

The Promise, the Purpose, and the Prescription for Pain

by Harrison Conley

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If you have a Bible, James 1:1. I want to read this first verse. Then, we're going to pause. I want to highlight a couple of things and then give us some context that will set up the rest of the book. James 1:1 ESV starts like this.

¹ James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.

Just pause there. Notice, if you would, how James introduces himself. If you have a pen, maybe you want to circle this word. He calls himself a servant, a servant of God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ. I love this language because it speaks deeply to James' character and his humility. If James had wanted to, he could have written this introduction very differently. He could have written it like this. James, the half-brother of Jesus and the key leader at the church in Jerusalem. Which by the way, the church in Jerusalem was the first Christian community ever. So, when it came to the New Testament church, James is a major figurehead. Everybody knows who James is. Everybody loves him. Everybody respects James, and he could have written all of these different accolades and achievements, but he chose to use the word servant. I love this. History tells us that at the time of his writing, the church there in Jerusalem was in the middle of having to endure incredibly difficult times. They were facing poverty, famine, and extreme persecution. Through it all, James stood as a pillar of strength and helped lead the church through these difficult and dangerous times to the point where it even eventually cost him his life as he was martyred for his faith.

He was martyred for his faith and his unshakable belief in the resurrected Christ. History tells us that James was taken by assailants to the high point of the temple and thrown off. But the fall didn't kill him, so the assailants came down and began to beat him to death. As they were beating him to death, he prayed for them. It reminds me of somebody else who, as they were being put to death, prayed for their assailants. Jesus on a cross saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." When we talk about a hero in the faith, that is James. He's a big deal. He's someone worth looking up to. Yet, when he introduces himself, he calls himself a servant. I love that because it teaches us that in the kingdom of God, none of us ever graduate from the role and or the title of servant. In God's economy, the role of servant is the greatest posture we could take because it's there in that place that we most resemble Jesus, who came not to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many. As we read through this introduction that James gives us, we realize that he's writing to Jesus' followers, who are spread out and dispersed all over the globe. Unlike most of the targeted New Testament letters that we read, James is not writing to a specific church. He's not even writing to address a specific issue, but rather inspired by the Holy Spirit, James is writing a timeless message to all believers, those past, those present, and even those still to come.

I'm telling you, these words that we're going to read today are just as relevant, just as important today as they were as the day they were written. As soon as we jump into this, what you're going to find is that James doesn't pull any punches with his words. James is not trying to butter anybody up. He doesn't dance around the point, but rather, he's incredibly direct with his words

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and his messaging. When you read this, it's almost going to read like a letter from a grandparent. Someone who's lived a lot of life and is not afraid to get up in your business. Someone who's not afraid to tell you the unfiltered truth and tell you exactly how it is. That's how James writes. I love it because he's not trying to teach us new theological truths. He's not trying to give us new revelation, but rather, he is unashamedly reminding us of the things that really matter. When it comes to the Christian life, we have to come back to these foundational items. How many of you know that most of the time, a good reminder goes a lot further than a brand-new revelation? This is what James is doing. In his writing, he's going to somewhat uncomfortably call out our hypocrisies. The first thing that he wants to let us know about the Christian life is this: that hardships and trials are actually paradoxical gifts that produce endurance within us. God uses hardships and trials to shape our character and to shape our perspective on life. Let's read James 1:2–8 ESV. He says,

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶ 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. ⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

That's the Word of the Lord. Anything else that gets said after that is just gravy. That is the Word of the Lord. Let's pray.

Father, we ask that You would take Your Word and instruct us with it. Help me, Holy Spirit, to say the things You've instructed me to say, and to say them with humility and to say them with courage so that Jesus would be honored so that Jesus would be glorified. We love You. Thank You for Your Word. Amen. Amen.

Hey, there's this really old saying, this old adage. I'm sure you've heard it before. It goes something like this. "No pain, no gain. No pain, no gain." Can I be honest with you? I've never liked that saying, not even a little bit. I really don't like that saying. As a matter of fact, I've always tried to live myself by a different motto, similar but different. My motto has always gone like this. No pain, no pain. For example, if a friend asks me to go to the gym and to work out with them, my question is always going to be, "Hey, are we chasing a ball, or are we keeping score?" Because the truth is, if we're not doing those things, I ain't trying to be sore. Do you know what I'm saying? No pain, no pain. Now, this motto is ridiculous. I know that. Yet, it served me well until recently.

