

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **From Trouble to Triumph, Part 2**

Scripture: James 1:2-4

Code: 59-4

Well, let's open our Bibles tonight to James, and I want us to look again at chapter 1, verses 2 through 12, and I do not assume that we will be able to cover all of this section. I want to take my time with these truths, because they're so rich and so wonderful. I want to read again James 1:2 through 12.

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing this, that the trial or the testing of your faith works endurance. And let endurance have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything from the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted, but the rich in that he is made low, because as the flower of the grass, he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and its flower falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth; so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. Blessed is the man that endures trials, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love Him."

Now, we kind of ended our message last time with the phrase "them that love Him," and I want to begin this time picking up that same phrase. Loving God is without question the key to enduring all the trials of life. Perhaps it is the single most decisive evidence of a regenerate soul. If anything is true of a regenerate person, it is that they love God. That seems to me to be the bottom line. True Christians here, then, are designated as "them that love Him." That is a title for Christians – what a lovely title it is indeed – and that is why they endure. They endure because they have a strong love for God. And no matter what the trial, no matter what the struggle, what the difficulty, they endure, because love holds them fast. I think you can see that in any relationship; any relationship, even on a human level, where the bond of love is very strong will sustain all kinds of adversity. And in those trials, and tribulations, and testings, and difficulty that comes into the life of a Christian, the thing that holds us to the Lord, that keeps our faith firm, is this strong bond of love.

Some years ago, Gardner Spring was a pastor in New York City; and he wrote of the persevering power of love, and these are his words. "There is a vast difference between such an affection, and that selfish and unhallowed friendship to God which terminates on our own happiness as its supreme motive and end. If a man in his supposed love to God has no ultimate regard except to his own

happiness, if he delights in God not for what He is but for what He is to him, in such a sentiment there is no moral virtue. There is indeed great love of self, but no true love of God. But where the enmity of the carnal mind is slain, the soul is reconciled to the divine character as it is. God Himself in the fullness of His manifested glory becomes the object of devout and delighted contemplation. In his more favored hours, the views of a good man are in a great measure diverted from himself. As his thoughts glance toward the varied excellence of the deity, he scarcely stops to inquire whether the being whose character fills his mind, and in comparison of whose dignity and beauty all things are atoms and vanity, will extend his mercy to him. His soul cleaves to God, and in the warmth and fervor of devout affection, he can often say, `Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none on the earth that I desire beside Thee; as the hart pants after the water brooks, so pants my soul after Thee, O God.'”

Now, what he means to say by all of that, of course, is that the bond that ties a man or a woman to God is the bond of love; not just superficial affection, not just sentiment that is basically selfish – that is to say, as long as I get from you what I want, I’ll stick around – but a true bond of love that can endure any trial. Gardner Spring then poses a personal examination series of questions, and I think they’re helpful. He asks the reader this: “Do you love God for what you imagine Him to be or for what He is? Are you pleased with His character and do you love every part of it? Do you love His holiness as well as His grace, and His justice as well as His mercy? Do you love Him merely on account of His love to you, or do you love Him because He is, in Himself, lovely? Do you love Him merely because you hope He will save you, or do you think you should love Him if you supposed He would damn you? Is your love to God supreme? Whom do you love more than God? In whose character do you behold more beauty? Whose blessedness is the object of warmer desires or more vigorous exertion? To whom are you more grateful? It can be no difficult matter for you to reply to these inquiries. There may be danger, but surely there can be no necessity of being deceived in a case so plain.”

Then he says this, “Supreme love to God is decisive evidence of the renewed heart.” I love that. “Supreme love to God is decisive evidence of the renewed heart.” The people who endure trials, James is saying, are those that love Him.

Now, there are some things that do not prove true love. They do not prove the reality of living, saving faith. Outward morality doesn’t prove it; there are many people who are outwardly moral who do not love God. Theological knowledge doesn’t prove it; there are many people who know a lot about theology. That does not necessarily mean they love God. Religious activity doesn’t prove genuine living faith. There are all kinds of people engaged in religious activity who do not love God. Even the conviction of sin and the fear of judgment do not necessarily prove genuine saving faith. What, then, does prove saving faith? Well, certainly saving faith is based upon a genuine love for God. What proves that love is genuine? What is it that demonstrates genuine love? Well, that’s what James is all about. That’s what the whole epistle is about. And he tests whether you love God with a series of tests.

First, there is the test – and we'll look at this one later on in chapter 1 – the test of blame in temptation. And then there's the test of how we respond to the Word. Then there's the test of an impartial love to others, the test of righteous works, the test of the tongue, the test of humble wisdom, the test of worldly indulgence, the test of dependence, the test of patience, the test of truthfulness, and finally, the test of prayerfulness. Now, all of those are tests, which a person who truly loves God will pass. But the beginning test, and what we're looking at in these verses, is the test of endurance through trials. It reveals whether love is really a strong bond, whether it is genuine faith. True faith sustained by true love perseveres in this test.

