

How to Endure Trials, Part 1

James 1:2-12

90-205

As I mentioned to you this morning, I am often asked about coping with the troubles of life. We all have them. They come in waves, it seems, none of us really escapes them. And as you know, in my own life through the years the Lord has done His work of refining by trials. As a young boy I went through an automobile accident in which I was injured and wound up three months in bed. From the physical standpoint, other illnesses that come and go in our lives cause us to be tested as to our trust and confidence in God. I've gone through a number of those, even recently when I came very near death with blood clots in my lungs. Our son, Mark, when he was a college student at the Master's college was discovered had a brain tumor, the Lord took us through that, took him through it as well. And it was six years ago last summer that Patricia they said should have taken her life when she broke her neck. And not long ago my sister died and a week ago my mother died.

And that's kind of how life goes. And life is filled not only with personal sorrows but because we're Christians and we bear one another's burdens, we sometimes have to sorrow with those who sorrow, don't we? And weep with those who weep. We have to share the grief of those who are disappointed and those who go through failure and loss and all of those things, they're a part of life.

And the question does come...how do you deal with that? How do you cope with that? How do you cope with those frightening disappointments as to their reality and as to the anticipation of what is inevitably ahead of us?

Turn in your Bible to James chapter 1. I think maybe as well as anywhere this text addresses that issue and does so in a very positive and instructive way. James 1, starting in verse 2, jumps right in by saying, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all men generously and without reproach and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind, for let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. But let a brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position and let the rich man glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away, for the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed. So, too, the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away. Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."

The last verse, really, is the summation of the point here. It'd a beatitude. Beatitude is a blessing. Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial. Trial then produces blessing. Having been tried we

receive the crown which is life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

How do you turn trouble into blessing? That's really the issue here. We're going to talk about that tonight and next Lord's day and hope we can get through this wonderful text.

A jeweler gives as one of the surest tests for a true diamond the water test. I don't know if you've ever seen them do that. An imitation stone is apparently on the surface as brilliant as a genuine stone, and if your eye is not experienced enough to detect the difference, water will help. A genuine diamond typically sparkles brilliantly under water while the imitation is practically extinguished. Place one alongside the other under water and the difference is immediately apparent.

Young ladies, when he gives you a diamond...(laughter)...right there at the table take out a glass of water...more laughter...and check him out.

Well, so many people who might be confident of their faith on the surface find that when it goes under the water of sorrow and affliction it loses all its brilliance, showing itself to be, in fact, an imitation. While on the other hand, the true child of God shines as a genuine diamond in the water of adversity.

James is concerned with such matters. He's concerned, as verse 3 says, with the testing of faith, with putting you through a test that will reveal the strength or weakness of your faith. Life is filled with these tests, we all know that. In Job chapter 5 and verse 7 it says, "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." In other words, sparks always fly upward off a fire and man is always born to trouble. In the fourteenth chapter of Job in the first verse it says, "Man that is born of a woman is a few days and full of trouble." Psalm 22:11 David said, "Be not far from me...talking to God...for trouble is near." Isaiah 8:22 records God speaking through Isaiah, speaking about His judgment in the world that left men, quote: "to look to the earth and find only trouble and darkness and dimness and anguish."

You know, really that's what life is, darkness, dimness and anguish for most people. Solomon in writing the book of Ecclesiastes sulked a little bit about life. In chapter 2 and verse 17 he said, "So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me because everything is futility and striving after wind." Verse 23, "All his days man's task is painful and grievous, even at night his mind does not rest, this too is emptiness."

Life can seem filled with nothing but trouble and emptiness. And even for Christians, even for those who belong to God there is the constant trouble and trial that comes in our fallen world. The psalmist, and we remember those Psalms as we read them on Sunday mornings, the psalmist repeatedly speaks about how he's in trouble...trouble after trouble after trouble..and celebrates the fact that the Lord delivers him out of trouble. Never says the Lord keeps him from trouble, always says the Lord delivers him out of trouble.