Recently, there was this event that transpired and took place that has me rethinking my beloved motto. You see, my oldest son is 15 years old. He's a freshman in high school. I know, crazy, right? I had him when I was like five years old. He's a freshman in high school, and in the last 12 months, he has sprouted like a beanstalk. He's grown six inches in the last 12 months. He's no longer this little baby dinosaur. Now, he's a full-on teenage emotive dinosaur. At his high school, as a freshman, he tried out for varsity baseball, and he made it. It's really cool. Thank you. I had everything to do with it. Part of this new baseball program is that he started lifting weights five days a week. And over the last few months, since he's been lifting weights five days a week, he's put on an additional 15 pounds of pure muscle.

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Now, I've always been stronger than my son. To be fair, in my mind, I still think I am stronger than my son. But an event took place a couple of days ago that's making me think twice about all of this. I don't know how it happened. I don't even know why it happened, but we both thought it'd be a good idea to have an arm-wrestling competition. So, we get there, and my middle son says, "Okay, go!" It's me against my oldest son. I can tell you that within five seconds, I knew my fate was sealed. Within five seconds, I knew this thing was not going to turn out the way I wanted it to turn out. Now, I held on for as long as possible, but that result was inevitable. For the first time in my adult life, my teenage son proved that he might just be stronger than me. I don't like how that feels. I don't like it at all, but I also realize that in order to do something about it, I'm going to have to abandon my beloved motto of no pain, no pain. I'm going to have to start working out, and I'm going to have to embrace the opposite of that motto, which is no pain, no gain.

Can I be really honest with us this morning? Most of us, when it comes to the Christian life, don't like to think about the difficulties that we inevitably have to face. The reason for that is because a lot of us don't have a very realistic and or healthy theology when it comes to the topic of suffering. On the contrary, a lot of us have this idea in our mind that the life of following Jesus is one that always moves up and to the right. And if somehow our life moves off of that trajectory, then somehow, somehow, we're doing something wrong. We think that following Jesus is supposed to be no pain, no pain. Whereas the Bible teaches something very different. The Bible teaches us that pain, suffering, trials, and hardships actually come hand in hand with following Jesus.

I can hear a new believer going, "Oh my, what did I sign up for?" You signed up for the greatest adventure of your life. Because although we're not exempt from hardship and or trial, what sets the believer apart is that in the midst of hardship and trial, we have a hope. Unlike the world around us, we, as believers, know that there is a greater purpose behind the pain. We know that our sufferings are not going to be wasted. God is actually at work in the midst of them, using them for our good and for his glory. Even in the midst of the most difficult of trials, we actually have the ability to tap into God's reservoir of joy, of wisdom, and perspective that ultimately sees us through the trial. So, James writes, and he says, "Count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds, knowing that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness." I want to just anchor up here for a couple of moments. I want to speak to you about three things we see in the text. I want to talk to you about the promise. I want to talk to you about the prescription. I want to talk to you about the purpose of pain.

Let's start with the promise of pain. Notice the specificity with which James writes. In verse two, he says, "Count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds." How bad do you wish, he said, "If you meet trials of various kinds?" But he says, "When." Now, hopefully, this won't come as a surprise to any one of you, but in this life, especially the Christian life, trials and hardships are inevitable. Pain is part of the program. However, I think this is a really important point that we need to establish: going through a trial does not mean that there's something wrong with you. Going through a trial does not mean that God is angry with you, or that He's out to get you, or that He's even trying to punish you. Please understand that all of the punishment that God ever had for you was placed upon Jesus, poured out upon Him completely and totally, past, present, and future.

Now, for a moment, I'm just going to speak to the believers in the room, those who have put their faith in Christ, His redemptive work on the cross, and His resurrection. For you, the believer, God has poured out His punishment for sin upon Jesus. But for those who are not believers and those who haven't put their faith in Christ, the Bible says something different is

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stored up for you. The Bible says that the wrath of God is being stored up for you and that there is a day of judgment to come. That's terrifying, but I'm here to tell you there is good news. The good news is this: it's almost paradoxical: the one who you need to be saved from is actually the one that if you'll turn to, He will save you.

That's the gospel. God loved you and the world so much that He sent His only Son, Jesus, who is the perfect likeness, exactness, and representation of God. God loved you so much that He sent Jesus and whoever would believe in Him shouldn't perish, but they will have everlasting life. This is the gospel. God made Jesus, who knew no sin, to be sin for you so that you might become the righteousness of God in Him. If you have put your faith in Christ, what I'm telling you is that the punishment for your sins has already been poured out upon Jesus. Meaning when you walk through a trial, you never have to wonder for a second, "Is God trying to punish me? Is God coming after me because I did something wrong?" Absolutely not. You don't have to look over your shoulder with God because Jesus once and for all experienced the punishment and full wrath of God, so you would not have to. The price has been paid. The debt has been canceled. The scales of God's eternal justice have been satisfied. Let me say it like this: God is not the author of your pain. I believe that with all of my heart. He's the author of salvation. He's not the author of your pain.