Now, back in verse 2, we noted last time that we will fall into various trials. We also noticed, in verse 3, that this is to test the validity of our faith. Various trials come into our life to test our faith, to demonstrate the genuineness of our love. Peter writes about the same thing, doesn't he, in 1 Peter 1:6 through 8, as we saw last time. Then in verse 12, he basically sums up this section with similar statements. The man who endures trials is going to be rewarded, and he will reveal himself to be one who really does love the Lord. So here we're dealing with trials as a test for genuine salvation, which is based on true love. Remember the word for trial here is *peirasmos*, from the word *peiraz*, which means to put to the test. It is the test of living faith.

Now, last time we talked about the fact that we as true Christians are not only eternally secure from God's viewpoint, but we persevere from our viewpoint. Remember that? Very, very important balance – the true believer is held by the Lord, but the true believer also holds on to the Lord. He perseveres through trial. And so you can look at a person in a trial and see the validity of their faith by the validity of their love; by whether or not they hold fast to their faith. If there is no trial and no tribulation that can destroy their trust in God, then they show themselves in that trial to have living, saving faith. If they bail out in the middle of that trial, and sort of curse God or walk away from God or deny God or ignore God, then they show themselves to have dead faith.

My son, Matt, was telling me about a man the other day who was married at one point in his life here at Grace Community Church, went on to another church where he was on the staff in ministry. His wife divorced him, and at this point in his life, he has absolutely no interest in the Christian faith. He has, for all intents and purposes, denied the faith, completely put it aside, shows no attraction to Christ at all, and what that tells me is that when put through a very severe test, his faith was proven to be dead and not living at all. On the other hand, how many people have gone through severe testing and demonstrated in the end that they had faith in God that was indeed living faith?

But that part of the emphasis that James is concerned with is how we as saints can persevere through trials and make the most of them; how can we gain the most, as well as demonstrate the genuineness of our faith? Well, there are several means to perseverance. Perseverance is the saint of God holding fast to his love and his faith. And what are the means? How can we persevere through

trials? Even as true Christians, how can we gain the most out of our trials? How can we be victorious in our trials? Well, we're going to look at five key means to persevering through trials.

First of all, we begin with a joyous attitude – we begin with a joyous attitude. Verse 2, “My brethren” – and he means by that believers; Jewish Christians, yes, to be sure, but nonetheless, though they are the Jews, the twelve tribes scattered, as verse 1 says, they are Christians, they are believers. He calls them brethren all through this epistle; chapter 1 verse 2, verse 16, verse 19; chapter 2 verse 1, verse 5, verse 14, verse 15; chapter 3 again in verse 1; chapter 5 verse 7, 9, 10, 19, and I may have missed some. And some of the time he calls them “beloved brethren.” So he's identifying them as fellow believers. And the word “my” has sort of a wonderful and warm word which has the effect of his identification with them in a common bond. So he embraces them, as it were, as his own Christian brothers and says, to begin with, if you're going to persevere through various trials, if you're going to come out triumphant in the end, you have to look at whatever the trial is and consider it joy. First of all, a joyous attitude.

Now, the word “count,” count it, that's an aorist; it means consider it or evaluate it as joy. I mean that's something you discipline yourself, in a sense, to do. Whatever it is, you say, “This is going to be joy, I will consider this joy” – a conscious commitment to a joyous attitude. When Paul says to the Philippians in chapter 4, “I have learned in whatever state to be content,” he says that just after he said, “Rejoice always, and again I say rejoice,” and he said that while he was a prisoner. He had learned to do that. He had cultivated that. That's not something that happens by accident. So “my brethren, count it all joy” – not just partial joy but all joy – “when” – notice that little word “when;” it's not the word “if,” it's the word “when.” In fact, it's the word *hotan*, it means “whenever.” And when used in this particular form with the subjunctive, it's in a sense saying “whenever, and believe me, it's inevitable.”

So “whenever you happen to fall” – *parapipt*, the idea of sort of stumbling into a trial; it's used here, and I think it's used only two other places. Once in Luke 10:30, where the good Samaritan story is told, and the man going down the road fell among thieves. That's the word “fall.” It has the idea of being suddenly overtaken and surprised by thieves. It's also used in Acts 27:41, where Paul was taking a boat over to Rome, and it says the ship fell into a place where two seas met. If you've done any sailing, you know when two bodies of water come together it can be very rough; it's like hitting a wall. And so they fell into that place – again, a sudden, inadvertent overtaking in that condition. And so the word, then, means an unplanned, surprising, inadvertent occurrence that sort of takes you over; *peri* means “around.” It surrounds you. It engulfs you.