The best of life is marriage. That's why it's called the grace of life. And even in marriage though, which is the best of life, the fulfillment of life, the grace of life, it is the best gift that God has given for earthly happiness because it's in marriage that we find that fulfillment and that completion, and we find family and love and intimacy and all the richness of life. Even in marriage, 1 Corinthians 7:28 says, "There is trouble." Paul calls it "trouble in the flesh."

And frankly, no trouble is as painful as that which occurs in the family. The closer people are to you, a spouse, a child, a grandchild, a relative, a father or mother, the more pain is inflicted on you in their sorrow, their suffering, their disappointment and their death.

Even Jesus understood human trouble. He suffered in all points like as we are, yet without sin. He groaned. He wept. He cried over the death of Lazarus, over the weeping of Lazarus' family. He sorrowed over the city of Jerusalem. His soul was in anguish many, many times.

The Apostle Paul who probably would be perceived by most people as the strongest of all Christians, a man who almost seemed impregnable, was moved deeply and emotionally frequently to great feelings and even sadness and sorrow. And Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation," it just goes with life here. So we need to expect it. Any human, even Christ Himself here on earth, goes through it, trouble from family, trouble from friends, trouble on the job, in school, economic trouble, criticism, persecution, physical illness, disease, finally death and separation.

But James tells us here that trouble is a test. It's a test and verse 12 says, "If you persevere through that test you'll be blessed and you'll receive a crown of life." We need to view trouble as a test.

Now notice in verse 2 that James also understands that trouble comes in many forms. He says, "When you encounter various trials," poikilos, many-colored, multiple kinds of trouble. It emphasizes not a number but diversity. It can come in all kinds of ways, as I noted, in relationships, in monetary things, in physical things. There are all different kinds of trials, peirasmos, troubles.

We don't even know what the troubles were that were going on among the people to whom James wrote. They were Jewish believers who had been scattered abroad, as verse 1 says, and dispersed all over the place. And in their dispersion in a Gentile world they were suffering struggles. We know that some of them were being persecuted. Some of them were not being paid for the work they did. There were hostilities against them by the rich, as indicated over in chapter 5, and some of it was so debilitating as we saw some months ago that some of them were weakened to the point where they had to go to the elders to be helped.

It really isn't James' point to define these things in their specificity, simply to say there are all kinds of ways in which life is exposed to trouble. And the question is...how do we deal with that? James doesn't even distinguish between internal trouble and external trouble. In the Christian life no such distinction can be made, doesn't need to be made. Trouble comes in both forms. Some of it is outside of us, some of it is inside of us. Some of our most profound trouble has nothing to do with anybody else. It has to do with personal disappointment. It has to do with personal unfulfillment. It has to do with unrequited love. It has to do with emotions that seem never to be able to be settled. It has to do with fears and anxieties and worries and cares and frustrations, misunderstandings, dreams never realized, unmet expectations, loneliness, loss. And there are external things like criticism and persecution and misunderstanding and conflict and lies and whatever...that's life.

Now James says how we react to that, verse 3, is a test. It's a test. And it is a test of our faith. You see, in the end how you respond to all the difficulties of life is a test of your faith. It shows up where you are on the faith meter from weak to strong. You have to look at trials in that way. They're tests to demonstrate your faith. And ideally, you'll go through that test and you'll come out in verse 12. You

will come out as blessed because you persevered. You endured. You went through the trial and you will be blessed and you will receive the crown which is life. That's where God wants the whole thing to end, with blessing and eternal reward. The crown which is life simply speaks of eternal reward...present blessing and an increased eternal reward.

Now focus on that in your mind. The purpose for trials in life is so that you, not God, He knows where your faith is, so that you may know the strength or weakness of your faith and so that in enduring through the trial you may be blessed in this life and rewarded in the next life. God has intention then through our trials to grant to us gracious and eternal blessing.

Now the question comes...how do we endure these trials to the end that we receive blessing and eternal reward? How are we able to do that?