But some people go, "Well, God is just testing me with this. This thing I'm dealing with. God is just testing me with this sickness. God is just testing me with this loss that I've experienced." Let me challenge that because biblically, I'm pretty sure it was Jesus who said in John 10:10 that it's the thief, the devil, who comes to steal, kill, and destroy. So, if what is in front of you right now is currently stealing, killing, or destroying, it's not from God. I'll even go so far as to say that God is not going to test you with something that Christ died to redeem you from. If you search the New Testament, the only thing that I see God testing people with is patience and or obedience, and a lot of times those are the same thing. So, is God the author of your pain? Is He the author of your hardship? No, I don't believe that He is.

However, does God allow pain? Does God allow trial and hardship to come into your life? Yes, I believe He does. Why? Why would He do that? Because if we're really honest, trials and/or pain have this really unique way of bringing us back to the feet of Jesus. Because you see, when things are good in our life, when there's gas in the car, money in the bank, and no family drama to speak of, before long, we as humans have this really bad habit of forgetting the source of all of that good. Sometimes, we even mislabel the source of that good, and we think that we created it for ourselves. And not to jump ahead to next week's sermon, but James 1:17 says that every good and every perfect gift comes from above. It comes from God, from the Father of lights, in whom there's no variation or shadow of turning.

But again, does God send or cause trials in our life? No, I don't believe so, but He certainly uses them. He uses them to teach us how to draw near to Him. He uses our pain to reveal in us and to reveal through us God's goodness, faithfulness, and mercy. We have this amazing promise in Romans 8:28, "For we know that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose." But the question becomes this: if God is not the author of my pain, then who or what is? There are a few culprits here. Sometimes, we are. Sometimes, we're the author of our pain. Sometimes, we're the author of our trial. Sometimes, we make really bad decisions, and then guess what? We have to live with the consequences of those decisions.

Recently, I was watching a documentary called The Announcement. It's about Magic Johnson in the 90s, when he had his press conference to announce to the world that he had contracted

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HIV. There was a statement he made to one of his longtime trainers that stuck with me. He said, "When God gave me this disease, He gave it to the right guy." To which I remember thinking, "Man, that's kind of a harsh one to blame on God." Maybe instead, we need to chalk that one up to the consequences of our own decisions. So, who's responsible for pain and trials in our lives? Sometimes I am. Sometimes we are. But sometimes it's other people. Rarely do our actions affect just ourselves. A lot of times, people experience the fallout and the side effects of our decisions. Sometimes, the pain that I'm feeling in my life has to do with somebody else's bad decisions. Sometimes it's us. Sometimes it's other people.

Can I tell you another culprit? The devil. Not to over-spiritualize everything, but the devil is certainly responsible for some trials and some pain in your life. He's the thief who comes to steal, kill, and destroy. He's the enemy of your soul who walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. We see him time and time again in the Scriptures, coming after the people of God. An Old Testament example of this would be Job. The devil afflicts him with pain, sickness, poverty, and loss, all in an attempt to get Job to turn his back on God. We have a New Testament example from the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12. He talks about this thorn in the flesh that he had. He called it a messenger of Satan that was sent to buffet him. The word buffet literally means "to punch." It's like a wave that keeps hitting up against the shore.

This thorn in the flesh, this pain, this trial that the apostle Paul had, he called it a messenger of Satan sent to buffet him and sent to keep him from feeling the call of God on his life. Listen to me. The devil hates the fact that you belong to God. He wants to do everything he can to disrupt your life, to isolate you, and to get your eyes off of Jesus. Sometimes trials, we cause them. Sometimes, other people do. Sometimes it's the devil. Sometimes, trials are just the byproduct of being human and living in a sin-filled, fallen world. Someone goes, "Oh, is this why bad things happen to good people?" Which by the way, I really don't like that statement because bad things don't happen to good people.

As a matter of fact, in the history of the world, bad things only happen to good people, to one person at one time. His name is Jesus, and He signed up for it. Because none are good, only God. We live in a broken world. We live in a fallen world. Sometimes, you didn't even do anything wrong, and yet you're in the midst of a trial. Here's the point. In this life, there will always be the promise of pain. Trials and troubles will come. Then, going back to the text, notice the word James uses to describe these trials. He says they're trials of various kinds. Now, that word various in the Greek, in the original language, is where we get our English word polka dot. Meaning that these trials come in all different shapes, sizes, colors, and varieties. Oftentimes, these trials are unique to each and every person.