So all of us in our lives are going to be sort of tripped up, surprised, shocked to fall into inadvertent troubles that surround us. And the intention of that means there just doesn't seem to be any clear way out. Christ had that. In Luke 22:28, He said to His disciples, “You have been with Me in my *peirasmos*, you've been with Me in My troubles, you've been with Me in My trials.” And there's really no way out,

they surround you. Jesus never sought troubles, but He always accepted them. And our dear Lord was even joyful in them. You remember Hebrews chapter 12, verse 2, “looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame.” He went through what He went through because He looked beyond the trial to the joy that He would be able to realize when the trial was over. In other words, what it would accomplish – what it would accomplish.

Later on in Hebrews 12, I’m sure you’re familiar with verses 10 and 11, it says, “Trials don’t seem to be joyous at first, no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous. But nevertheless, afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are properly exercised by that trial.” So when you see a trial coming, your attitude is to be an attitude of joy, because you anticipate what perfecting work the Lord will do through that trial. You learn then to cultivate that right attitude. It was, of course, the Savior’s way. He went through pain to joy. Should we expect anything different? Do you remember back in Matthew 10 when Jesus, in effect, said that? He said to His disciples as He was preparing to send them out that they should certainly not expect anything different than He had endured. He says in chapter 10, verse 25, “It’s sufficient for the disciple that he should be like his teacher.” And what He was talking about there was not so much discipleship as modeling, but discipleship as suffering. And then in John chapter 15, He says, “If they hated Me, they will hate you. And if they persecuted Me, they will persecute you.” And chapter 16, He says, “The day will come when men think they please God by punishing you.”

Can we rejoice because we see beyond? Can we rejoice because we have a vision that through the trial the Lord is bringing about some perfecting work? Notice John 16 for just a moment. I want to draw your attention to several verses there to help sort of elucidate this point. And really we’ve covered so much of the meaning of trials in our last message that we’re just kind of adding on these means as an ending. For those of you who weren’t here, I apologize for not having everything up to speed, but I trust the Lord will instruct you anyway. In John 16:20, Jesus says, “Verily, verily” – and again He is really warning His disciples – “I say to you, you will weep and lament, and the world will rejoice.” In other words, He’s anticipating His death, and the world will rejoice but those who love Him will weep and lament. “And you will be sorrowful” – I love this – “but your sorrow shall be” – what – “turned into joy.” And then He gives an illustration. “A woman when she is in birth pain has sorrow because her hour is come. But as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembers no more the anguish for joy that a man is born into the world.” What a beautiful analogy. What a wonderful picture. “And you now therefore” – verse 22 – “do have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man takes from you.”

Now, I believe that that is applicable to the life of every believer. As we enter into some kind of a trial, whatever that trial might be, we need to have the vision that sees beyond the trial to the joy that’s going to come when we have passed that test, when we have been strengthened by that. And so our response, back again to James chapter 1, is not partial joy, it’s all joy, having come to a settled,

definite, decisive conviction that we're going to face trials with the right attitude. We can have all joy. Now, some commentators say that means all joy and nothing else, which equals pure joy. Some commentators say that means unmixed joy. Some commentators say it means complete joy. Others say total joy. And one that I like said sheer joy. Take your pick, they all mean the same thing. But this is a joy of one who counts it a privilege to have his faith tested, because he knows in the testing of his faith it will draw him to the Savior. And he so longs for that intimacy and that relationship of dependence, that even the trial is a welcome friend.

Have you noticed – have you noticed that in your trials you are much more sensitive to the presence of God? You notice that? Have you noticed that when you're going through difficult times, your prayer life increases? Your communion with God increases? You start searching the scriptures to find answers to your problems. You start asking people to pray for you, and all of that draws you closer to the Lord and closer to the very source of your joy. We are privileged to have our faith tested. We are privileged to suffer. We should count it a privilege and accept it with joy. In 1 Peter 2:20, he says if you do well and suffer for it, take it patiently because this is acceptable to God. You're really suffering on His behalf. And remember this, Hebrews 12:3 says you haven't yet suffered unto blood. I mean, you haven't suffered as far as Jesus did. Have you ever thought about that? I think about that an awful lot. When I'm going through a trial – and I do have my trials – and it gets kind of difficult, and I'm asking myself whether this is really a very happy occasion and there's anything to rejoice about, I'm always reminded that I have not come anywhere near suffering unto blood as did Jesus Christ. And if He could endure the cross and see it as a joyous opportunity to accomplish a great thing for the purpose of God, then how can I not endure my small trial with joy as well? I not only look at Christ as a model – but I guess in some ways Christ is an unrealistic model for me, because I say no matter what I do, I'll never be like Him, so find me someone who is more like me that I can pattern my life after. And inevitably I am attracted to a man by the name of the apostle Paul, who seems to me to be as close to being like Christ as any man will ever be. And all the time he goes through trials, he seems to be able to joy and rejoice no matter what it is that's happening.

