn't until the resurrection that James saw Jesus as God's Son and Savior of the world. So James followed him and wrote his letter to Christians who were spread around the Roman Empire.
- He focuses on very practical aspects of life and our first text is about as practical as you get. Everyone faces trials, regardless of your background, education, or faith. Often it seems like life is just rolling along when we get hit with a trial. How we respond to trials shows what our ultimate hope is in this world. Do we seek to end it ASAP no matter what it takes? Do we run away? Do we get discouraged and depressed? Do we see them as challenges to be taken on?
- Today, James is wanting us to see that through Jesus, we can find joy in the trials we face. He shows us this by telling us the reality of trials, the new perspective on trials, and the tools for trials.

1. The reality of trials

- Before we get to the "*count it joy*" part I want us to focus on the "*when you meet various trials*" part of v.2. Trials are a reality for all of us!
- Someone once said, everybody falls into one of three categories when it comes to trials. Some are coming out of a trial, others are in the midst of a trial, and everyone else is headed toward a trial.
- The word "trials" describes things that put a person to the test. They may be difficulties that come from without, such as persecution, or they may be inner moral tests, such as temptations to sin. It tests a person's character and what they are looking to in life for their identity, their hope, and their strength.
- For James, no doubt this idea of finding joy in trials was not a mere academic exercise. Last Sunday we talked about how James was martyred which was maybe 20 years after he wrote this letter. But James was the leader of the church and Jerusalem which faced near constant persecution from the same religious leaders who crucified Jesus. I believe there is little to no doubt that James had seen Christians persecuted and surely faced some of it himself. We know there was a famine in Jerusalem that Paul had the Gentile churches raise money to send to the church in Jerusalem.
- All of this to day, James is not throwing this out there like a simplistic platitude. He knew the REALITY of trials. Just like everyone here knows.
- ILL – Trials come to all of us is an AXIOM of life – an axiom a statement or proposition that is regarded as being established, accepted, or self-evidently true. Kids, PULL OUT PITCHER OF WATER, HOLD IT UP, dip hand in it. Kids, did you know "water is wet." Do I need to prove to you that

water is wet? Of course not! You know because every bath you have ever taken or pool you have jumped into. You know because your lips get wet when you drink water and when it rains your body gets wet. Anyone who knows anything and has touched water knows that its wet! It is an axiom that doesn't need proving because we all know it is true. Another axiom of life is that trials come to everyone.

- Every person here faces trials and they often come when you least expect it.

ILL –My daughter, Sarah, turns 15 next week. I will never forget when she was born... I was a second year PhD student, pastoring a church, and was enjoying a sweet time in life. Hannah was 3 and we were excited to welcome Sarah after 2 miscarriages. She came into this world and screamed for the first hour and a half. The doc said she was really healthy and had strong lungs. I'll spare you all the details but 5 days later Sarah was admitted back into the hospital because of some bizarre infection. She had lost weight, wasn't eating and was dehydrated. What was a gloriously happy moment turned into a trial for us as a family.

- “Various” -many different kinds. So we all face trials but they don't all look alike. Some are temporary trials like having the flu, dealing with difficult period in life, or losing our job. They may be weighty but they tend to pass in a reasonable amount of time. Other trials are long and take years or even a lifetime to work through. I know people have had lifelong depression and it never fully lets up. Others have long-term health issues like the wife of one of my oldest friends who is at the Cleveland Clinic right now because of Crohn's disease which she has suffered with miserably for over 20 years. Some people have long-term trials. Some of you have come in here today in the middle of a trial and you feel the weight of it right now.

- The key is to remember we ALL have trials so we all respond to trials. I think there are several ways that we respond on our own.

1. Escape – people find themselves under a trial so they seek to escape the trial. If the trial is about a person they just drop them as a friend or as a boyfriend and they seek to just get out from under the trial. They aren't interested in trying to work through it, learn or grow through it. The trial feels overwhelming so the person feels they must get out from under it as quickly as possible.
2. Distract – a trial comes and it is going to be a long slow struggle to get through it so rather than taking it head on, the person will fill their life with something else to distract them. The woman with a difficult marriage might give herself to endlessly surfing and posting on social media or spend as much of her time as possible with friends. People distract themselves by traveling, buying stuff, throwing themselves into work or a hobby or hanging out with OTHER people who are not testing you.
3. Denial – you have to go through the trial but you tell other people it is not a big deal, you try to act like its not bothering you, and you generally deny and diminish the overall impact of the trial on you. Somehow you hope that if you act like its not a big deal that somehow it won't be.
4. Deal – some of us are pretty good at taking on trials directly, figuring out the best way to get through it and then get it done. Its just a terrible part of human life so might as well get through it. We deal well with trials but the problem is that we miss letting trials really teach us or shape us in good ways. The trial is to be worked through and put behind as quickly as possible.

- This is why James gives us a NEW perspective on trials...

2. The new perspective on trials

- So, it is not IF you face trials but WHEN we face trials. So we ALL face trials but James is wanting us to know there is a new perspective on trials because of Christ.

