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

How to Endure Trials, Part 3
Scripture: James 1:2-12
Code: 90-207

Turn in your Bible to James chapter 1 and we've been looking at the issue of turning trouble into triumph. James chapter 1, been looking at verses 2 through 12, let me read it to you, James chapter 1 verse 2:

"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 the 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."

It is a common occurrence to meet people who think they are Christians, or who thought they were Christians, felt they were saved, believed they knew God, believed at some point in their life they made some decision or some commitment that secured them as Christians...until...until some severe difficulty arose in their life, until they were exposed to some challenge, some trial, some unbearable burden which exposed the fact that they were not Christians at all. Their faith was tested and found to be dead faith, non-saving faith. Rather than find resources and comfort in God and the Scriptures through the trial, they forsook God.

This is a common occurrence. Thankfully it does awaken people to their true spiritual condition and that is essential, but tragically many of them walk away from what they once professed.

Through the epistle of James, James is concerned about this issue. He's concerned about living faith, the real thing. He's concerned about true Christianity, genuine salvation. And from the beginning to the end of James' epistle, he gives a series of tests that reveal the character of one's faith. Is it the real kind of faith that saves, or is it a sham kind of dead faith that does not save? All through this epistle there are tests for a living faith, and frankly, within the framework of the church,

within the framework of Christianity, no more important subject exists. We must be able to recognize our true spiritual condition, to recognize our faith and to discern whether it's living faith or dead faith.

Now as I said, there are a number of tests that James gives but the first one that he gives is how one responds to trials. Verse 12 says when a person perseveres under trial, that would be persevering in faith, persevering in trust in God, persevering in belief in Jesus Christ, when a person perseveres under trial, clinging to God, clinging to Christ, unwavering in his faith, he has been approved and he is one who will receive the crown which is eternal life. That crown being promised to all who truly and genuinely love the Lord.

The first test then that James brings to us is the test of genuine faith that comes through trials. Turn back for a moment to Luke's gospel, chapter 8, pretty familiar statement is made by our Lord in this context. We have heard it elsewhere, namely in Matthew's gospel. But in Luke 8:13 Jesus describes certain kind of people who hear the gospel and it says in verse 13, "Those on rocky soil," there are certain people who are like rocky soil, soil filled with rocks, "Those on the rocky soil are those who when they hear receive the word with joy." There's an initial response, an initial reaction that's positive, an initial faith. "But these have no firm root, they believe for a while...and here it comes...in the time of testing...also translated temptation...in the time of testing, or the time of trial, would be better...they fall away."

Now you're very familiar with that. Jesus gave the parable about the soils and He said there is a kind of soil that has some shallow dirt on the surface but underneath is rock. And when the seed is planted, it starts to grow up toward the sun and receiving the water that is available, and pretty soon its roots go down, they hit rock bed, they can't get to anymore water and eventually the sun burns the plant that's above the ground and it withers and dies. That's really an illustration or a picture of trials, scorching trials that come in life. There are times in our lives when we go through those kinds of trials and they become significantly, Jesus says, tests for us...in the time of trial, or the time of testing.

Time is kairos, it's not chronos, you talk about a chronometer, that's something that tells chronological time, or sequential time on a clock or a stopwatch. It's not talking about that. We're talking about kairoswhich is an event, or a season, or an epoch, or a circumstance, or a destined time, or a moment of opportunity. There come those kinds of times an din those times of trial or temptation or testing, they fall away. It doesn't mean that they once belonged to God and now no longer belong to Him. That's not true. They never bore fruit and fruit is the evidence of truly belonging. They simply made some kind of a shallow affirmation of faith that didn't last, couldn't survive trials.