So, for one person, the trial might come in the form of a temptation. Where there is this area of our life that we've been wrestling with. This area of our life that we know goes against God and goes against His standard for holiness. For some of us, this temptation is a daily battle. For others of us, it's a temptation that occasionally rears its ugly head. Sometimes it's a temptation. Other times, for some people, a trial could look like something to do with their health. A physical ailment that has a pronounced effect on their body. It could be an emotional ailment that's affected their mind. That comes in the form of anxiety, depression, loss, or grief. Sometimes, trials come in the form of our finances. Maybe there's been a lost job, or you find yourself in debt. Maybe there were really bad decisions and investments made. Maybe it's a college kid who spent all this money to go to school and get this degree but now can't find a job to match the degree. Three months after they graduate, the bank comes knocking and wanting their money back. Maybe it's somebody going, "Hey, I can't keep up with inflation here. I'm having

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a really hard time paying for gas, rent, groceries, and insurance. There's just this uncertainty in the area of my finances.”

Maybe your trial isn't a temptation. Maybe it doesn't have to do with your health. Maybe it's not financial. Maybe your trial has to do with relationships. Right now, there's all kinds of drama going on with your family, going on in your marriage, or going on in your immediate friend group. There's been this deep wounding and deep hurt that's taken place. But somehow, instead of it being addressed, it just gets swept up under the rug. Maybe for some of you, relationally, your trial looks like the kid who you raised in church has now gone off to college. They've been indoctrinated. They've changed their way of thinking when it comes to God. They're in this process of deconstructing their faith. These are all trials, and they're going to hit each of us a little bit different because it's a polka dot of trials. Listen, following Jesus does not equate to the absence of pain in our lives. But what following Jesus does do is it gives us a hope amidst life's trials. It gives us a hope that we're not alone. It gives us a hope that there is someone who loves us, knows us, sees us, and is going to walk through it with us.

Following Jesus gives us a hope that even on our worst day, there is a new day coming. That even on our worst day, there is light at the end of the tunnel. That these afflictions that we are experiencing are just light and momentary. Because there is a day coming where mortality will give way to immortality. Everything's going to be made right. Everything's going to be made whole the way it was always intended to be. Following Jesus doesn't exempt us from the trials of life. Following Jesus does give us an eternal hope as we weather this temporary storm. I heard an old preacher say it like this. “Storms don't endure, but saints do.”

So, how do we endure the storms and the trials that inevitably come? We endure by taking the prescription for the pain. Again, going back to the text, verse 2, James writes and says, “Count it all joy. Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.” The short and sweet answer. The prescription for the pain is joy. This morning, I realize there are people under the sound of my voice who are carrying a very heavy weight on their souls. Some of you who are here today, it's a miracle, it's a win that you're even in church. We read this verse together, and you're like, “Wait, hold on. I'm facing the biggest trial of my life. I'm stressed. I'm burned out. I'm overwhelmed, and you're telling me that the prescription for my pain, the prescription for my situation, is that I'm supposed to be happy?” No, that's actually not what I'm telling you.

It'd be really weird if you were happy about your situation. At this point, I think it's really important that we draw a distinction between joy and happiness. Here in our Western culture, we've almost made these two terms synonymous. We've almost made these two terms interchangeable, but they are not the same thing. And because we often think they are, it can cause confusion. In our mind, we read this verse when we're in the middle of a storm, we read it, and we substitute the word happy for what's actually written. The word is not happy. The word is joy. Happiness and joy are two very different things. You see, happiness is an emotional response that's fleeting. It's a temporary emotional response that is dependent upon whether or not things work out in my favor.

Let me say it like this. Happiness is circumstantial. If things go according to plan, if the kids are nice to each other, if I get paid on time, if the check engine light doesn't come on, if I win the game, if, if, if, and depending on whether or not if works out in my favor will determine my emotional response of happiness. Are you following me? Here's the crazy part: even if things do work out in our favor, that emotional response that we feel, this happiness eventually fades away and wears off. Whereas joy, on the other hand, is different. Can I say this? Joy is actually

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a distinctly Christian word and concept. Joy is not an emotional response. Can I even say this? Joy is not even an emotion. Biblically speaking, joy is a fruit. It's a fruit of the Spirit.

