

Thank you for being here this evening, either in person or online. I want to encourage those that aren't able to be with us either because of distance or your life circumstances are such that you are continuing to follow stricter guidelines -- be encouraged. The body of Christ misses your presence in our gathering together and we miss you. We look forward to the day when we'll be together again, whenever and wherever that is. But we can guarantee that it will happen.

One of our teaching team for our now-traditional summer series won't be participating this year because he and his family are in the latter group -- taking stricter precautions. We miss you, Jim. I knew that we would miss you when we heard you couldn't be with us this year, but I'm also experiencing it each week in the little things, too.

I consider it a high honor to be teaching here tonight. I've been a member of the Stuart Heights body for more than two decades and I've lived life with most of you. We've been through a lot together and above all else, we have experienced God's faithfulness together.

These brothers with which I'm privileged to teach -- Brian, Jim, Terry, John, Patrick -- to be considered among them is, indeed, a high honor of which I'm pretty certain I'm unworthy. But as the Spirit says through the wife He has given to me, "Get over yourself" -- so I shall. I could say much about each one of these guys, but time won't allow it. Just know that as each of

us get up here to teach, we feel the weight of the task we've been given -- we talk about it frequently -- and we appreciate your prayers.

For those of you that are here with us tonight and through the rest of this series, I want to invite you, after our prayer time at the end of the service, to join us down front where we'll have additional conversation about what is taught tonight or any other random thing that one of us feels led to ask about. We commit to maintaining safe distances between us and you don't have to participate -- you can just listen as we hang out for another 30 to 45 minutes and as we talk about God's Word, what He's doing in our lives, and about His kingdom. I hate that our online friends won't be able to share in this time -- have I mentioned that we're missing Jim? That's one of the things he would be able to make happen easily enough -- making the follow on conversation available electronically -- but alas.

Let's get into the lesson.

Thank you to Terry for kicking us off last week with a background and overview of the book of James. In several conversations I've had since last week, many of you have said, "Terry said X and I've never thought about that before". I love when a group of seekers -- that would be you/us guys are exposed to quality teaching. That's the result -- "I never thought of that before." "That really ministered to me."

He also drew our attention to verse 1 -- the salutation of the letter, and he pointed out things for us to consider that many of us hadn't thought of before. Paul and James being fellow ministers, meeting and talking several times.

So before I read tonight's text, verses 2 through 18 of chapter 1, let's be reminded of some things.

Whenever you hear or read a passage from James, it is my aim that some thematic things will come to your mind that you've learned before or will learn between now and the end of July. As you get to know your Savior and your Father better, it will come partly by increasing in your knowledge of the Word. Not just the words themselves, but how, to whom, and when the Word was given. For me, when it comes to James, it's a simple two-word sentence. I believe James was elegant and economical in his speech -- under tremendous persecution as the pastor of the church in Jerusalem. Many of the other leaders are out on mission, like Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Mark, and others. Others, like Peter, have been forced to run. But James remains and withstands persecution and writes a message to the then-persecuted saints, and here's the two-word message:

Faith acts. To go a bit further, you can say you have faith, but if there isn't evidence, then we can assume that faith isn't present. Others have said it this way, "Faith, without works, is dead".

So let me read our passage for tonight and then I'll attempt to exegete, to draw out, the truth from this passage that God has for us tonight.

2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

9 Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, 10 but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. 11 For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.

12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when

desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. 18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

I have an outline and a handout for us tonight that I pray will complement, not distract, from our study. This outline is taken right from page page 3 of this New Testament commentary, Christ-Centered Exposition - Exalting Jesus in James, by David Platt. I had been laboring on an outline of the passage and I've been adding these commentaries to our library so when this came in a couple weeks ago, I compared my sketch outline to Mr. Platt's and his was better -- so there ya go.

As we approach the truths in this passage, I want to point out how often the Christian walk -- us being like Jesus -- following His example and His teachings is, what I'll call, the rule of opposites. However you would normally react or respond to something -- if you want to be like Him, do the opposite of what you naturally want to do. Do the opposite of probably just about everything you've ever been taught.

Some quick examples:

You want to be first? Be last - Mark 9:35

You want to be a leader? Be a servant - Luke 22:30

You want to be rich? Be poor - Matthew 6:33

You want to be free? Be a bondservant - 1 Corinthians 7:22

Someone has wronged you and you want retribution? Turn the other cheek

Someone asks you for your coat? Give them your cloak also.

Someone compels you to go a mile with them? Offer to go a second mile -
all in Matthew 5:38-40

Don't want to rely on others? Get over yourself and lean on and depend on
one another. Galatians 6:2

Had enough yet??? I could go on. How about this one:

Don't feel like being hospitable? Do it anyway and do it without grumbling?

1 Peter 4:9

With this first verse in our text tonight -- the first part of this letter from James following his greeting, I want to really slow down and do an abbreviated, light word study on the first verse. As you study the Bible, there are many techniques and helps, and one of them is "the rule of firsts". When a word is used, how is it used the first time it appears. In this case, the "first" that I think deserves our attention is what and how does James start this letter.