They are like those in 1 Timothy 4:1 who fall away from the faith. Those same kinds of people are described in 1 John 2:19, "They went out from us because they were not of us. If they had been of us they would have continued with us, but they went out from us that it might be manifest they were not all of us." Same kind of people in Hebrews chapter 3. In Hebrews 3, those people who fall back after

having been exposed to the gospel. Same kind of people in Hebrews 6 who having come all the way to the full revelation about the gospel fall away and it's impossible for them to be renewed to repentance. Those texts do not refer to true believers but to those who make some shallow profession but when the trials come they fall away. The seed in Luke 8 finds a little top soil but not enough to take root. So the idea simply that there never was any root, there never was any substantial grip. The union...the imagined union with the soil was only apparent, never a true relationship. And when the sun came out, the plant withered and died.

Now James knows that the Lord taught that. James, you remember, is the Lord's brother, mentioned as his brother in the thirteenth chapter of Luke in verses 55 and 56. So as James begins his epistle, a series of tests of living faith, he starts out with the issue of trials knowing that Jesus made a very important issue out of that. Verse 3 calls it the testing of your...what?...your faith. Trials always test your faith. Listen to what I say, very important. Trials cannot destroy true faith. Did you hear that? Trials cannot destroy true faith because true faith is a gift from God and true saving faith is forever. We are secure because God has given us an undying faith. That was illustrated by Job who said, "Though He slay me yet will I trust Him." Trials cannot destroy true faith. But they can test it. And they will reveal dead faith.

James then is concerned to test the genuineness of our faith in the matter of trials. And he tells us that true faith, verse 3, endures. And down in verse 12, true faith perseveres...two words really identifying the same thing. True faith can't be destroyed by a trial, it endures, it perseveres right through the trial. That's the nature of true faith.

So, God bringing trials into our life is not destroying our faith, He's manifesting it. I think one of the most encouraging things in the life of a believer, of course as I get older I go through more of this, and you have in life trial after trial after trial. As a kid I had a terrible car accident, seventeen years old, or eighteen years old, and thrown out of a car at 75 miles an hour, almost killed, and numerous other close calls. I remember falling off a cliff one time and hanging by a root until I could be helped out of that predicament which could have cost me my life. There were times in the ocean when I did ridiculous things while surfing and you realize that it was only by the fortuitous providences of God that you found air in the depth of a wave you shouldn't been involved with. And you go through life and you go through issues with your children, and as you well know, a brain tumor that our son, Mark, had, and my wife's accident which almost cost her life, and then recently going through a difficult situation where I was a few hours from being dead, according to the doctors. And you go through all these trials of life and you lose the ones you love. The last year, my sister dying of cancer, a few weeks ago my mother dying. And you go through trial, after trial, after trial and never in the life of a true believer do those trials destroy faith. All they do is expose the reality of the real thing.

And I can tell you honestly that I..the longer I live and the more trials I go through, and not only my personal ones, but the ones I go through as a pastor of a church, times when there have been

assaults on the church, or assaults on your character, or personal attacks on me, or sharing and bearing burdens with other people that are heart-wrenching. The more of that you go through and the more times your faith is unwavering, the more confident you become that your faith is the real thing.

I suppose there was a time when I was young when there were doubts. You know, sometimes you ask a young person...Have you invited Christ into your life? And they'll say, "Yeah, twenty-five times...or fifty times...or I do it all the time, I just want to be sure." I don't do that anymore, and you who are mature in the Lord don't either. Your faith has been tested enough so that you know what it's made of. And you know it's not by your own concoction, you know faith is a gift of God, right? The kind of faith He gives endures the test. And the more it's tested, the more it's proven. And the more it's proven, the more confidence you enjoy in that faith and the stronger your hope becomes. True faith will persevere, it doesn't matter what happens. True faith is tested and proven in every case.

Having said that, that doesn't divorce us from being involved in the trial, does it? It's still a battle in there, isn't it? You may not abandon the Lord, you may not abandon your trust in the gospel, you may not just jettison the whole thing and plunge yourself into sin as if God has so severely disappointed you that you're going to let Him have it with a barrage of sin and see how He likes it. It doesn't...it doesn't mean that, but I'll tell you this, when you're going through trials there are some things that you need to do to gain from the trial what God has for you in it. I've seen true Christians go through a trial. Their faith is intact, but their attitude sure isn't. Have you noticed?