Let me say it like this: joy is a permanent fixture that comes to us via our new identity in Christ. Meaning that when you and I said "Yes" to Jesus, when He became Lord and the Holy Spirit applied salvation to our lives and we became these new creations in Christ Jesus, where spiritually speaking, all the old was gone, everything became new. Part of that new identity in Christ is that we are given the joy of the Lord. It's the fruit or the byproduct of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. Now, can this joy grow in our lives? Absolutely. Just like fruit can grow on a tree in its size, just like that our joy can grow in its fullness. Here's the thing: we have to stay connected to the source, though. Again, the moment we said "Yes" to Jesus, that joy of the Lord became foundational. It became a permanent part of our new identity in Christ.

Here's the best definition I could come up with for joy. Joy is an unshakable inner contentment and satisfaction that is anchored in knowing. That's a big word, in knowing. Not hoping, not wanting, and not wishing. In knowing that God is at work for our good regardless of what's going on around us. Maybe you read that, maybe you hear that, and you're like, "Man, yeah, I get it. I believe it. I believe that the joy of the Lord is there somewhere. I just can't seem to find it." You're like, "Preacher, how do I tap into this joy?" Well, it takes effort, but it's not as hard as you think. You just have to go back to the source. Remember, joy is a fruit of the Spirit. While fruit might grow on a branch, that branch and that fruit receives its nourishment from the vine. Scripture says that He, Jesus, is the vine. We're the branches. So, if you want to tap into the joy of the Lord, you have to go back to the source. You have to be a person of His presence. Let me say it again: you have to be a person of His presence. Psalm 16:11a ESV, you'll know this verse. David the psalmist writes, and says,

¹¹ You make known to me the path of life; in your presence (speaking about God) there is fullness of joy.

So, how do I become a person of His presence? Do you want to be a person of His presence? You better, first and foremost, be a person of the Word. Why? Because He is the Word. Do you want to be a person of His presence? You need to be a person of prayer. Why? Because it's there in the place of prayer that you communicate with Him. It's not a monologue where we come with our list of demands, but it's a dialogue where we start with thanksgiving and gratitude. Then, we listen for Him to speak to us. Do you want to be a person of His presence? You better be a person in a Christ-centered community. He said, "Where two or more are gathered in My name, there I am in the midst." Do you want to be a person of His presence? You better be a person who practices stillness.

Oh, we don't like that one. That's a hard one in our life which moves at a million miles an hour. But the Scripture promises, "Be still and know that I'm God." Do you want to be a person of His presence? Well, then, you better be a person who worships. We have the promise that God meets him who rejoices. We have the promise that God is enthroned, literally takes up residence, takes up dwelling in the praise and in the worship of His people. So, may it be our resolve that in times of pain, in times of trial, we let nothing keep us from being a people who pursue His presence. It's there in His presence we tap into, and we experience the fullness of joy. Which, by the way, the joy of the Lord is our strength. So, we have the promise of pain. I'm telling you, trials are going to come, but we have a prescription for the pain. It's the joy of the Lord. Then, quickly, there is a purpose in the pain. In verses 3–4 ESV, James says this,

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³ For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Here's the purpose in the pain. That when we come out of the trial, we emerge with a steadfast faith. Now, if you have a Bible that you brought to church this morning, your version might say patience or might say endurance. Mine says steadfastness, but those three words can all be interchanged. The picture that is associated with that original language, the Greek word, is not the kind of patience, endurance, or steadfastness that you show when you show up to the doctor's office and you're waiting there for the doctor to come in. You have patience, and you're like, "Come on, dude." It's not the kind of patience or endurance where you're like, "I just want to go home, but I have to wait for my shift to be done at work." But rather, the picture that's painted in the original language is this steadfastness, this endurance, this patience of one of a marathon runner. It's an inner grit. It's an inner determination that says, "I'm going to keep moving forward. I'm going to keep putting one foot in front of the other, even when things are harder than I expect, even when I'm exhausted, and even when I can't see the finish line. I'm going to keep moving forward." This is the type of faith that James says is being developed in us during trials.

Then, he says, "Let steadfastness have its full effect, that you might be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." Now, this word perfect is one of James's favorite terms. What he means is this: literally to make whole. The word in the original language means to live a perfectly integrated life. The idea being that our actions are always consistent with our values and our beliefs. Our values and our beliefs, we've received them from Jesus. Here's a truth for you. Most of us live like fractured people, where we have these inconsistencies in our character. I don't know about you, but this speaks of me. Sometimes, my actions don't align with my words and my values. What James is communicating to us is that God is on a mission to restore fractured, inconsistent people and make us whole, perfect, and complete. How does He do that? He does it through the crucible of pain and trials.