I'm reminded of Acts 16. Now, "At midnight" – Paul and Silas are in jail. You have to know that this is not a nice place. They're not like some jails are today. This would be a filthy place with no sanitary conditions, a dark and dingy place. And not only that, they would be put in the stocks, and the stocks meant that they would put their arms at a distance apart, stretching their limbs. They would stretch their legs apart so that their legs were pulled like a wishbone, again, causing their muscles to tighten up into knots because of the immobility and the stretching. And here they are in that condition in the stocks, in the jail. Their life is on the line. And it says, "At midnight, Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God." Now, that is a joyous attitude in the midst of a very difficult trial. But that seems to have been Paul's portion.

I'm reminded also of 2 Corinthians 12, and Paul, you'll remember, had some kind of a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan sent to buffet him; a grave difficulty, for which he prayed three times that

the Lord would remove it, and it didn't go away. And so he says, "My grace is sufficient for you, Paul." You don't need the elimination of the trial. You need the grace to endure it. I'll give you that grace because My strength is made perfect in your weakness. So then Paul says, "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me." You ought to rejoice in your trial. First of all, it draws you close to the Lord. Secondly, it allows you to have the privilege of the fellowship of His sufferings. And thirdly, it keeps you what? Keeps you humble, doesn't it? Keeps you dependent. It's a privilege.

Look at Philippians 1. Not all suffering is necessarily physical suffering. Sometimes we have to go through emotional and mental suffering. But in Philippians chapter 1, Paul is talking about the things that he's doing. He, of course, is a prisoner when he writes Philippians. And he says in verse 12, "The things that have happened unto him" – that is, the imprisonment – "has fallen out rather to the furtherance of the gospel, so that my chains" – he is chained – "in Christ are manifest in all the palace." He was chained to all these Roman soldiers, and as a result, he was winning them all to the Lord, and they were having a revival in Caesar's palace. And that's why at the end of Philippians, verse 22 of chapter 4, he says, "All the saints greet you, chiefly those of Caesar's household." They didn't know what they had on their hands. They thought they had a prisoner; they had a sort of self-appointed evangelist they had chained to their own soldiers, and consequently given him a captive audience.

He says in verse 14, "Many of the brethren in the Lord have become more confident by my bonds." In other words, people see that this jail ministry is a valid deal, so they're going after it, figuring "if I get in jail I'll have a revival like Paul is." I mean there's a lot of ways to have a jail ministry, right? And Paul says, "By the way, some preach Christ of envy and strife," and that is to say "some preach Christ antagonistically against me." Some were at odds with Paul. And what they were really doing was – if you're going to study the background here, what they were doing was speaking evil of Paul, saying he was in prison because he blew his ministry, the Lord put him on a shelf, he's had his day and now he's set aside. Some may have been saying he's committed some sin. Whatever it was, it was certainly strife and contention. Verse 16 says "they were trying to add affliction to my chains." It wasn't as bad, it wasn't bad enough that he was chained; now there were people trying to hurt him and wound him by saying evil things against him. "They preached Christ contentiously. Some, however, preached Christ of love. And they know that I'm in jail because I was set for the defense of the gospel."

But verse 18 – I love this – he says, "So what, what's the difference? Christ is preached, and in that I do rejoice and I will rejoice." What a model. What a model man he is. He is a man of joy. Look at chapter 2, verse 17. He says, "If I have to be offered up like a sacrifice for your faith" – in other words, if I die getting you saved – "I joy and rejoice." I mean, he was expendable, wasn't he? He really was. He didn't count his life dear unto himself. He says in Acts 20, all he wanted to do was finish the ministry. In chapter 3, verse 7, "the things that were gained to me" – what were those – "circumcised

the eighth day, stock of Israel, tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew of the Hebrews, touching the law, Pharisee, concerning zeal, persecuting the church, touching the righteousness of the law, blameless – all of that sort of religious pedigree doesn't mean a thing to me. I counted them lost for Christ. And I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and I do count them manure that I may win Christ.”

And then over in chapter 4, he says, “Rejoice in the Lord, and again I say rejoice.” He learned in any state he was in to rejoice. Why? Because he could see that he was drawing nigh unto God, he was communing in the sufferings of Christ. And that was his prayer, wasn't it, “that I may know Him in the fellowship of His sufferings.” And he knew that he would see the power of Christ in his weakness, and he knew that out of that the Lord would make him a better man, and accomplish some glorious work, and prove his faith.

This was the joy of Job. Job said, “He knows the way I take. I'm not going to debate God. He knows the way I take.” And then he said, “And when He has tested me, I shall come forth as” – what – “gold.” I mean I want Him to do what He's going to do for the joy of the final product. And Job even said – that's 23:10 of Job – “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.” His wife was in the wings saying, “Curse God and die.” And he was rejoicing.