And so, James is very instructive in this opening part of chapter 1 because he tells us how to endure the trial. Our faith will stand the test, it will be revealed by trials whether we're true or not. And I welcome that and you should, too, because that is a very, very important and wonderful confidence to have to know that you genuinely are God's, that you have a genuine and true saving faith because it's been tested in the severest of circumstances. But at the same time your faith is standing the test, that's minimal, that's survival level. But God's desire is not that your faith survive, but that the test become a very clear point of your spiritual progress...that instead of just holding on with clenched teeth by your fingernails, you ride through the test and the trial triumphantly. To do that there are several things that are necessary, and we're looking at them.

Number one is a joyous attitude...number one is a joyous attitude. Verse 2, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials." Consider it all joy, pure, unmixed, total, sheer joy. You say, "This is not normal." You're right, it's not normal, but it's commanded. Rejoice...how often Paul says to the Philippians?...how often?...always, and in case you didn't get it, again I say rejoice...all the time, all the time, all the time.

Christians should have an incessant joyous attitude. It doesn't mean you go around with a silly grin on your face all the time, that's not realistic. But that there's a depth of confidence, and a depth of peace, and a depth of tranquility, and a depth of excitement and anticipation and gratitude that can't

be touched by any surface experience. You should go through trials with a joyous attitude.

Secondly, we saw in verse 3, with an understanding mind. "Because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance." You have to understand what God is doing. He's producing endurance. That's perseverance, that's staying power. That's a tremendous benefit cause as life goes on trials accumulate, and accumulate, and accumulate, and faith needs to learn endurance. Approach your trials with a joyous attitude and an understanding mind, knowing...verse 3, that's the key word...knowing what this test of your faith is producing. It's making you stronger, better able to endure.

Thirdly, we said that a right approach to trials is to have a submissive will...to have a submissive will. You know what is going on, God is producing something. So in verse 4, "Let endurance have its perfect result because it's going to make you perfect or whole, or complete, lacking in nothing." That is to say it's going to bring you to spiritual maturity. Have a submissive will.

Through trials we're brought to spiritual maturity. I was reminded this morning by Dick Mayhue that Joni Eareckson Tada wrote a book called When God Weeps. And at the time she wrote it she asked me if I would put together some...some thoughts for an appendix on what the Scripture says about what God is doing in our suffering. And in that appendix I wrote, "Discovering God's hand in hardship is really a discovery of God's Word." You never will understand what God is doing until you look to the Word and there are myriad verses in the Word of God that unfold for us this perfection verse 4 talks about, this completeness, this perfect result, this lacking nothing that the Lord is trying to effect through our trials. As a trial comes along it produces endurance. That endurance when we allow ourselves through that trial to enjoy God's provision and to gain that endurance has an increasingly perfect result bringing us ever more mature toward the image of Jesus Christ.

Well as I look at the list that's in that appendix, I didn't remember all of this, but these are the things that I said God is doing to perfect us in suffering. Here's just a few.

"Suffering is used to increase our awareness of the sustaining power of God to whom we owe our sustenance. God uses suffering to refine, strengthen and keep us from falling. Suffering allows the life of Christ to be manifest in our mortal flesh and allows us to share in His suffering. Suffering bankrupts us, drains us of all human resources and makes us dependent on God. Suffering imparts the mind of Christ who was willing to strip Himself and become a servant and bow to the needs of others. Suffering teaches us that God is more concerned with character than comfort. Suffering teaches us that the greatest good of the Christian life is not the absence of pain, but the presence of spiritual maturity, or perfection. Suffering can be chastening from God for sin and rebellion. Suffering teaches us obedience and self-control when it comes in a chastening form.