I believe the text unfolds five things that are required...five things, this is our recipe for perseverance, this is our recipe for handling trials. And I hope that this little list will stick in your mind, you can write it down and you'll go back and rehearse it again and again, it really is the key to persevering which is the key to being blessed which is the key to eternal reward.

Number one, the first thing to cultivate in the midst of a trial is a joyous attitude...a joyous attitude. And that's where James begins. "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials."

"My brethren" indicates he's talking here to believers, Christians, as those who are referred to in verse 12 at the end who love Him. We're talking here about people who love God, people who know Him, people who are our brothers and sisters in Christ. And by the way, James likes to use that term "brethren," he uses it maybe nearly ten times in this brief epistle. He's really identifying his audience as believers.

So the idea that somehow when you become a Christian you ought to be free from trouble is just not true. The idea that somehow when you become a Christian if your faith is strong enough you...you won't have any difficulties, you won't have any failures, you'll be swept in to unmeasured success, unmeasured fulfillment, health, wealth, prosperity, etc...just is not true. We're talking here about believers who are going through trouble and, first of all, he says your response is to consider it all joy.

This is a...this is a statement...in the form of the verb I believe he is giving a once-for-all kind of command. In other words, you need to make a conscious commitment at some point when you begin to enter into a trial to deal with it as joy.

Now, "to consider" is a very important word. Let me just kind of unfold that word for you a minute. If you really think about something, just take it in a generic sense, if you really think about something, if you really process what is happening, you begin to come not only to an understanding of what effect it's having on you, but of where it's going to lead. You cannot process something in your mind without processing its implications. And that's very important. In fact, you could translate that Greek word "think forward." And in processing the trial that you're going through, look ahead to its benefit, get out of the trauma of the moment because there's no joy in the immediate pain.

In thinking about the loss of my Mom this week, it was very hard to find joy in the midst of mulling

about her death. In thinking of her as having a cerebral hemorrhage and falling to the floor, thinking of her not being around anymore and never seeing her and stuck in that moment, you find yourself almost overwhelmed by the sadness of the loss. As you think about it from a Christian perspective, it isn't long until you start thinking forward and you start thinking about the fact that beyond what occurred there is heaven and that's where she is and that's where she'll be when you arrive. You begin to think pass the moment of pain and the joy begins to break on you like the dawning light after a night of darkness. Whenever you encounter the variegated trials of life, whenever that happens, my brethren, begin to think forward, don't get stuck in...in this moment. Life...and I reminded my Dad of this again, he knows it well, he's preached it all his life...but I reminded him life is a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. It's a brief breath, this life, and when you think forward you think of reunions and you think of the glories of heaven and you think of eternal life, and you think of being made like Christ, eternal glory and blessing.

So, whenever you encounter these trials, you are to think forward to the joyous reality that is beyond. And not only in the case of a death, but in the case of an illness. Instead of getting wrapped up in the sadness of the immediate experience, you begin to think forward to...what?...to what God is producing through that. I think of the words of the apostle Paul who...who could think beyond his own pain, so much that he could say when I'm suffering I'm receiving the comfort of God in my suffering so that having learned that I'll be able to comfort you in your suffering. In going through my own pain now, I am being prepared in the future to be able to help you deal with your pain. In going through the frustration of loss and going through the unfulfilled dreams and having my goals never achieved, not getting the job I want, the education I want, the position I want, not getting what I want in my marriage or my family, or whatever it might be, I realize that even in the midst of that suffering God is burning away some of my pride, some of my ambition and God is reforming my waywardness and moving me more into the kind of suffering that refines me and makes me more like my Savior. And that's looking forward, isn't it? Can't get stuck in the midst of the pain and experience the joy. You've got to go forward.