- James says "*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you*

may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- James is saying that there is a way to see a trial that from a new perspective. This new perspective is shaped by the Lord Jesus James mentions in v.1. This new perspective on trial is the trials have a purpose.
- Trials are the pathway to maturity. We know this when we stop and think about it. Simple question, which has caused you the most growth, good times or difficult times? Have you grown as a person when everything has gone your way? Have you made great strides your character when its all rainbows and lollipops or has it been in working through the grit and the grime of the difficult moments of your life? It is the hard moments that have taught us the most.
- ILL – You see, God is not a helicopter parent. You know what a helicopter parent is, right? A helicopter parent hovers over their child and always protecting them from anything and everything that might be unpleasant. They rescue them from every struggle and protect them from every trial. Helicopter parents do not raise well-adjusted, strong, and
- God is more interested in our character than our comfort. God is more concerned with building our endurance than in ending our trials as quickly as possible. God wants us to be strong and strength comes through testing. No one increases their max bench press by using the lightest weights possible. No, if you want to be substantially stronger, you have to keep pushing yourself with heavier weights.
- James says God is trying to build *Steadfastness* in us. It's the Greek word *hypomeno*. *Hyper* means super, right? Super, hyper, intense. And *meno* means to stand. Now what is endurance? It means to stand your ground, to "hyperstand." The result of trials and testing is steadfastness, a life of faithful endurance amid troubles and afflictions.
- So, think of it this way, when you are training for something... training to run a long race or play on a team, you know that pushing yourself to your breaking point is essential. No one runs a marathon without pushing themselves beyond what they ran last week. That pushing can bring pain and that pain is a testing. It tests you as to what your goal is, what you really want, and how determined you are to get it. The greater the determination, the greater the endurance, the longer you can run. Now, the question is this, what do you do with the pain when you are pushing yourself to reach your goal? Great runners learn to use that time of testing to build greater endurance. They don't stop and say, "this is pointless!" They don't drink a beer unless you are doing one of those beer relay races where you drink a beer and run a mile, drink another beer run another mile...
- The truth is that great runners knows the pain will lead to endurance. What if for the Christian, every pain that tests our faith becomes the pathway endurance and maturity? What if instead of feeling like a victim of a trial, you co-op it and see it as an opportunity for growth?
- James says "*know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*"
- God wants you to be mature and complete, lacking in nothing. He wants you to find joy in the trials knowing that God is using it to build you up. This is how you get joy in the midst of a trial. It's not a shallow happiness but a deep joy that says the fruit of this trial is going to be great.
- ILL - Last week at the Acts29 conference a friend of mine Doug Logan used an illustration I thought worked perfect for us. How many of you have seen the Property Brothers Show on HGTV (or any other home renovation show). Ratty house, ugly rugs, gross paint color or wallpaper from the 50's. Sometimes people just can't see what is going to happen to the space. Early in the episode some people gripe and complain because they don't like this or don't like that. BUT surely they have actually WATCHED the show they are on, right? I mean, is there an episode that they don't fix the house and turn it into a beautiful home? Why do we forget the end of the

episode and get caught up with the ugly paint or the mess in the middle of the renovation? Reno work looks awful while it is happening. Walls ripped out, floors ripped up and they almost always find stuff that was hidden like bad wiring, termites eaten up wood, or water damage.

- What if you and I knew the builder and knew what he was doing in the midst of all of the mess. What if we knew he PROMISED to make us like Jesus? What if we knew that he would strengthen our joy in him through trials? What if we knew the trial wasn't some random happenstance but was foreseen by God and allowed to be able to help you grow like Jesus? Then we might be able to count it joy.

3. The tools for trials

- vv.5-8 *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, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*
- These verses outline the two tools for trials that God gives us. They are Wisdom and Faith.
- Wisdom** –ASK for wisdom! Wisdom is practical wisdom for life. In this case, how to deal with a trial. What decision need to be made? How is it best to move forward? What is God doing in the midst of all of this?
- James is telling us that we often lack wisdom in the midst of trials. We don't get it. We don't understand what God is up to. We don't know how to move forward.
- And this is a PROMISE! IT WILL BE given to him! God WANTS to give you wisdom. This is not God waiting around for us to figure stuff out. It is God wanting us to go to him when we are struggling to make sense and move forward with life.
- Faith**
- But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*
- Now, this can seem a bit hard to understand. It's like God has said, "If you lack wisdom I understand so come and ask me but don't ask me unless you have faith because without faith you are a double-minded man." On the one hand God asks you to come and on the other hand he says don't come unless you ask in faith.
- Understand that God is not saying, anyone who struggles with faith shouldn't come. Remember, in Scripture it is not the size of your faith that matters but the subject of your faith. So, the double-minded man, comes with doubts and "TRIES" God. "I'll see if maybe God can help out in this situation, if he actually exists." That person is unstable in all of their ways.
- "doubting" = Vacillating between trusting God and trusting the world or one's own natural abilities. This makes a person like a wave of the sea, a picture of instability and uncertainty.
- So faith is a tool to be able to get through a trial. It is both the thing that is tested but it is also the resources for making it through. A small amount of faith in an infinite God is enough faith to endure a trial and find joy.
- Faith helps us keep God and his purposes in mind while we are in a trial. Quote: "When we are crushed like grapes, we cannot think of the wine we will become." -Henri Nouwen

- Mark 9 story of a boy who was being tormented by a demon. The father brought the boy to Jesus. Picking up in v.20ff

And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." And Jesus said to him, "'If you can!' All things are possible for one who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:20-24 ESV)

- "I believe; help my unbelief." Can we all say, "Amen" to that sentence?
- LISTEN – God gives you the tools of faith and wisdom to allow you to hammer on a trial until it bleeds joy. Until you can see the fruit of steadfastness coming. Until your joy and faith in God becomes greater than your pain in the trial.
- Jesus is not only our means of dealing with trials but our model. Jesus faced testing at the hands of Satan and lifetime of trials dealing with broken and sinful people. His family thought he was crazy and wanted to lock him up. He was betrayed by one of his disciples and denied by his best friend at the moment he needed him most. Let me say to you today, Jesus isn't saying, "wow, I'm sorry you're going through that. I'm imagine it must be difficult."
- No, he went through the worst trial... the cross and persevered. You can do the same. Hebrews 12:1b-2 *let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

COMMUNION

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