"Suffering is a voluntary way to demonstrate the love of God by personal self-sacrifice. Suffering is an inevitable part of the struggle with our fallen natures and the sin that is in us. Suffering is part of the struggle against an evil world and Satan and demons and evil people. Suffering is part of the struggle for the advancement of the Kingdom of God. Suffering is part of the struggle for the proclamation of the gospel. Suffering is part of the struggle against injustice. Suffering is part of the struggle to lift up the name of Christ. Suffering indicates how the righteous are able to share in Christ's sufferings. Suffering produces endurance and endurance produces an eternal reward. Suffering forces mutual love and ministry and the administration of our gifts for the common good. It makes us come to each other's rescue.

"Suffering then binds Christians together in a common purpose. Suffering produces discernment, it produces knowledge, understanding, and allows us to share what we've learned and understood with others. Through suffering God is able to obtain our broken and contrite spirit which He desires. Suffering causes us to discipline our minds by making us focus our hope on the grace to be revealed at the revelation of Jesus Christ. In other words, it makes heaven all the more wonderful and it causes us to anticipate it with a greater amount of joy. Suffering teaches us to number our days so we can present to God a heart of wisdom. Suffering is sometimes part of reaching the lost with the gospel. Suffering allows us to become strong enough to hold up the weak. God desires truth in the innermost being and one way He achieves it is through suffering. Suffering in this life will be rewarded in the life to come. Suffering is always coupled with the greater amount of grace. Suffering teaches us to give thanks in times of sorrow and to appreciate the times when we don't suffer. Suffering increases faith. Suffering allows God to manifest His care." And we could even say more.

You need to understand that. That's why James says in verse 3, you need to know what's going on there. And then in verse 4, you need to let it happen.

So with what approach do we endure our trials? With a joyous attitude, with an understanding mind, with a submissive will, and number four, we come to verse 5, a believing heart. And we went through this last time, just briefly to mention it to you. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God and God will give to all men generously and without reproach." That simply means that God doesn't say, "Well you want wisdom, do you, well I'll give you exactly what you deserve, here's a little dribble of wisdom and a scolding comes along with it." Not so. God gives generously and He never reproaches us in the process.

Now there's a condition, verse 6, "Ask in faith without any doubting. A person who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. Let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." Such a person who is two-souled, we talked about that, double-minded, unstable, who has a double heart in the words of Psalm 12:2, is not going to receive anything from the Lord. He don't come before God with doubt and dispute, questioning God, defying God, telling God He would be better off to do what you want than

what He'd chosen. You'll receive no relief from your suffering until you trust God completely.

But when you do, when you come, not like the doubter who vacillates, his whole life is one of vacillation between doubt and faith, he is unsettled, unstable in all his ways. But those who come with the true faith and ask for wisdom to understand the trial will receive it.

Now we sort of ended at that point, I just want to add a footnote to that. You're asking the question...in what way does God deliver that wisdom? Answer: first of all, through Scripture. As I mentioned a moment ago, understanding what God is doing in your suffering is understanding Scripture because it's all laid out, and I gave you a long list of things the Scripture says that trials are intended to accomplish. So the first thing that happens is when you ask God for wisdom in the midst of your trial, and you're trying to figure out why it's happening and what's going on and you don't understand it and you can't get a grip on it, and you go to God and you ask Him, you're going to be directed right back to the Word of God.

First of all, the answers that you need come from the Scriptures. Secondly, they will come through circumstances...they will come through circumstances. It may be the instruction of a teacher, it may be the instruction of a friend, it may be the way God providentially orders circumstances in life until you say...Aha, I see why this is happening, look at this, look what has happened, look what's taken place...as God begins to work providentially in the world around you among the people who touch your life.

Now finally, and this is where we sort of wrap up, trials are a test of your true faith. We're not just going to get through and survive, we want to go through triumphantly. And that requires a joyful attitude, an understanding mind, a submissive will, a believing heart, and finally, a humble spirit...a humble spirit.

This is obviously essential. I mean, one of the things God is doing in your suffering is humbling you. But look at verses 9 to 11. It's interesting how he just drops this in here, and some people might not think it's related, but it is because verse 12 goes back to the suffering. So this is encompassed in that context. "Let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position, let the rich man glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away." And then he goes on to describe how winds dry up grass and flowers and that's just like earthly riches.

