

Joyful in trials

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[0 : 00] Well, this morning, what we're really going to be thinking about is endurance and perseverance. That the Christian life, following Jesus, is one of perseverance and one of endurance.

One of the illustrations that I used last week was of following Jesus is walking in love. And the illustrations I used was of walking up Scarful Pike when I was a youngster on a school trip. And on a foggy day, you had to follow the leader. I don't know if you've ever been on a big hike, but if you've ever walked up a really big Monroe, there are times when you might, I don't know, I've had this, when you might, when it's hard, when you might want to call it a day, there are times when you want to turn back.

And there are times when you're doing a hike, when it can seem harder than other times. There's moments when walking, when you have to be observant of what's in front of you, when you're going up a particular steep section that's surrounded by scree.

It is more tricky, isn't it, than walking on the flat. Life is like that. Life is like that. There are times when it feels like you're walking on air.

[1 : 24] No worries, no troubles, life's a breeze, the sun is shining, you've got a spring in your step. There are times when we don't feel like that, when we're knackered.

Spiritually hanging on when there's conflict, distress, Antarctic. When it feels like every day is an uphill climb. And that, what I've explained there, actually is not just true for followers of Jesus, but everyone in life, everyone experiences that.

The question is not how to keep going when life's easy. The question is how do we keep on keeping on? How do we keep on keeping on?

How do we endure through life's difficult moments when life feels like an uphill climb? And the strange thing about life is you never know when things are going to flip.

It can flip in seconds. One moment you've got no troubles, and then you fall out with a friend, a relative. You find out some bad news, and you feel that heaviness, the atmosphere, and your thoughts are clouded.

[2 : 33] And you can feel totally different to how you felt five minutes earlier. How do you keep on keeping on? How do you endure and persevere in those moments?

And what we're really thinking about this morning is the two options you have when those uphill moments come. As I said, I'm really excited about this new series in the book of James.

What we're going to remind ourselves afresh is that my hope is that we think about what it means to walk following Jesus.

And what that really is about is all about his grace to each one of us. That's how we follow it. To be able to let him lead and to follow his walk is his grace given to us.

There's this amazing verse that comes that I think is one of the big themes in James. It comes in actually a bit further on in chapter 4. Like I said, on reflection, I think it's a key verse to understanding it.

[3 : 33] It reads, All the way through James, it is the humble who are given what they need to follow Jesus Christ.

And in our passage this morning, what we're considering is what it means to persevere. And how we're able to persevere in the most difficult circumstances we might find ourselves in.

The reason we can persevere is because of grace that is given to us. The humble are given grace to persevere in trials.

And right from the off, as we get in our passage, we get this peculiar suggestion as to how followers of Jesus, James is writing to the church.

We know that in verse 1 it says the 12 tribes scattered among the nations. He's writing to lots of people. Right from the off we get this peculiar suggestion about, in verse 2, about how we're to think during difficulty and trials that we encounter in life.

[4 : 49] You just look with me in verse 2. Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds.

The joy that James talks about there is more of a contentment. What it doesn't mean is that when you face difficulty, you should be all smiles and no frowns.

That's not what James means. It's more of a settled contentment. A deep joy in salvation.

In the face of the variety of trials that we all face in life. And notice with me, it's not a command here.

It's not a command, but it is something to consider.

It is an attitude. It is how to think in the middle of trial, of adversity. The trial here seems to suggest an outward situation like the type of things I've mentioned.

[5 : 51] Perhaps a conflict or a traumatic event. Rather than an internal struggle. But it does remind us, doesn't it, from the off. It does remind us that following Jesus does not shelter you from facing adversity in this world.

Anything can happen to a follower of Jesus that can happen to someone who doesn't follow him.

We're not sheltered from adversity. Followers of Jesus hit adversity all the time.

There's often this fallacy, and in some quarters of the church, there's a belief that once you follow Jesus, you should have peace all the time. Nothing bad should happen.

And when that's pushed to the extreme, that Christians shouldn't get sick or face problems. And if they do, then perhaps it's their fault that it's their fault in their walk with the law, that it's some sort of punishment.

I just want to squash that. I just want to squash that. If we've heard that or are tempted to think that, we just need to squash that. The most faithful, godly Christians have suffered.

[6 : 59] Charles Spurgeon, the famous preacher, suffered with depression most of his life and gout. He used to have to take off three or four months a year and escape to France where he spent time recovering from his mental health.

Countless others have suffered through difficulty. Even in the Bible, we know the apostles, Jesus Christ himself suffered, as we know. Following Jesus, followers of Jesus, will hit adversity in their life as much as anyone else.