Let me say this. God does some of His best work in us through suffering. I'm going to just let that one hang in the air for a minute. He does His best work in suffering. Well, what kind of a work is He doing? First and foremost, He is doing a work of maturity. He is doing a work of maturity in us. Maturity is this: It's this sense that during the seasons of suffering in my life, I somehow grow in my awareness and my dependence upon the reality of God's grace in my life. When I am going through excruciating pain, when I don't understand what's happening, maturity says that now is the time to lean in and to depend upon God's grace. Do you know what God's grace does during trials? It develops within us Christ-like character, where we become more like our Savior. We identify with Him in His sufferings.

I love what A.W. Tozer says. He says it like this. "When I understand that everything happening to me has the ability to make me more Christ-like, it resolves a great deal of anxiety." You see, maturity says that instead of leaning on my own understanding, instead of depending upon my own strength and ability, I have to fully submit and rely upon Jesus and His strength. Maturity says every day I come to this place afresh where I say, "God, I need You more today than I needed You yesterday." And if, in seasons of trial and pain, if we will learn to lean into God's work of maturity, not only will it develop in us a greater level of Christ-likeness, but it will actually develop in us this place of intimacy with God, this greater level of intimacy, where no matter the severity of the storm, we can live with this tangible sense of His presence and His nearness, this tangible sense that He is for us.

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We have a confidence that's unshaken that says, "Hey, He is near to the brokenhearted, and He binds up our wounds." It's this intimacy, this fellowship that's developed in trial. Now, we realize God does some of His best work in us during suffering. So, let me ask you a question. If we know He is doing a good work during suffering, is it okay then to pray that the suffering would stop? Is it okay that we pray and say, "God, would You intervene and take this trial away?" Immediately, I think about the apostle Paul. I mentioned a moment ago in 2 Corinthians 12, where he talks about this thorn in the flesh. The Bible says that Paul prayed over and over and over that God would take this trial, that He would take this thorn in the flesh away. But what did God say? He said, "Paul, My grace is sufficient for you."

Now, that word sufficient in the original language means "hand-tailored." It means fit to your specs. So, it's not just this blanket of grace that He throws on everybody; that is the same for everybody. He said, "In the midst of your trial, My grace is sufficient. It's hand-tailored for you. For My strength, not your strength, Paul. My strength is made perfect in your weakness." What does Paul say? He says, "Well, therefore, most gladly, I'd rather boast in my infirmities so that the power of Christ will rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in reproaches, needs, persecutions, and distresses for Christ's sake. For when I'm weak, then I'm strong."

You might be going through the most difficult season of your life right now. Perhaps you've been on your knees, and you've been praying, "Oh, Lord, take this from me. Lord, would You intervene? Would You do the miraculous?" Can I say He is the miraculous God, the Ephesians 3:20 God who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above what we could ask, think, or imagine. So yes, in a second, He could fix it all. But if He doesn't, if His response to you is the exact same response He gave to Paul, in the midst of your trial, His grace is sufficient. His strength is made perfect in your weakness. So, may we have the maturity to respond as Paul did. "I'm going to boast in my infirmities that the power of God may rest upon me. When I'm weak, then I'm strong." How do you get that kind of response? How do you get that kind of perspective? I'll tell you how.

It takes a level of wisdom that is greater than we naturally possess to see this perspective, to see that God is really at work in our pain to accomplish His work and His will. It takes a greater level of wisdom, which is why I love the promise we have in verse 5. If anybody lacks this wisdom, if anybody is in short supply of this wisdom, all you need do is ask God for it. And what's His promise? That He'll give it to you generously. Not like when you go to Chipotle, and you go, "Hey, can I get a little bit more chicken?" He says, "I'll give it to you generously, without reproach, without looking at you sideways, and without holding a grudge." You're like, "God, I'm really sorry. I didn't trust You like I should have last time. But God, I need some wisdom this time."

God is not going to hold a grudge and be like, "Well, you didn't trust me last time, so I'm not giving you any more." Generously, liberally, without reproach, and without holding a grudge. But here's the key in verse 6. If we want this wisdom, it says we have to ask for it with faith, not doubting His character. Notice the language James uses in verses 6, 7, and 8. He says that the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that's driven and tossed by the wind. He's double-minded and unstable in all of his ways. James is really intentional with his language here. Think about the picture that he's painting.