But the common denominator here in verse 9 is humble, in the case of the lowly man, and humiliation in the case of the rich in verse 10. This discussion is fascinating, by the way, fascinating. It's another command and the command comes in verse 9, "Let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position." This is the brother some texts say of low degree, the lowly brother. This is a poor person, low on the economic scale, low at the bottom of the prestige chart. Typically in the church there were not many noble, not many mighty, as 1 Corinthians says. And these particular believers

who were scattered everywhere, verse 1 says, they were twelve tribes of Jewish believers who were dispersed everywhere in the dispersion, scattered all over the place. They were victims of persecution. they were dispossessed. They were deprived. They were victims of racism and bigotry. Over in chapter 5 the rich are condemned. In chapter 5 verse 1, the rich are condemned and one of the reasons in verse 4 is because the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields and which has been withheld by you cries out against you. They...they didn't pay the poor people that worked for them. They defrauded them. And then in verse 6 they condemned and executed the righteous.

The rich were guilty of these kinds of things against the poor people, only to point out that poverty in the dispersion, dispersed Jews, particularly dispersed Jewish believers, really were typically poor. They couldn't find their way into the Jewish community because they had named the name of Christ. The Gentile community didn't want them either because they belonged to Christ and had nothing to do with typically Gentile paganism.

They are the poor, the tapeinos, literally the word for poor. And he says to them, you need to glory...the word is kauchaomai, it means to boast, but it's the joy or the boasting of a legitimate pride. You may have nothing in the world, nothing at all, that's okay. Let the brother of those humble circumstances rejoice in his high position. He may have nothing in the world but he has a high position with God, he may be the filth, he may be, as Paul called it, the off-scouring of the world, but he can rejoice because his spiritual status is one of exaltation. Let him rejoice in that...literally it says, in that he is exalted...and we could put in parenthesis, in that in Christ he is exalted. He may be hungry, but he has the bread of life. He may be thirsty, but he drinks of the water of life. He may be poor, but he has the true riches. He may be cast aside by men, but he is received by God. And so he can accept his deprivations, his human humiliation, his lowliness and rejoice. He doesn't need anything more. His position before God is enough, it is enough.

In Romans chapter 8 you have a very similar statement made in verse 17, saying that we are children of God, then heirs also, heirs of God, fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may be also glorified with Him. Then he says in verse 18, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us." We willingly suffer knowing the glory to come. That's the whole point. We have the true riches. We have an inheritance laid up for us in heaven, reserved for us there, an inheritance that fades not away.

So he says if you're poor, you're socially humiliated, you're economically humiliated. Accept that humiliation because poverty is a short-lived trial, it's just for this life. And those who are poor and in Christ have the hope of eternal riches. In other words, don't look to draw joy out of this world, and you'll never be disappointed. If you're looking for your joy in the circumstances of life, you're never going to have true joy. If you attach joy to any earthly possession, any earthly economic status, you miss the point. Accept your humiliation, it's good for you, it keeps your focus where it ought to be and it makes the spiritual realities and the eternal riches all the more precious.

Now the rich man, he's got a different problem. Verse 10, "Let the rich man glory or rejoice in his humiliation." Most rich people are very concerned that they might lose their riches. But let the rich brother rejoice when he's made low. Let the rich boast when the stock market crashes. Let him rejoice when he loses everything because he shouldn't have any pride in his possessions anyway, shouldn't have any hope in his position. Let him rejoice when he's humbled because humility is good for the spiritual life.

There were a few wealthy people in the early church. Those who were wealthy had to bear a certain stigma. You know, wealthy people kind of like to hang around wealthy people, have you noticed? They're not really comfortable with the riff-raff, the rest of us. But you know, the church just breaks down all that. And if you're in Christ you're stuck with the not many noble, the not many mighty, the base things of the world, the common things, just us plain folks. There's a certain amount of humiliation in that. The rich are therefore blended together in common life with the poor.