Trials are to be faced with a joyful attitude. They produce proven faith. They strengthen us. They draw us into communion with God. They identify us in the sufferings of Christ, and what a sweet identification that is. And they promise better things to come. I guess in one way we can enjoy the suffering today, because it will be so wonderful when we get to the future. Like Romans 8:17, “the glory that shall be revealed, the sufferings of today aren't worthy to be compared with,” right? It's kind of like the guy who beat his head on the wall because it felt so good when he stopped. It's going to feel awfully good, isn't it, when it all is over. What a privilege. So where do you start with your trials? I believe what James is saying is you start with a joyful attitude, because you know all the little things that God is using that trial to bring to pass in your life. What a rich and wonderful thing to see your faith proven, to see your faith strengthened, to see maybe some sin knocked off your life, to fill your heart with hope for that better day when you won't have trials, to draw you into prayer and communion, to let you identify with Christ. What wonderful things, cause for joy.

I was reading Warren Wiersbe, who's a dear friend, and his commentary on Philippians, and he had an excellent little paragraph. I want to share it with you. He said, “Our values determine our evaluations. If we value comfort more than character, then trials will upset us. If we value the material and physical more than the spiritual, we will not be able to count it all joy. If we live only for the present, and forget the future, then trials will make us bitter, not better,” end quote. He's right. Your values determine your evaluation. Now, listen carefully. If you can't rejoice in your trials, your values are wrong. You got that? Your values are wrong. You're not seeing that God has a purpose in that. Now, while I'm preaching this, I'm saying in the back of my mind, “The Lord is probably going to make



you live this sermon in a few weeks.” I wouldn’t be a bit surprised. Walter Knight once wrote, “Pressed out of measure and pressed to all length, pressed so intensely it seems beyond strength, pressed in the body and pressed in the soul, pressed in the mind till the dark surges roll, pressure by foes and pressure by friends, pressure on pressure till life nearly ends. Pressed into loving the staff and the rod; pressed into knowing no helper but God. Pressed into liberty where nothing clings, pressed into faith for impossible things. Pressed into living a life in the Lord, pressed into living a Christ-life outpoured.” Isn’t that beautiful? That’s what He wants to press you into.

And Amy Carmichael said, “Hast thou no scar? No hidden scar on foot or side or hand? I hear thee sung as mighty in the land. I hear them hail thy bright ascendant star. Hast thou no scar? Hast thou no wound? Yet I was wounded by the archers spent. Leaned me against the tree to die and rent by ravaging beasts that compassed me I swooned. Hast thou no wound? No wound, no scar. Yes, as the Master shall the servant be, and pierced are the feet that follow Me. But thine are whole. Can he have followed far who has no wound or no scar?” The joy and the privilege of bearing in our body the marks of Christ, enduring trials for the strengthening of faith; a joyful attitude.

I want to show you a second thing, a means to perseverance in trial; not only a joyful attitude, but an understanding mind – an understanding mind. Notice verse 3. What’s the first word in verse 3? What is it? “Knowing,” that speaks of the mind. Not only are you to have a joyful attitude, but an understanding mind. And the word is *ginsk*, basically has the idea of knowledge which comes from personal experience, the personal knowledge that we have learned because we have encountered the truth ourselves. “Knowing this” – now, what he means by that is, “Look, if you’re going to go through a trial victoriously, if you’re going to persevere, you’ve got to know a few things, you’ve got to understand a few things.” Christ had joy in enduring the cross because He knew what was going to happen. He knew what was going to come. You need to know some things, too. What do you need to know? Well, “Know this, that the testing of your faith works endurance.” So you need to know that what’s going on in your life is producing something very beneficial.

Let me see if I can break that down a little bit. What should you know to persevere in trials? What do you need to know? Well, first of all, you need to know your faith is being tested. You need to know that. You say, “Well, why do I need to know that?” Because when you come through the other end of the trial and you still have your faith, it’s good to know you’re for real, right? It’s wonderful. If you ask me how I know I’m a Christian, one of the things I’m going to say to you is, “Well, I love the Lord with all my heart. Certainly not as much as I ought to, but I love with all that I feel I have to give. And so I know I love, I know I’m a Christian because of my love for the Lord. But I also know I’m a Christian because I’ve gone through difficult situations, and I come out the other end, and all my hope and all my trust is still in Him.” So know this, that your faith is tested. Anything that’s legitimate is going to be tested, and the verification of true faith ought to be a wonderful thing. What an encouragement to see that my faith was genuine, that I went through the test and I passed.

The word “testing,” *dokimion*, means “proof.” Know this, that the proof of your faith brings endurance. Works, the word “works” means to achieve or accomplish. Don’t ever think trials don’t accomplish something, they do. Trials, all the trials that come into our life are designed to accomplish something. They’re designed to produce something. They’re designed to work something. And what is it here? It is *hupomon* – not patience; the best word is endurance. Patience is that word *makrothumia*, which has to do with being patient with people. This is the word “endurance.” It’s the staying power, is a good translation; perseverance, maybe the best one. And this is perhaps one of those passages where theologians of old drew the perseverance of the saints as a theological term. It’s the tenacity of spirit that holds on under pressure while awaiting God’s time to remove, to dismiss, to reward when the trial is done. Oh what a wonderful, wonderful thing to have in your life, endurance. And every time you go through a trial, and every time I go through a trial and we pass through those trials, we are strengthened. We have gained a little bit more endurance.