You know what's sad about being...not being a Christian, there is no forward. If you're not a Christian, there is no God to move you forward, there is no hope of eternal life, there is no sovereign one unfolding his purpose in your life. The plan's a little different than you planned it, but it's just exactly what it ought to be. There is no way to hope in that, to trust in that, to have confidence in that. There is no way to believe that somehow this is going to take you to a higher level of spiritual life, a greater level of blessedness and an eternal reward that would never occur had not this suffering come. It's just one blank. Hard to get beyond the pain. That is why people who have no hope sorrow so profoundly. But we do not sorrow like people who have no hope, do we? Because we think forward about everything. No matter what suffering comes into our lives, no matter what difficulty comes into our lives, for the moment we don't like it.

Remember Hebrews 12? When the Lord chastens us for the moment it is grievous, right? That's what he says. It's not fun when it's going on. It is grievous. Verse 11 of Hebrews 12, "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful." And if all you do is look at the moment, you're going to get stuck there. "Yet to those who have been trained by it, afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness." What God wants to do in your life is produce righteousness and righteousness is the most glorious thing that you can ever possess and it is the highest and most wondrous thing to enjoy. If you look forward, you'll see righteousness. If you get stuck in your pain, can't get your eyes off that, it seems only to be sorrowful.

Trials circle us. They sometimes seem to engulf us and drown us. And there's no way out but through. But still, writes James, consider it all joy because you're looking ahead to what God is doing.

Why...and our Lord would be the greatest example of this...why can we be so confident about what can come out of this? Look at Jesus. Hebrews 12, "Fixing our eyes on Jesus." You want to endure in this difficulty? "Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author, perfecter of faith...listen to this...who for the joy set before Him endured...what?...the cross, despising the shame and has sat down on the right hand of God, the throne of God." I mean, Christ was in the same situation. In the Garden when He looked at the immediate sin-bearing, He said to the Father, "Let this cup pass from Me," I don't think I can endure this. Hanging on the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" The sorrow would be absolutely beyond human description. His agony was so great in the Garden that He sweat, as it were, great drops of blood, his capillaries began to break down and began to bleed...the agony was so severe, the mental anguish showed up in His body. the agony on the cross again inexplicable. And yet, it was for the joy set before Him that He endured that. The joy wasn't in it, the joy was out of it, through it. The joy was set before Him when He was sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Jesus said in Luke 22:28 to His disciples, "You've been with Me in My trials."

He never sought trials, they came to Him. He always accepted them. And even the trial of the cross He could see through to the glory of God. And He endured the cross with joy. There couldn't be a greater trial than the cross, could there? A sinless one bearing sin? The inseparable second member of the trinity somehow separated from the rest? Unthinkable. But He endured it for the joy that was set before Him.

Now James doesn't just say...I want you to have a little joy in this. He says, "Count it...what?...all joy." What do you mean, James? Well what he means is very simple. Have a settled definitive decisive conviction to face trials as a source of pure joy, of unmixed joy, of complete joy, of transcendent joy, comprehensive joy, total joy, sheer joy, the joy of one who counts it a privilege to suffer because he knows it brings about divine blessing and eternal glory.

The apostle Paul certainly learned that, didn't he? He learned in whatever state he was to be...what?...content, because he knew that in the most profound trial, out of it would come blessing. He says, Philippians 1:18, he was a prisoner at the time he said this, he was being mercilessly criticized by other preachers, so he was suffering physically, he was suffering assaults, persecution both physical and mental...he says, "In every way whether in pretense or truth, Christ is proclaimed and in this I rejoice, yes and I will rejoice." There's a man with a settled conviction. I don't know that could have done anything to take his joy away. He was determined to be joyful because he could see beyond the suffering.

Chapter 12 of 2 Corinthians, verse 10, "I'm content with weakness, insults, distresses, persecutions, difficulties for Christ's sake, for when I'm weak then I'm strong." What he was saying was this, when God just breaks me down to nothing then He infuses me with His enduring gracious strength.