And you know what happens? The poor need a lot of what they've got. And if they're really Christ-honoring, they're willing to share it. So the rich even though they would, from an earthly standpoint, have a certain amount of prestige, once they come into Christ, belong to the family of God, and there's a certain amount of humiliation with the folks they have to associate with. Well let the rich rejoice in that, he says. Let the rich rejoice in whatever humiliates them. Let the poor rejoice in their humiliation. Let everybody rejoice in humiliation because the path to spiritual maturity is right straight through the process of humiliation.

The poor man can rejoice because his faith in Christ lifts him beyond his trials and he contemplates the glory of his position in Christ. The poor man who has absolutely nothing and is humbled in life socially and is humbled in life economically and is humbled in life in terms of any prestige, let him...let him be elevated to great heights because he contemplates that he is in fact the child of God who is rich beyond description. It's just that he hasn't yet received his inheritance.

And faith does an equally blessed thing for the rich brother. It fills him with the Spirit of Christ. It pushes him together with the lowly and the humble and gives to him a spirit of lowliness and humility. So as the poor brother forgets all his earthly poverty, so the rich brother forgets all his earthly riches and the two realize they're equal in Christ. True humility accepts the poor and the rich. Either way, don't attach yourself too tightly to what you have and don't live your life trying to get what you can't.

To emphasize how anything in this life is temporary, he gives an illustration. At the end of verse 10 he says, "All this earthly stuff is like flowering grass," and rich people, he's not talking here about them spiritually, "but rich people are going to lose it all, all this earthly stuff." Verse 11 he says, "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."

This is all very temporary stuff. If you don't lose it here, you're going to lose it when you leave here. There's some flowers in Israel, and Israel is such a hot place, that just bloom and disappear. Typically the anemone and a whole bunch of other ones, including the lilies that grow over there, they sort of arrive in February and they're literally burned to a crisp by May. They all knew that. Everything is going to burn. James is saying you just need to be humbled through all of this, you just need to accept that God is in the process of humbling you, and the more humble you are, the less dependent you are, the more meek you are, the more Christlike you are. James, by the way, has a lot more to say about riches that we won't have time to talk about.

So there's James first test. It's a test of true faith. If you're a real Christian, you'll survive the trial. The trial might be loss of a job. The trial might be personal offense by somebody in the church. The trial might be a wife that has an affair. The trial might be a husband that abandons the family. The trial might be heart disease, it might be cancer, it might be some other illness. The trial might be a child that's born with a severe handicap and dies. The trial might be a teen-ager that's killed in a car accident. The trial might be like the lady I talked to this week, Gladys Staines, I told you about her. I called her and had a wonderful conversation with her. Really hard to imagine. She's a missionary in India and on the twenty-fourth of January her husband, Graham, and her two little boys, ten and six, went to a father/son outing in a simple little place with mud huts. And they had a little kind of a Jeep-type station wagon that they slept in because there weren't any accommodations. And then during the day they had activities and ministries. An unruly Hindu mob targeted him because he was so effective with the gospel, came and smashed he windows, poured gasoline in the car and torched them alive and incinerated them.

I was talking to Gladys about this just this week. I said, "What's your response to this?" She said, "Well, I'm not angry, I'm just sad."

I said, "Well, what's your future look like?"

"Oh," she said, "I would never entertain the thought of leaving. I just have to pick up my husband's work and continue to do it."

Unflinching faith. And then I said to her, I said, "Well, Gladys, can I ask you a personal question? I want some advice to pass on to young people, what would you say to a young person today preparing to go to the mission field?"

Instantaneously she said, "First of all, be sure you're called...be sure you're called. Secondly, be willing to give your life," this is within days of the torching of her family.