In Psalm 40, verse 1, “I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined unto me and He heard my cry, and He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, set my feet on a rock and established my goings. He put a new song in my mouth.” Boy, every time you come out of a trial, isn’t that the way you feel? I cried unto the Lord, He picked me up, set me on a rock, put a song in my heart, and off I went, stronger than ever because of the enduring of that trial.

Now, I want to show you something. Let’s go to 1 Corinthians 10. I need to just elaborate a little bit on this. First Corinthians 10:13, it says, “There is no trial” – it’s the same term here – “there’s no trial taken you but such as is common to man.” In other words, you’re not going to have some kind of supernatural trial that is going to be so overpowering that there’s nothing within the human realm that can withstand it. No. The trials that come are going to be common trials to human beings. “But God is faithful” – now mark this – “who will not allow you to be tempted above that you are able.” I want you to just stop and think about that. Now, does everyone have the very same ability in terms of enduring trials? Do they? No. A brand new baby Christian with limited knowledge and limited understanding and very limited experience is not going to have the ability to endure trials at a level that someone else might. And I believe what the apostle is promising here is God will never put you through a trial that you can’t handle until He has put you through some preliminary ones to strengthen you for that level of trial. And that’s the promise of 1 Corinthians 10:13 – there will never come into your life, or my life, a trial which will be absolutely overwhelming. First of all, the Lord will bring us trials, testing our faith, strengthening our faith, producing endurance, so that gradually, we can move out for Him, encounter greater trials, and be ready to face those trials. The sovereign, faithful, covenant-keeping God who secures his children, does so in a personal, intimate way, through all the days and hours of their lives, not just through some fiat statement made in time past, but rather through working with them day in and day out.

It's like a runner. I remember a few years ago they had the, I don't know what you call it, a jogathon at Cal State Northridge for the disabled people in Dr. Britton's program out there, and somebody said, "Are you going to run?" And I said, "Well, I don't know." Well, people kept wanting to put money on me to run, and so by the time the jogathon came around, I had a lot of people who promised a lot of money if I ran. I think one guy promised a hundred dollars a lap. Now, that's a lot of pressure. I mean, I know that every one more lap I can go is another hundred dollars for the program, right? And you had to do it within an hour. Well, I hadn't been jogging, I don't jog because I have bad knees from old football injuries, but I determined that day that I was going to jog. So I jogged; I think I jogged 26 laps in an hour. And I want you to know, folks, you didn't know this, but I could not walk for a week. My knees swell up, and I don't want to go into my medical history, but I couldn't walk. And, of course, I got a lecture from my wife about overdoing things, and all I could think about was I got all that money for this project, you know.

But it was a good reminder that anybody who wants to develop the ability to run long distance starts small. Mine went backwards. I started big and I haven't run since. We work up, don't we, to maximum capacity, and James' point is that right here; understanding and knowing that God is strengthening your faith. He's producing greater endurance for greater ministry, for greater service, for greater trials, for greater joy, may I add. And haven't I said to you on many occasions that the more difficult the battle is, the sweeter the victory, right? The more difficult the trial, the sweeter it is when you come out of it? Oh, that's so true. And I have learned in my life that whenever you're going into a trial, there's always, there's always light in the morning, and when you come out of it, you rejoice at the increased strength and the deliverance of God, which again proves Him to be trustworthy, which strengthens your faith.

In 2 Thessalonians 1, Paul writes to the Thessalonian Christians, he says, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ; we are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting because your faith grows exceedingly." Isn't that good? "Your faith grows exceedingly. And the love of every one of you all toward each other abounds so that we ourselves glory or boast in you in the churches of God for your endurance and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure." You know what endurance brought them? It brought them growing faith, abounding love and a tremendous testimony. It's very productive. In chapter 3, verse 5, he says to them, "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patient waiting for Christ." They were a wonderfully enduring group.

In Hebrews chapter 11, also, we have insight into this point being illustrated to us. It's discussion of Moses, "By faith, Moses when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. He considered that the reproach of the anointed Messiah was greater riches than the treasures in Egypt – why – "because he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." In other words, the man lived in the light of what the endurance would bring in the future. He saw the future

plan. So by faith in that plan, by faith in God, he forsook Egypt, didn't get intimidated by the wrath of the king, because he could see an invisible King. Through faith he kept the Passover, the sprinkling of blood on the door post and the lintel, lest the first born be destroyed. By faith they all went through the Red Sea on dry land, and the Egyptians attempting to do that were drowned, and so forth.