We don't have time to do this beyond this first verse, but I want you to see what it looks like to do this and know that this helps us understand the approach and tone of the rest of the letter.

There are several good study guides, some better than others. For this deeper dive on the first verse, I'm using Robertson's Word Pictures on studylight.org.

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials."

"My brethren" -- understand that, as he states in his greeting in verse one, James is addressing believers.

"Count it" -- this is a verb in the first aorist middle imperative -- it's a command. We must consider.

"All joy" -- "Whole joy", "unmixed joy". Not just "some joy" along with much grief.

"When" -- whenever. An indefinite temporal conjunction it's a linking word - setting up the condition to "do this 'when' something. When what???"

"You fall into" -- literally "to fall around" or into the midst of. To fall among. It is the picture of being surrounded by something. What are we surrounded by?

"Various trials" -- often translated as temptation, the Latin originally neutral -- either good or bad, but the evil sense has monopolized the word in our modern English. Trials, rightly faced, are harmless, but wrongly met become temptations to evil. The word "various" means variegated or many colored.

This is a bold demand that James makes to open his letter.

Here in James, right off the bat, in verse 2, he tells us to do one of those impossible things that's the opposite of how we're wired and what we're taught -- "count it all joy when you fall into various trials".

So how about that? How do you respond when a temptation or trial comes into your life? What's your first reaction? Take a step back and look at how we respond if we even think that a trial could happen. Our bodies react physically and chemically and the mush between our ears just starts churning, looking for escape routes. We take inventory of our assets and do the "here's what I'll do" or "here's how we'll minimize the pain" of the trial -- we work to avoid the trial or get out of it as quickly as we possibly can. If and when we realize that the problem is bigger than we can handle, we'll pray and ask our loving Father to take care of it, saying, "in Jesus' name we pray, Amen" but what we really mean is "ready, set, go". And when God doesn't immediately respond, we doubt His love and care for us and wonder if He's even paying attention.

But James is teaching us something remarkable about our problems, and if we really learn it, it will change the way we respond to them -- at least after we get over our initial, fleshly reaction. He's actually teaching us why we experience trials and temptations

We need to understand that

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God is sovereign over our trials.

Think about that. We talk about the sovereignty of God, but do you count Him as sovereign when it comes to problems that come into your life? They have a purpose and He is in complete control of them as He is every other aspect of our lives and the world in which we live.

So let's go ahead and complete the outline and get these written down and out of the way:

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We learn to grow in His likeness (that's the "make perfect" part).

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We learn to trust in His wisdom

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We learn to rely on His resources, and

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We learn to live for His reward.

When we talk about the sovereignty of a country or the sovereignty of a ruler of a country, we know that there are limitations on the idea. We talk in terms of absolute sovereignty in the area of influence, but we don't really mean it. But when we talk about the sovereignty of God, we must think about it in absolutes. You can debate this at length, but He's either sovereign over all or He isn't sovereign at all.

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Before we go any further, let's make sure of the things that we're not saying here. Make no mistake -- the passage isn't telling us to deny or ignore our feelings. Problems are painful and it's okay to hurt and to grieve. And even understanding their purpose doesn't negate the pain associated with life's problems. Sickness. Job loss. Relationship struggles. You name it. They hurt. But like everything else in our lives, we need to see these things as God sees them and be in agreement with what He says about them.

Maybe this is the first time you're hearing this idea or maybe it's the 100th time. Regardless, this is a command to the redeemed, to be fully joyful about our trials. Please see the redemptive opportunity in this command. Chances are that you are in the midst of a trial. And there's also a good chance that you are struggling in that trial and that you've approached it very much like an unredeemed person would. At this point, we have a

wonderful opportunity to repent -- change direction and confess -- say the same thing about the situation that God does and stop. Stop trying to fix it. Stop trying to escape. Stop praying that your will be done. Be transparent with Him and tell Him the desires of your heart which He already knows, but ask Him to give you joy in the midst of your trial. Tell Him what you want but then tell Him that you desire His will to be done more than anything.

Our small group can be pretty blunt. Someone will text about a situation going on in their life -- something for which they are seeking prayer. And someone else, in, I'm sure, a loving way, will ask, "Have you thanked God for this coming into your life?" Yeesh.

There are multiple progressions in the passage we're looking at this evening. We see the first one here in verse 4. In the verse before, we learn that one of the purposes of our trials is for the testing of our faith and that results in patience. Then we see that:

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The Test/Trial results in Patience which, in turn, leads to our Perfection.

Notice that this is happening in us and to us, but not by us. Prepositions are important when studying Scripture -- pay attention to them.

There are two primary purposes for our trials. 1) They are for our maturity in Christ. And 2) they are a testimony to a watching world. Think about it. When you begin to live this imperative out in your life, you are going to appear to be quite peculiar. Peter calls us that in 1 Peter 2:9 -- you can look that up later. And being seen as different -- you're told you have cancer but after your initial shock, you turn to God and put your faith in Him and people see that. Or you get passed over for a promotion but you don't get angry -- you trust in Him. You don't think people will see that? Or you stub your toe, get cut off in traffic, someone takes your parking spot, but you smile as you say a prayer under your breath -- man, that's peculiar. Peter continues to develop this idea in chapter 3:15 when he says,

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

Why would they be asking you about your hope? Because when they see you go through a trial, they can tell that you're different, peculiar, even.