It was the joy of Job that caused him to say this. And Job suffered. You know, it's just unimaginable what that guy went through. I mean, I go over the story of Job so often in my mind, this is a poor guy just going through life, a good righteous man, as righteous as anybody in the world. And that's why God used him to prove His point to Satan, when Satan came and said, "Well, the only reason people serve You is cause You bless them. Take away all their blessing and they'll turn on You." And God

was going to prove to Satan and did prove that you can't break saving faith, you can't steal the trust of a true child of God. It's an eternal thing.

So He said, "Go after Job." And Satan went after him. All his children died. All his crops were gone. All his animals were gone. He was reduced to destitution. All he had left was a griping wife who told him to curse God and die. Life was so miserable he had scabs all over his body and some kind of illness and he sat in a pile of dirt with a broken piece of pottery, scraping the scabs off his skin. And to make matters worse he had some ill-advised and witless friends who came and told him all the wrong answers to his dilemma...which was another kind of suffering cause they kept accusing him of sin and saying the reason he's in the mess he's in is because of sin in his life. And he kept saying...No, there's not. And as some modern Christian psychologists would say today...Oh, he was in major denial.

Well he was in major denial because he had every right to be in it. It was just an unthinkable situation. Job said, chapter 23 verse 10, "But He knows the way I take, when He has tested me I shall come forth as gold." Isn't that great? You think you've had trouble, you didn't lose everybody in your family, all you possess like he did. It's okay, he said, I'm taking the forward look and when He's tried me, I'll come forth as gold. And it's when you think forward that you find the reason for joy.

Secondly, not only does perseverance through trials require a joyous attitude, but an understanding mind...an understanding mind.

Verse 3, "Knowing," there's a key word. If the key word in verse 2 is joy, the key word in verse 3 is knowing, ginosko, by personal experience. Personal knowledge gives us the information needed to evaluate our trials so we can look forward to the joy.

What do you need to know? What do you really need to know? Well, I'll tell you where I'm anchored. There are a number of things I need to know and if I don't know them I can't look forward to that joy. If I don't know them, it's impossible. And the thing that James points to that sort of sums it all up is, you need to know this, "You need to know that the testing of your faith produces endurance." That's what you need to know. That testing, dokimon, is the same word for proving, that God has a purpose and it is to make you stronger, to produce staying power. I love that, hupomone, so you can get under and remain under any trial and endure. It's that tenacity of spirit that holds up under pressure. That's sort of the general thing.

What you need to know is that God is doing a work in your life. That's what you need to know. And the work that He's doing is to develop your spiritual strength so that you'll be more useful, more blessed and receive even a greater eternal reward. This test is producing. It's achieving. It's accomplishing.

So you know what I need to know? Let me break that down into some component parts. I need to know this, that when I go through a trial God is allowing it, okay? I need to know that. I need to know that. God is allowing it.

You remember in 2 Corinthians 12 the apostle Paul went to God in his prayers and three times he said, "Lord, take this trial away, take this trial away, take this trial away," and the Lord said no. No, I am not going to take this trial away, I'm just going to give you the grace to endure it because I want

to accomplish something in your life.

You see, that's very important to know. You need to know that. And I need to know that things don't happen in our lives just helter skelter. They don't happen in our lives willy-nilly, they don't happen in our lives by luck. It isn't just a bad day. There is a sovereign God working in the life of every believer purposely to achieve His end. I need to know that. If I don't understand that about my God, then I am really going to have a difficult time looking forward and finding that joy. If I believed that...as the latest wave of theologians are telling us, this new process theology...they're teaching that God is not who the Bible says He is, He's a work in process. And He's kind of scrambling along like the rest of us trying to sort it out and develop into what He ought to be. I am not interested in a God like that. I don't want a God who is up there trying to figure Himself out, sort through things and work His way up some...some spiritual ladder to become what He ought to be. God is not in process to become something He is not now. Scripture says that God is who He is and He's unchangeable. He doesn't need to change, never has, never will. I need to know who my God is. I need to have a sound theology. I need to have a sound understanding of the nature, the immutable, that's a word that means unchanging, the immutable, He doesn't mutate, He doesn't change, He doesn't alter. The character of God is fixed and established. I need to know not only that God is unchanging but that God is sovereign. That is to say that there is no power that can thwart His efforts.