And then he goes on from there to talk about other people in terrible times of trial, and you go down to verse 32 and you just have more and more of them: Gideon, and Barak, and Samson, and Jephthah, and David, and Samuel, and the prophets, always through faith, through faith, through faith, the great heroes of the faith here. They trusted God in the midst of unbelievable circumstances. They subdued kingdoms, and wrought righteousness, and obtained promises, and stopped the mouths of lions, and quenched the violence of the fire, and escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in fight, turned to fight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Others had trials of cruel mocking and scourging, and moreover, bonds and imprisonments. They were stoned, sawn in half. They were tested or tried, slain with a sword, wandered about in sheepskin and goatskins. They actually encased them in skins. They were destitute, afflicted, tormented. The world wasn't even worthy of them. They wandered in the deserts, in the mountains, in the dens and the caves of the earth. And all of them received witness through faith, having not received the promise. They did it all by faith.

And then he comes into chapter 12, and says, "That's the, that's the heroes of faith. And you're compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses." That means so many people who testified to the virtue of faith. Boy, you better lay aside the stuff in your life and run the race of faith like they did. And the great finisher and author of faith is Christ, who is the greatest example of joy in the midst of trials. When trials come, then, we have an understanding mind. We understand that the Lord is creating endurance. And endurance strengthens us for greater ministry. And our faith is proven.

There's a third ingredient, and I'll just give you this one tonight and the other two next time. The third necessary means for perseverance – first the joyful attitude, secondly, an understanding mind – thirdly, a submissive will – a submissive will. I love this in verse 4, it's so direct. Look at this, "Let, but let," this is present active imperative, this is a command, "let patience have her perfect work." Let God do His work. Let endurance do what God wants it to do. This is a command demanding submission. What he's saying is, be submissive to the trial. Don't fight it. Don't argue about it. Don't shake your fist at God. Accept it. If you try to fight it, if you try to resist it, if you try to argue with it and debate with it, well, you may bring yourself under the chastening of God. "My son, don't despise the chastening of the Lord nor faint when you're rebuked of Him, for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son He receives. If you endure through chastening, God is dealing with you as a son." He's perfecting. He's shaping. If you fight against it, you're going to find it becomes more and more difficult.

So, we are to submit – we are to submit. I said this, remember, when we were going through 1 Corinthians 10; that's years ago. The only way out of a trial is what? Through it. There are no side exits. The way out is through. "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above that you're able, but will with the temptation make a way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." And the way of escape is always through. So with joy in trials, because we see the glorious future, because we're drawn into sweet communion with the Father, because we are enriched in the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ, because we see the sin being knocked off of our own life, because it gives us a greater hope for heaven. In the joy of all of that, we begin to see how to persevere.

Then comes the understanding that God is doing this to create a greater endurance, for a greater usefulness, for greater trials; and then we submit to that, with a submissive spirit or a submissive will. And look what he says here. "Let patience have a perfect work." What it's trying to do – let endurance have a perfect work – what it's trying to do is just make you better. The word "perfect" here would be better translated "spiritually mature." Don't be reluctant when trials come. Don't fight against that. Don't resist that. Don't deny God that wonderful perfecting work that He wants to do in your life.

In Psalm 131 – just a three-verse Psalm, it gets lost – but listen to what it says, "Lord, my heart is not haughty nor mine eyes lofty, neither do I exercise myself in great matters or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself like a child that is weaned of his mother. My soul is even like a weaned child." Beautiful thought. Lord, what You put me through has made me grow. I have matured. I'm off the bottle, is what he's saying. And that's a privilege; a thankful heart for being weaned away to be strong.

Job thanked God and willfully submitted to every trial the Lord gave him, even though his heart sometimes was confused. And you know what's interesting? It wasn't, it wasn't the circumstances that confused Job. It wasn't the circumstances that bothered him. It was the fact that he couldn't get an answer from God that bothered him. He kept asking and nothing came back. And that was the difficulty. In Job 5:7, he says – Eliphaz is speaking – "Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward. I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause: who doeth great things and unsearchable; marvelous things without number: who giveth rain to the earth and sendeth waters upon the fields: to set up on high those that are low; that those who mourn may be exalted to safety." He says when you go through a trial, just commit yourself to God. Just give yourself to God, trust in Him.

Psalm 37 says "Fret not yourself because of evil doers. Commit your way unto the Lord, trust also in Him," the scripture says; "He'll bring it to pass." Now listen, follow this: endurance is not the goal, the goal is perfection. Endurance is a means to that. It goes like this: you go through a trial, you get stronger, you have greater endurance. That greater endurance will allow you to go through a greater trial, and that greater endurance, a greater trial, and the sequence of that is going to bring about

spiritual maturity. Perfection is really synonymous with spiritual maturity. Let endurance lead to the goal, or the end, or the fulfillment, which is spiritual maturity. It doesn't mean sinlessness. No, there's no indication of sinlessness. James 3:2, "In many things we all stumble." But the point is spiritual maturity, full mature development; in the terms of 1 John 2:14, to be a spiritual father who knows Him who's from the beginning.

By the way, that term "perfect," *teleion*, is used in secular sources of animals that are full grown. Here it is used of Christians that are full grown. It makes a full-grown Christian. So the Lord is giving you endurance, to put you through a greater test, to make you a stronger Christian, a more mature Christian. And in Philippians 3:15, Paul says, "Let us therefore as many as be mature" and so forth. So it's attainable, you can get there. The Lord's putting you through that to bring you there. Faith is tested to make us more dependent, to give us stronger faith, to drive us to deeper communion. And that makes us more mature.