It's a picture of a storm. What do storms do in our lives? What do trials do in our lives? They bring a certain level of darkness, don't they? They bring a certain level of instability and uncertainty, don't they? Sometimes, when we're in the midst of trial and storm, sometimes our faith kind of goes up and down. It bobs like a cork in the water. Sometimes, we have these

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mountain-high moments where we're like, "God is at work." Then, we have these really low valley moments where we're like, "God, are You even aware of my situation?" James says that when we're like that, going up and down, that's what it means to be double-minded and that the double-minded man should not expect anything from the Lord. So, he says that when you ask for this wisdom, make sure you ask in faith, meaning you're not doubting His character.

Let me boil that down for you. What that means is when we come and ask God for wisdom, we have established in our hearts that regardless of what is going on around us, regardless of what is in the periphery, regardless of what I am currently feeling, regardless of the confusion in my mind, that regardless of this rollercoaster of emotion, regardless of the uncertainty of the situation, this one thing I am certain of, this one thing I come back to, that regardless of what's going on around, God is immutably and forever good. So, when we come before God, and we ask for wisdom, we have to come to this bedrock foundational place that God is gracious and God is for us. His hand of love is upon us, guiding our lives, and God is, in fact, working all things out for our good and for the glory of His name. James says that if you'll ask with that kind of unshakable faith, God is going to give you that wisdom. He is going to give it to you liberally, generously, and without reproach.

Let me end with this. Many of you would know Pastor Josh Turner. He's a part of our team. He preaches four or five times a year. You know his story a little bit. He has shared about his beautiful daughter. She's 16 years old. Her name is Riley. If you ever get a chance to meet her, she'll be one of your favorite people on the planet. She is generous. She is sweet, and she is so incredibly witty. Just so much fun to be around. Riley was born with a really incredibly rare genetic disease. As a matter of fact, she's the 12th known case in all the world. And because of that, Riley is severely special needs. She rides around in a wheelchair. She has a couple of them, actually. They're all different names, kind of fun.

She has a full tracheotomy tube. She needs full-time care and attention. I believe she has had over 30 major surgeries. She is 16 years old. Unless we're in that situation, we can only imagine how difficult something like that must be on Riley and/or on the family. Pastor Josh is one of my best friends. I've watched him over the years navigate the ups and downs of seeing his baby girl constantly be in pain. Let alone navigate some of the other factors that we would never think of. Things like moving state and having to get new doctors, new insurance, and the financial demands of all of that. I've watched him wrestle through these things.

I've watched him wrestle through the theology of this. Where he's like, "Did God cause this? Or did God just allow this?" It's really easy for us to sit back in our chairs and be like, "Well, we know the answer to that." But unless you're walking in their shoes, and unless you're wrestling through that, sometimes the answer is not as easy as we want to make it be. He and I have had more conversations than I can count where we have processed that very theology. We've processed emotions. I've seen him at times full of faith. I've seen him at other times at really low points where he doesn't even want to come out of his room. But the thing that inspires me the most about Josh and his wife, Becca, is that in the midst of the most difficult of circumstances, where their situation is constantly fluctuating, they have always come back to this foundation, to this perspective that no matter what happens, whether it's a good day or a bad day, God has been incredibly kind to them. That's their foundation. It's an incredible perspective.

I remember asking him one time, and I go, "Hey, how have you navigated the fact that you have prayed for, and I have prayed for, and multiple other people have prayed for Riley, and yet that healing has not yet manifested?" Do you know what he said? His response has floored me. He said, "H," everybody calls me H. He said, "H, I believe now more than ever before that God is a

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healer. He's looking at his daughter in a wheelchair. His daughter with a tracheotomy tube. I believe now more than ever that God is a healer." He said, "I know if Jesus walked into the room right now and touched Riley, in a second she would be made well." He said, "But in the meantime, this trial has allowed me to learn how to carry pain well." He said, "In the meantime, God's purpose is being accomplished in me. And part of that is He has entrusted me to walk this path of pain so that I can now have a platform to help other people as they navigate pain. I can be an encouragement and a blessing in their life."

I look at that, and I go, "Man, how do you get a perspective like that? That God's purpose is being accomplished in you, that God is good even in the midst of tremendous pain, how do you get a perspective like that?" It only comes by regularly asking for and receiving God's wisdom. Coming back to that bedrock foundational promise that God is good. So, Lord, give us this wisdom. Lord, help us to hold fast to Your character so that we might see that You are at work in the midst of trials. We have the promise of pain. Sorry to tell you, trials are going to come. But we have a prescription for the pain. Joy. The joy of the Lord is our strength. The good news in all is that there is a purpose in the pain. Our suffering is not wasted. God is developing a steadfast and unshakable faith within us that no matter what comes, we're able to put one foot in front of the other and serve Him with all of our heart, with all of our mind, and with all of our strength. Come on, let's pray.