I mean, it would be one thing to say...Well, God does have a plan. God knows what He's all about. He has a plan. And He really would like to work that plan in your life, but He's really having trouble pulling it off.

I really get distressed when I hear preachers say, "You know, God wants to do this, but, boy, He can't do it because Satan's thwarting Him." Just remind you that Satan is the servant of God. He doesn't stop God from achieving His purposes. He is not sovereign over God.

So, you see, I need to know that this is a test designed by God to make me strong, to develop the tenacity of spirit that strengthens me and holds me up under future pressure and makes me a blessing to others and a strength to them and an honor to His name. I need to know my God has a plan and I know...need to know my God is powerful enough to work that plan. And I need to know that my God is wise enough to have the right plan.

Another thing I need to know is that God in effecting that plan will never put me in a position where I've got more to handle than I'm capable of. You remember 1 Corinthians 10:13? "No temptation has taken you but such is as common to man. God is faithful who will never allow you to be tempted above that you are able, but will always with the temptation make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it." No, God has a plan, He is sovereign enough to work that plan. He is wise enough that we can be confident it is the right plan. And He will never put us through something that He doesn't give us the grace to endure. You see, it's my confidence in my God that anchors me. I need to know that. I need to know that I'm not a piece of driftwood floating around, I'm not a stick in a waterfall just going over the edge and being thrown to whatever happens to be under me when I hit bottom. I'm not flotsam and jetsam. There's a God, a living, sovereign, eternal God in control of every single detail of my life. God is intimately involved in everything. If I don't know that, then life takes on a completely different character.

Let me tell you how far I go with that. I never blame Satan for my trials...never. It isn't Satan who puts me through trials. It is God who would allow Satan to bring a trial against me for God's own holy ends

and purposes. Satan is the servant of God. I never blame Satan for my trials. He can't touch me anymore than he could touch Job if God didn't allow it. And in Job's case God allowed it to test Job's faith. And you remember, his faith never wavered. He said, "Though He slay me yet will I trust Him." And in the end God blessed him and gave him another family and more animals and more land and more crops and just showered him with blessing. He passed the test.

I never blame Satan for my trials. God is behind them. Now in 2 Corinthians 12 you remember when we studied it, Paul talks about a thorn in the flesh. You remember what he said, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger from Satan. That's right, there was given to Paul literally a rod, a shaft, a spear just driven through him, so painful, it was a messenger from Satan but it was given to him by whom? By God. And that's why he went to God and asked God to remove it. And God said no, I want this messenger of Satan piercing your otherwise proud flesh so that you will be humbled, he says, because he had had so many visions he would be proud if God didn't use Satan himself and a messenger from Satan to pierce his otherwise proud flesh and humble him.

You need to know that. You need to know that even Satan is the servant of God. So when the trials come, who do you attribute them to? God...God. It's the trial that produces, verse 3 says, endurance.

So, what you need to know, see, is the purpose in your trial. You need to understand and know that God has a plan and that God has the power to work that plan, the wisdom to design the right plan and the compassion and grace to never put you through something that you can't endure.

As you go through something and develop perseverance, you have a greater strength for the next trial. As you go through that, have greater endurance for the next trial. And little by little, step by step God is producing greater and greater strength for your own blessing and usefulness and for His great glory.

In Hebrews 11 there's a good illustration of this. In Moses' case he grew it, verse 24 says, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. That is to say he refused to take all of the privileges that he would have had as a prince in Egypt. He really wasn't interested in that. He was a beautiful child, it says in verse 23, he was a remarkable man. And, of course, he was brought to favor in Pharaoh's court. But verse 25 says he chose rather to endure ill treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin. Rather than enjoy the passing pleasures of sin he would rather take the pain that came to the people of God because the forward view was so much better there. Take the pleasures of sin now and what do you get down the road? Judgment. Take the reproach of Christ now, what do you get down the road? Blessing and eternal reward.