The word "perfect" has the idea of richness of character. Getting us to the place where we really want to be and where the Lord wants us to be. It also kind of conveys the idea of balance, a stable, balanced righteousness. The best verse to explain it – I love this – Galatians 4:19, Paul says, "I'll never be satisfied or I'll be in travail, I'll always be having pain spiritually until" – listen to this – "Christ is," – what – "formed in you." Isn't that a marvelous thought? That's the desire. That's the ultimate spiritual goal, until Christ is fully formed in us. And he describes what he means by perfection in verse 4, "Let endurance have a perfect work that you may be perfect" – and he repeats *teleioi* again – "and complete." That's a marvelous word, *holoklros*. *Holos* means whole; we get a word today, holography, which is a 360 degree picture, holography; "holos" and "*klros*" means all the portions. He wants you to be all portions intact, well-rounded, full put together spiritually, and then the negative of that, "Lacking nothing." Oh, what a comprehensive statement. He puts you through trials, so that you can gain endurance, so that you can go through more trials, until you've become fully complete as a mature person in Christ.

Only trials really could do that. Takes the Word of God, which is able to perfect you, 2 Timothy says, and trials, 1 Peter 5:10, the God of all grace, after you have suffered a while will make you" – what – "perfect" – trials, and the Scripture, and the perfection that comes.

Let me take you to a passage, as we draw this point to a conclusion, in Jeremiah 48, Jeremiah 48, one of my favorite little texts in the Old Testament, because it is so rich with meaning. In Jeremiah 48, there's a judgment spoken against Moab which, of course, was to the south and east of Jerusalem, a neighboring nation, pagan. In fact, God had cursed the Moabites, and there was not allowed to be any Moabite in the house of Israel. And there was a wonderful exception to that in the story of Ruth by God's grace. But in verse 11, I want you to notice this, "Moab," it says, "has been at ease from his youth." You know what Moab's problem is? Moab is ungodly. Moab is unregenerate. Moab is dissipated. Do you know why? Because Moab never had any problems in his life; a life without

problems produces a very weak character. Okay? Now watch. “And he has settled on his lees.” What are lees? Well, lees are the sediment that settles in the bottle bottom of a wineskin in the process of making wine; settled on its lees – “and has not been emptied from vessel to vessel. Neither has he gone into captivity, therefore his taste remained in him and his smell isn’t changed.”

You say, “What in the world is this?” Well, I’ll tell you what it is. This is a whole picture of wine making. Now, I want to tell you how it’s done. I say this by way of study, not experience. I want to tell you how it’s done. You have a series of wineskins. So you take this fruit of the vine, grape juice, and you pour it in a wineskin and you let it set. And as it sets for a while, the dregs, or the lees or the sediment, falls to the bottom and begins to separate from the wine the juice. You then, after a period of time – and this is a typical wine making process – take it out of that wineskin and pour it into another. Some of the sediment remains in the bottom. You pour it in the next wineskin and again that process is repeated over a length of time and whatever lees or dregs are left fall to the bottom in that one. You do that over, and over, and over, and over, and finally you’ll pour it into a wineskin, and wait a long time, and pour it back out again, and there’ll be no sediment, and it will be sweet.

All that sediment is collected, and from that sediment is made vinegar. But the wine now has a sweet fragrance and a sweet taste. And it has gotten that way because it has been poured from vessel to vessel to vessel, and in each case the pouring allowed the bitterness to fall out and settle in the bottom. And God is saying if Moab had only been poured from trouble to trouble to trouble, so that the bitterness could have fallen out, Moab would have offered a sweet scent. But Moab has been at ease. That’s a bad thing to be.

Consider it joy, and understand this, and submit to it, because as God pours you and me from trial to trial to trial to trial, all the bitterness is settling in the bottom until finally we bring before the Lord only a sweet savor, a sweet smell with no bitterness at all. We rejoice in our trials with that in mind. We understand the perfecting work and we willingly submit. Now, if you can approach your trials like that, you’re going to turn trouble into triumph, right? There are two more to go, and we’ll look at those next time. Let’s pray.

Father, we would not want that having heard we would forget, or having remembered we would not apply, but we would desire that, Lord, we would hear and apply these things in our lives. Help us now to internalize and make them personal, even as we speak these words written so beautifully by the hymn writer. And may they be our own prayer when we say, “Be still, my soul,” may that mean my soul. And whatever that trial, whatever that struggle might be, may we leave it to You to order and provide, to know that in every change You will be faithful, that You’re our best, our heavenly friend. And no matter how thorny the way may be, You lead us to a joyful end. Let this be the expression of our hearts as we sing it together. And, Lord, work in every life Your perfect and gracious work for the Savior’s sake. Amen.

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