It does not shield you from that. So what is up for discussion then? What's up for discussion here is the response to adversity. And in particular, how to get through it.

How to persevere, to endure, to be steadfast. The reason, the real reason James gives, says that we should consider a trial pure joy, is because the trial, going through it, produces something.

Look with me from verse 3. Because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

[8 : 17] Perseverance, steadfast, is steadily clinging to the truth in any situation. It is not a passive action.

But it is fully engaged faith. It is faith stretched out. In the middle of trials, when we continue to cling to Jesus in faith, our faith is stretched.

It grows. And through it, we are made perfect. Made mature. Complete. If we are complete, we lack nothing. Being mature in faith, being mature in adversity, is what God will work through us.

Persevering in faith is what gets us there. Becoming mature through perseverance. It is something beautiful happening.

Something really beautiful that's coming from something that on the face of it looks like a mess. Like a situation that you struggle to cope with.

[9 : 24] I don't know if you... Well, obviously, we all know here the sound of a mother going through labor.

We know what that sounds like. If you didn't know what was happening on the other side of the room. If you didn't know what was going in there. And you just was walking past and you heard that noise.

That does not sound like life is happening. That does not sound that on the other room life is about to happen. Out of something that sounds horrible, life is happening.

What you go through in life, as difficult as it may be, God will use in your life to make you more like himself.

If you continue in him. There is something wonderfully beautiful about this. That even the most difficult moment in your life. And you may well have the scars to prove it.

[10:26] Right in the middle of the struggle. Clinging to him. Perfects you. Having the faith. Aiming to walk like Jesus when it's really hard are the moments when you shine.

The times when your life looks the least shiny. But you cling to Jesus are the times when you shine the brightest. When it feels like every day is a daily battle.

The question we have to answer or even ask perhaps is how is that possible? Because you might say to me, well it's all well and good thinking about what it does in the future. In the end.

In the end result. What's going to happen? And don't get me wrong. That we become mature and perfect. But what do we do in the middle of the trial? You know. That's great.

It's really motivating that I'm going to be mature and perfect and like nothing. And that's coming. But why does that really help me right now? Because I'm in the middle of enjoying and persevering.

[11:32] I'm in the middle of it. You know. When you're climbing uphill. You're thinking about. Wait until you get to the top of the Munro. Oh the view.

You can sit down. Have your lunch. We can enjoy this amazing scene. That's a nice thought. But right now. I'm out of breath. And my calves are burning.

How's that going to. How's that help me in the middle of the struggle? In order to persevere. To enjoy through adversity. You're going to need wisdom. You're going to need wisdom.

And we read that here. We read this. There's kind of an assumption here. Is that we lack. But we lack wisdom. Verse 5. If any of you lacks wisdom.

You should ask God. Who gives generously to all. Without finding fault. And it will be given to you. Perseverance. Endurance.

[12:26] Whatever you want to call it. How to live faithfully. What to do in the middle of the trial. Can only be done if wisdom is given. By God. Don't get me wrong. You can get through a trial.

But you can. This is not about just getting through it. This is about getting through the trial. Persevering in a godly way. Because you could get through the trial. But leave a trail of destruction. In your wake. With everyone else suffering. That is not persevering in faith. This is enduring with godliness. It is wisdom.

That enables you to stand tall. In trials. To endure. And know how to face. The trial. With godliness. And. We often get wisdom wrong. Just to be clear.

Wisdom is not. God telling us exactly. What to do in every situation. We'd love that. That'd be great. Wouldn't it? That'd be so easy. We sometimes want that. I'd love you know.

[13:24] A specific. Very specific. Clear direction. Written in the clouds. Telling me exactly what I should do. That is not wisdom. That is not what wisdom is.

Wisdom. Wisdom. Is the ability to discern. How you should live. To discern how you should live. In the circumstance you find yourself. It cannot be gained by human effort.

You can't really work. At becoming wise. It is a gift. From God. You need to ask him for it. Ask for wisdom repeatedly. So that you can discern.

How to live. The course of action. You should take. In the circumstance. You find yourself in. The trial. That you find yourself in. It is living like Jesus would. In the circumstance of your life.

That is what wisdom is. Living as Jesus would. In the circumstance of your life. Living out what you believe. And there's an amazing promise. Amazing promise.

[14:22] If you pray for wisdom. Verse 5. Ask God. Who gives generously. To all. Without finding fault. And it will be given.

Without finding fault. He doesn't. There's nothing that can hinder anyone. It's. From. If they pray for wisdom. God gives it. And he gives more. He gives generously. He gives all the wisdom you need. And. God doesn't look. At us. When we. When we can't. When we don't know what to do. He doesn't look. And think. We're stupid. He doesn't mock. When we don't know what to do. He doesn't belittle you.