You see, he considered verse 26 the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt because he was looking, here's the key, to...what?...to the reward. Now that's basic. If you look past the suffering, past the sorrow, past the disappointment, past the disillusionment, past the unfulfilled dreams, past the illness, past the death, the loss, the separation. He looked down at the reward that's produced by enduring that test faithfully.

He believed in God. And he believed that God was powerful and God had a plan and God would work that plan wisely and compassionately and bring him to a glorious end. Perseverance then is the result of a joyful attitude and an understanding mind.

Thirdly, and I'm just going to introduce this and then next time we'll kind of dig a little more deeply into it, a submissive will...a submissive will. These are all kind of intermingled components here...a submissive will.

That should be fairly obvious, verse 4, "And let endurance have its perfect result that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." Let it happen...let it go, submit to it, hupeiko, present active imperative, let it happen, let it go, don't fight it, don't resist it, don't chafe against it. If you try to do that you may bring upon yourself the chastening of God. Don't strive against it. Don't fight against it. Let the work of God take place, embrace it, come to terms with it as Paul did. He could say, "I rejoice and I will rejoice no matter what the suffering, no matter what the pain."

Simply put, you should never be reluctant to let God do His perfecting work. Don't say to God, "You know, what I really want, Lord, out of this deal is a trouble-free life." You know, you put yourself in a good position for special discipline. And yet there are people going around and promising, you know, Christianity is the gateway into the trouble-free life. You don't want to ask the Lord for a trouble-free life. You should ask the Lord this, "Lord, work Your work in my heart, don't give me more than I can endure. Show me grace and compassion, you know my weakness and frailties. I want to see Your loving-kindness but I want You to do Your work. I want You to do Your perfecting work. I want You to do whatever it takes in me to make me what You want me to be."

You need to come to terms with that. You need to be able to say that. And I think probably for many Christians that just...that just might be too much, I mean, to really honestly say whatever you need to do in my life to make me what You want me to be, do it...that's pretty strong stuff.

Psalms 131, just a little brief Psalm, three verses, "O Lord, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty, nor do I involve myself in great matters or in things too difficult for me," I'm just a simple guy, the psalmist says, I'm just a plain simple person. "Surely I have composed and quieted my soul like a weaned child rests against his mother, my soul is like a weaned child within me." That's so beautiful.

You know what he's saying? I just want to cuddle up and just rest in You. I can't figure it all out. I'm not able to figure it all out. I don't even want to try to figure it all out. I just want to do like a weaned child.

Now what's a weaned child? Well a child is usually weaned at what age? Somewhere between one and two, or three at the most. And a weaned child finds its greatest comfort and contentment in the arms of its mom, its mother. The psalmist is saying I really don't need all the answers, I'm like a weaned child. They don't need all the answers. They don't need to know where life's going. They don't have to have all the great questions answered. They're really more than content to just get in your lap and rest. And that's me. I really commit my life to You, I just sort of crawl up and let You hold me and You direct me.

Let endurance have its perfect result. Let God do what God wants to do. Don't resist that. Don't fight that. Just let Him do it. Maybe the words of Psalm 37 are a help. Psalm 37:7, "Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him. Don't fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who carries out wicked schemes, cease from anger, forsake wrath. Don't fret, it only leads to evil doing." Just rest...just rest. Earlier in the verse...in the chapter, verse 3, "Trust in the Lord." Verse 4, "Delight

in the Lord." Verse 5, "Commit your way to the Lord." And then verse 7, "Rest in the Lord." That's...that's the idea.

Endurance is moving toward perfection, see. It has a perfect result, teleion. Now listen, it doesn't mean sinless perfection in this life, it just means maturity. It just means spiritual maturity, spiritual...you want to become a man, fully matured, or a full-grown woman with all adult faculties and capabilities and strengths. You want to be full-grown. This term, teleion, is used of those who are full-grown, those who are mature. And that's what he's saying. You need to let God bring you to that maturity. And you're never going to get there without trials, never going to get there without some suffering along the way.