Would you say she passed the test? I'd say she passed the test. You can't destroy saving faith with a trial. All you can do is manifest its character. And there's a triumph in talking to this woman, in the midst of all this, a joyful attitude, an understanding mind, a complete grasp of God's work in this, a submissive will, she'll stay if she and her thirteen-year-old daughter have to give their lives. A believing heart, I'm sure she's been before the Lord incessantly since that time, asking for that wisdom, to sort it all out. And she said, "You know, we've been running a leprosarium here as well as preaching the gospel and working with these travel people, we're the only missionaries in the area. There's no one else to take care of the lepers in this place. And I don't know all the things that my husband did, so I'm just in there trying to learn everything and asking God for wisdom. Believe me, she was asking without wavering, right? The thing that touched me so also was her humility. She just literally has bowed her knee to the purposes of God.

Sailors used to say the crosswinds are the safest for entering the harbor. George Whitefield said, "All trials are for two ends, that we may be better acquainted with the Lord Jesus and better acquainted with our own hearts." Isn't that good?

Cardinal Richelieu died in 1642, he once said this, and I quote, "A virtuous and well-disposed person is like good metal, the more he's fired, the more he's refined; the more he's opposed, the more he's approved. Wrongs may well try him and touch him but they will never imprint on him any false stamp."

Ella Wheeler Wilcox wrote back at the turn of the century, "I will not doubt though all my ships at sea come drifting home with broken masts and sails. I shall believe the hand which never fails, of seeming evil worketh good to me and though I weep because those sails are battered, still will I cry while my best hopes lie shattered, I trust in You. I will not doubt though all my prayers return unanswered from the still white realm above. I shall believe it as an all-wise love which has refused those things for which I yearn. And though at times I cannot keep from grieving, yet the pure ardor of my fixed believing undimmed shall burn. I will not doubt though sorrows fall like rain and troubles swarm like bees about a hive. I shall believe the heights for which I strive are only reached by anguish and by pain and though I groan and tremble with my crosses, I yet shall see through my severest losses the greater gain. I will not doubt, well-anchored in the faith like some strong ship my soul braves every gale, so strong its courage that it will not fail to breast the mighty unknown sea of death. Oh may I cry when body parts with spirit, I do not doubt so listening worlds may hear it with my last breath."

The Puritan Joseph Church once said, "Sufferings are but as little chips off the cross." And God has never allowed you to be tested above you are...that you are able. And always with the testing makes a way of escape.

One of the Puritans named Perkins expressed an attitude in the midst of trials that is so desirable for the child of God. This is what he wrote. "Here is a notable difference between the godly and the

wicked. It comes in the suffering of trials. A reprobate, a wicked person, the more the Lord lays His hand on him, the more he murmurs and rebels against God. The faithful, when they feel themselves overwhelmed with sin, turmoiled with the conflicts of Satan, when they feel even the anger of God offended against them, they fling themselves into the arms of God's mercy, they catch hold of the hand of God buffeting them and they kiss it."

Thomas Watson said, "Whatever trouble in this life a child of God meets with, it is all the hell he will ever have."

Well, in summing it up, our trials should be sweet to us because of these considerations. There exists an almighty, all-wise, infinitely gracious and sovereign God who knows about them. That God has given me in past times and is giving me at present intimations of His love to me, both in His providence and in His grace, and through suffering. Suffering is an evidence of the love of this God, a love of which He never repents and a love which He never withdraws, but a love which compels Him to our refinement. Whatever then comes to pass in my life is the result of His will. My afflictions are part of His plan. They are all ordered in number and weight and measure. My distresses are not the result of chance or accident, or some fortuitous combination of circumstances, but the providential accomplishment of God's purposes designed to answer a greater end, that of my spiritual maturity and Christlikeness. Further, my affliction will never continue a moment longer than God has decided. And He who brought it to me will support me through it to victory. So I will rejoice in my trials.

Father, we thank You for tonight, for the joy of consideration of Your Word, Your truth, for the clarity with which the Word of God speaks to such a pertinent issue which touches all our lives. Compel us with this truth to have what is called for her in this text...a joyous attitude, an understanding mind, a submissive will, so critical, so essential, a believing heart, and humility. Produce that in us even as you use trials to make us like Christ, in Christ's name. Amen.

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