Father, we thank You for Your Word. Your Word that is eternal. Your Word that is full of life and power. Your Word that will never pass away. The flower fades, and the grass withers, but Your Word, God, it stands the test of time. You said You even exalted Your Word above your name. Father, many of us are in the midst of situations and circumstances right now that we don't quite understand. Some of us are dealing with pain. Some of us are really struggling under the weight of our trial. So, Father, we come back to Your Word. We come back to that bedrock faith and belief that You're good, that You see us, that You're near to us, and that You're for us. We ask You for this wisdom, the wisdom that only You can give.

I'm reminded of David, the psalmist. In Psalm 61, he said, "Father, would You lead me to the rock that's higher than I? Would You give me a fresh perspective? When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock." Father, we ask for Your perspective, for we know Your ways, thoughts, and perspective are higher and greater than ours. We ask for this wisdom, and we know that if we ask You, not doubting your character, You give it liberally and generously. Father, I ask that You would bestow this wisdom to each and every person crying out for it right now. Thank You that You are developing in us a Christ-like character so that we can reflect to the world around us our amazing Savior.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. With your heads bowed and your eyes still closed, I want to speak to your heart for just a moment. I want to speak to those who have not yet put their faith in Christ Jesus and His redemptive work on the cross through the resurrection. Perhaps, earlier in the sermon, when I said that for those who haven't put their faith in Christ, the wrath of God is being stored up for you, that there's a day of judgment coming, perhaps those words pricked your heart. That wasn't me, that wasn't my words, that was the Holy Spirit. And what the Holy Spirit does is He reveals to the human heart our need for a Savior. The Holy Spirit goes to work in human hearts doing what I can't do. He convicts hearts of sin. He shows us that there's a chasm that exists between us and God.

He exposes the evil that's in our hearts. But in the next breath, He convinces our heart that there's a Savior, that although the chasm is wide, there's a bridge, and His name is Jesus. He is the way, the truth, and the life. He is the only way you can get to the Father. He's the only

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way that you can experience salvation. If you're in this place today and you are unsettled about the state of your soul, there is only one way to find that hope. There's only one way to find that peace for your soul, and it's through the person of Jesus. I want you to know this. He loves you. He loves you. He loves you so much that He came to this earth, and lived a perfect, sinless life, a life you couldn't live, a life I certainly didn't live. And He took the penalty and the punishment. For the Bible says the wages of sin is death.

Jesus became our death. He actually became our sin, the Scripture says. And the full wrath of God's punishment for sin was placed upon Him for you and me. If you put your trust in what He has done for you, you experience what the Bible calls salvation. You experience what it is to have your sins forgiven and wiped out. You get to experience what's called being born again; that's what Jesus called it. Where you become a new creation, spiritually speaking, where everything that was old, that old way of living, and the old way of doing is gone. It's been wiped out from the record, and everything becomes new. It's a change that happens on the inside and then works its way out.

This salvation is only found at the feet of Jesus, where you submit your life to Him totally and completely. You take yourself off the throne of your life and you enthrone Jesus. You say, "Jesus, it's Your way. Jesus, it's Your Word that is my final authority." I don't get to pick and choose the parts that I like and I play some spirituality things over here and I do some things over here, but I live how I want to live. That's not what this is. Salvation is radical and is a total submission before Jesus, His Word, His will, and His way. If you'll submit to Him, I'll tell you what you'll find. You'll find a peace for your soul. You'll find forgiveness for your sins. You'll be taken out of the kingdom of darkness and put into the Kingdom of light. You'll go from death to life. It's available. Here's the best part, it's free. You don't have to earn it. You can't pay for it. It's a gift of God. But this gift has to be received. It starts by you saying, "Jesus, be the Lord of my life. I need You. I'm lost without You. Rescue me from my sin. I want to follow You." If you'll do that, if you'll make that declaration in your heart, if you'll get your lips and your heart in alignment, the Bible says this. If you will believe in your heart and confess with your mouth, heart, and mouth, if you'll get them in alignment, confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord; that's when you enter into this relationship called salvation. Where the Holy Spirit of God literally comes and applies salvation to your life and imputes God's righteousness onto you. Everything changes on the inside. But it starts with you taking this posture of submission. "Jesus, I need You."

Father, upon every person who is making that declaration in their heart right now, I thank You for the promise in Romans 5:5 that the Holy Spirit pours out Your love in our hearts. Holy Spirit, I thank You that You're applying salvation now. I thank You that You're giving people the courage to cry out to You. Thank You for salvation. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

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