For asking for help. That. That is not our experience. In the world. Is it? Lots of us will. Me included in this. Sometimes we don't like.

Asking for help. Or. Admitting that we don't have the wisdom. Admitting that. We're struggling. Or. We need help. Is sometimes seen as a sign of. Weakness.

[15:17] And we're embarrassed. The living God doesn't belittle you. He doesn't mock you. When you can't do something. He actually says. The wisdom. The opposite. That asking him for wisdom.

Is in itself. Wise. That's true in life. Isn't it? With anything. I would love. And I. And I think this is true. Of most guys. I would love. For other men. To think that I'm good at DIY. I'd love that. But I'm going to be honest. I'm really bad at it. And when it goes wrong.

I get really stressed. And worked up. I get embarrassed. At the thought of admitting. That I've done something badly. And need someone. With a bit more. Sort of. DIY savvy. To come and help me out.

The wise. Decision. When I try DIY. Is actually to ring. Duncan. Annabelle's dad. And ask him how to do it. Or just say. The next time.

[16:14] Can you come down. Can you. Can you help us out. Because. He's a joiner. He's brilliant practically. Either asking what to do. Or waiting for her to come. And visit. That is. The wisest thing to do.

But. It's an embarrassment. To think that I can't do it. Now it might not be DIY. But we've all got something like that. And we can bring that. We can bring that attitude.

To God. When we're in adversity. That we want to be strong enough. To cope on our own. And that we know what to do. Don't be embarrassed.

To ask the living God for help. From the smallest issue. To the big catastrophes in life. We need wisdom. We lack it.

And we need to persevere. Through tough times. Ask God. Have faith in him. He'll give generously. Not just a little bit of wisdom. But all the wisdom you need.

[17:09] Ask him today. When you have an argument. With a friend. Or a relative. And you feel that kind of. All you want to do is go. And have distance.

And you feel like you want to get revenge. Or say something. Ask. Lord. Give me wisdom. I need to know how to resolve this. When you're in the thick.

Of a difficult work meeting. Or your projects. Long overdue. And you. Or your budget. You've missed the budget. And everybody's stressed at work.

Living God. I need your wisdom. When your kids come home from school. In tears. Lord. Give me wisdom. I need to know how to respond.

As you would. In this situation. I find myself. The promise. He will give it. Generously. James moves.

[18:10] From those who ask in faith. To those who doubt. And this has the potential. To give us concern. Because which one of us. Has not doubted. At some point.

We all have. So we need to understand. Who James is. Referring to. Because. What he's not talking about. Is. Is people who have everyday doubts. He's not talking about that.

He. What James is talking about here. Is. Is the person. The one. Who doubts. The very character. Of who God is. And. And doubts.

That he is able to govern. Their life. And so in a sense. It is doubt. That is controlling. Their responses. To be controlled.

By doubt. Is. Is a concerning place. To be in. Not to have doubts. But to be. Controlled by them. Is a concerning. Place to be in. We see. Verse six.

[19:03] The one who doubts. Is like. A wave of the sea. Blown. And tossed. By the wind. The one. Controlled by doubt. Looks to other things. For wisdom.

And. If you've done that. We all have. We've all done this. There are a thousand. Different opinions. When something. Comes up. About what you should do. You can plow the internet. And find every suggestion.

As to what you should do. In the circumstance. You find yourself. And don't get me wrong. That. Of course. That. There is. By common grace. We find. Helpful advice.

That come across. However. The likelihood is that. Well. This has certainly happened to me. Is. You. You try something out. Take a little bit of advice.

You modify it. See how you feel. Respond. It works for a while. Then you. All of a sudden. Another bit of advice. Comes in. You talk to a friend. And they. Something might be working well. But they give you another bit of advice.

[19:59] And. And you take that on board. And. Before you know it. You've got all these different opinions. And advice. And they. That is what it means. You're not looking to God. And all the advice.

You're being tossed. From one bit of advice. To the next. Being washed. Around. That is being tossed. By the waves. Blown. By the wind. Searching from. Self-help. To self-help. And never truly landing. Or feeling secure. There's always a new theory. Or a new way of reacting. And you're blown around. Verse 8. You're double. Minded. God is just another self-help. Idea. Along with everything else. And therefore. Unstable. I'm as guilty of doing this. As anyone else. Social media. The latest thing. The latest book. That will transform you. Into the you. You've always dreamed. Of becoming. What's really going on here. Is. You see the difference.

[20 : 55] Between the person. Who has God. Is humble. It comes back to that. Verse. That will come later. To in verse. In chapter 4. That. The humble. Are given.