Faith then is being tested to bring us to greater dependence on God, to greater endurance as He processes us to maturity. And even repeats it, end of verse 4, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. Perfect is telei(?) again, teleion, teleio(?), either one. Complete is a word that simply means whole...whole, everything is there, lacking nothing, comprehensive idea here. And you have to yield to the process to let that happen.

I always ask the question..."Lord, please show me what it is You're accomplishing. Lord, through this make me more like Christ. Through this draw me to Yourself." Trials bring us to wholeness. They bring us to maturity. They bring us to spiritual adulthood. And with it comes strength and character and virtue. And that's the purpose of God. It brings us to stability. That's what adulthood is, to balance. First Peter 5 verse 10, "After you've suffered for a little while, the God of all grace who called you to His eternal glory in Christ will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you." How does He does...how does He do it? After you have suffered a while.

I'll close with an illustration. Go back to Jeremiah 48 and we'll pick up the remainder of this next time. Jeremiah 48, this is a great portion of Scripture and one that would be very easily overlooked. Jeremiah 48 verse 11, this is a judgment prophecy in this section against Moab. The Moabites, obviously, people familiar to any Bible student, were a pagan, idolatrous people who lived across the Dead Sea in the south part of that area, east of the land of Israel. And God pronounced judgment on Moab, divine judgment. And here in verse 11 of Jeremiah 48, the prophet under the inspiration of God identifies what Moab's problem was. Verse 11 says this, "Moab has been at ease since his youth."

You know what made Moab so morally weak? An easy life...an easy life. He's been undisturbed, says verse 11, on his ease, undisturbed. "Neither has he been emptied from vessel to vessel, nor has he gone into exile. Therefore he retains his flavor and his aroma has not changed."

This is a very graphic passage. Let me tell you what they're talking about and I have to tell you this from my reading, not from my personal experience cause I really wouldn't know this. But this has to do with wine making. Now you know why I wouldn't know anything about it. But it has to do with wine making. When wine is fermented initially it is a combination of what is sweet and what is bitter.

Typically wine was made in this fashion or a similar fashion. The liquid was poured into a skin and it was left there for a long time. What would happen would be the bitter part would begin to fall to the bottom and become what we call the dregs. After a period of time what was on the surface was then poured into another skin and another passage of time would yield more dregs. After some time it

would be poured into another skin and a few more dregs until finally it could be poured into a skin and there would be no dregs at all because all of that had been removed in that process. And what you had at the end was the pure wine...pure wine.

The problem with Moab was Moab was never poured from trial to trial to trial to trial so that the bitterness went out. I don't know about you but I don't want to be in that situation, I don't want to be in the situation of a life of ease. If God needs to pour me from vessel to vessel to vessel so that the sinful dregs of my life can fall to the bottom and what is left is the pure, sweet wine of righteousness, then so be it, amen? We want to let God do His work, don't we?

If we're going to allow God to accomplish His purpose then in our lives, we're going to have to have an attitude of joy. We're going to have to have an understanding mind and a submissive will. And that's the beginning. And as you know, because we're going to verse 12, there's much more to come.

We never cease to be thrilled and blessed and encouraged by Your Word, Father. O just remarkably rich and instructive it always is to us. Thank You, Lord, for the way in which you work in our lives to accomplish Your glorious ends, and they aren't only for Your glory, they're for our blessing and our glory in Your eternal presence. We are privileged, Lord, not just to be saved but to be being sanctified, to be poured from skin to skin to skin, trial to trial to trial until the dregs of our life are distilled and only the pure righteous life is left. Do that work. Give us the forward look that looks for joy down the way. Give us the understanding mind that trusts in Your plan and Your power, Your compassion, Your wisdom. Give us a submissive will that is even eager to let trials bring about that spiritual maturity which will reward us with blessing in this life and glory in the life to come. And we'll thank You, Lord, that You're working all of this in us because You love us as a father loves his own children. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2017 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).