I just did something I hate to do -- stopped reading a passage in the middle of a thought. There's a comma at the end of verse 15 which means Peter is still in mid-sentence. But we don't have time for me to keep going there -- we're supposed to be in James, so let's go back there and you go read 1 Peter later this week -- make a note on your handout.

So James doesn't stop with just talking about our trials and their purpose and leave us hoping we'll be able to handle it. In verses 5 through 8, James then says something very profound about wisdom -- Godly wisdom. We don't have time to go into the profound differences between earthly and Godly wisdom -- a similar discussion can be had about worldly and Godly sorrow.

There's a progression we see in the world -- data collected becomes information. Information, when accumulated, becomes knowledge. Knowledge, rightly applied is wisdom. But Godly wisdom comes from above and if there's wisdom to be had, let it be Godly wisdom. It should also be noted that Godly wisdom can be at odds with data, information, and knowledge -- not always, but it can be.

He says that if anyone lacks wisdom, we simply ask God for it and He will give it liberally and without reproach. That's it. But then a warning is given -- ask for and receive Godly wisdom, but do not doubt that you have received it. It becomes a faith issue. The opposite of faith is doubt.

Now as we continue in the passage, it appears that James shifts direction in verses 9 and 10 because he starts talking about the financial status of believers, but consider the narrative, the context. He isn't changing gears at all but continuing to develop the same thought. He knows our tendency to rely on our own resources when we encounter trials. He also knows our tendency to think of ourselves as self-sufficient and James, here, is

reminding us that what we have isn't because of something we have done -- it's from Him, and even then, riches on this earth are very temporary. A rich person who pursues earthly riches will have them fade away. Yet how many of us hear that, but still think that that doesn't apply to us -- that we're going to be the exception to the rule. Or we try to convince ourselves that we're not the rich talked about and warned all through the New Testament. So let me ask you this -- when trials come, what is the first thing you rely on? What's your initial response???

In verse 12, we learn that the result of our accumulated trials on this earth, the things that ultimately result in the perfection He creates in us, results in a reward -- the crown of life -- something that the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Again, do not seek the reward for the reward's sake. Seek Him, and the reward will result.

Continuing in the same paragraph, James goes on in verses 13 and 14 to give us sound doctrine about the nature of God, good, evil, and temptation. Again, the directness of James should be appreciated.

Let's continue with our outline:

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We see that we are responsible in our temptations.

He starts by telling us that

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God is perfectly sinless.

He then tells us where complete blame for our sin resides:

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We are utterly sinful.

Another phrase we use that we arrive at from the weight of Scripture is “total depravity”. The Bible teaches that because we are sinners by nature and by choice, there is nothing good in us.

So sin or even temptation to sin does not come from God -- it originates with us.

Then he goes on in verses 14 and 15 to give us another progression as he explains the anatomy of sin.

Let's read it again:

But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

Here are the steps involved when we sin:

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Step one: deception

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Step two: desire

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Step three: disobedience

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Step four: death

When you consider the truths that Jesus gave us in Matthew 5 and 6 about what is going on inside of us -- that we say we haven't murdered anyone but we've harboured deep hatred for someone in our hearts -- thinking

about doing them harm and liking the thought of it; that we haven't committed adultery but you've let your mind go when it comes to thinking about it -- spending significant time imagining it in your mind. Thinking this way goes beyond temptation to the entertainment and committing of the sin and Jesus says that we are then just as guilty as if we had committed the sinful act.

So in the anatomy of sin, when does the sin actually happen? We know that the temptation by itself isn't a sin, but there are many ways in which that sin can manifest itself and we aren't smart enough to escape it on our own -- we need divine assistance.

And as we wrap up this first section of James in verses 16 through 18, see the faithfulness of God. Specifically,

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God is faithful in our salvation.

And his faithfulness is and results in goodness.

In these verses, we see that

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His goodness is unchanging

Also that He is unchanging -- an important attribute of God and something that can only be said, in absolute terms, about Him. It's an awesome thing to stop and think about -- that God is absolutely God in all of His attributes and in all of who He is.

We also see that:

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His goodness is undeserved -- something that we need to keep repeating to ourselves because we're often in denial about our own nature (see point II. A. 2. In the outline).

And

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His goodness is unending

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He has saved us from our sin (something we are completely incapable of doing for ourselves -- something for which we should worship Him everyday).

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And then James completes his lesson on trials and tribulations by telling us that God has saved us through (not from) our sorrow.

What a challenging passage. You may be mad at James, like Terry shared last week about his experience with his doctor, but you know that what he says is good, and right, and for our benefit.

Thank you for your patience. I'm prayerful that reading and reviewing this part of James has blessed you and will continue to bless you in some way.

I invite you to join us after our prayer time and I invite you to come back or tune in next week as Patrick picks up and finishes chapter 1 and carries us through into chapter 2 in our study on the book of James.

Let's pray.