Grace. But it. It is pride here. Because. Because it is thinking. That you can find the wisdom. Out for yourself. That you can do a better job.

Of sorting your own life out. Than God can. That you can look. Either externally. Or you can look inside yourself. For the wisdom. And the answers. And what we see.

Is a reversal. Of fortunes. Verse 9. Believers. In humble circumstances. Ought to take pride. In their high position. That's those who know.

Who know. They need God. Who are humble. They should take pride. That God will give them. Everything they need. But verse 10. The rich should take pride.

[21 : 49] In their humiliation. Since they will pass away. Like a wild flower. For the sun rises. With scorching heat. And withers the plant. Its blossom falls. And its beauty.

Is destroyed. In the same way. In the same way. The rich will fade away. Even while they go. About their business. While we were away.

And our house was being renovated. We didn't get as much chance. To water. Our plants. My poor. Willow tree. When we came back.

From staying there. Was decimated. It looked like. It hadn't had a drink. In months. The hot summer we had. Had faded its leaves. And it looked like.

It was going to die. Now. It's a good story. Because it's come back to life. But. The image. Of being scorched. By the sun. Of fading away.

[22 : 44] Is the picture. Of what the proud. Are like. Who don't come to God. That they fade. Like the flowers. Of. Of a plant.

Under extreme heat. When the wisdom. Of this world. Doesn't. Work. They won't stand. When the heat.

Of the trial. Comes. The answers. Won't cut it. The wisdom. Won't work. It is unwise. And they fade. And how do they respond? How do the proud. When they're fading. How do they. Respond. To that. There is a. There is a choice.

Here isn't there. There is a choice. To admit. That all those answers. Haven't worked. To be humble. And to say. God. It hasn't worked. I've been proud.

[23 : 44] Give. Ask for wisdom. Like the humble do. But no. We see. In verse 13. What happens. What happens. When tempted.

No one should say. God is tempting me. For God. God cannot be tempted. By evil. Nor does he tempt. Anyone. The idea. Here. Is that. The proud person.

Controlled by doubt. Tossed by the waves. Who fade. Like a flower. Doesn't realize. They're responsible. But blames. God. For tempting him. Like the sin.

In the garden. Adam. It's not my fault. She told me. To weave it. To eat it. Eve. It's not my fault. It was the snake. And the snake. Tries to attach.

Blame to God. See God there. He doesn't want you to be happy. It's his fault. That you're not. Happy. The living God. Never puts obstacles. In your life.

[24 : 39] That are designed. To make you fail. He never does that. He never puts an obstacle. In your life. That is designed. To make you fail.

That are designed. To tempt you. To. For you to mess up. And sin. In fact. It's the opposite. It is God. The trial. God does allow the trial. To come into your life. But.

But the living God. Gives you the strength. And the grace. To endure it. When you come to him. The wisdom to resist. That's why we pray to him.

For wisdom. Verse 14. Each person. Is tempted. When they're dragged away. By their own evil desire.

And enticed. Each person. Is tempted. By their own desires. God allows the trial. Remember. Jesus was led. Into the wilderness. By the Holy Spirit.

[25 : 35] God was. Jesus was led. To trials. By the living God. God. So trials. Can be brought to you. By God. But it is your own heart. Your own attitude. That determines.

How. You respond. And verse 15. Tells us where this ends. We have this. Ironic. Picture. We spoke earlier.

That normally. Pregnancy. Leads to. Life. As you know. We're all expecting.

A little one. In January. And we're preparing. For that new arrival. The kids are getting excited. And we're thinking about. How the dynamics will change. And thinking about. How it will impact Naomi. She won't be the little.

Littlest one anymore. And in verse 15. We see that. They use the image. Of pregnancy. Of what happens. In your soul. If you let your selfish desires grow.

[26 : 33] That in your soul. In your inner being. In your heart. If you. Become. The literal word is. To become pregnant. With your desires. That if you become pregnant. With your desires.

And you let your desires. Grow in you. Verse 15. Then after desire. Has conceived. Has become pregnant. In you. That desire.

Gives birth. To sin. You will literally. Live out something. That has destructive. Consequences. For you. And for those around you. But it doesn't stop there.

It gets worse. If you don't stop. The sin. If you let that grow. And the sin. Becomes. Pregnant. In your soul. Verse 15. Sin. When it is fully grown.

Gives birth to death. Essentially. When you let sin. Grow inside you. If you feed it. If you nourish it. If you. If you.

[27 : 29] Harbour it. And do everything you can. It will. It will grow. Inside you. And you will give birth. To something. That is destructive. It will become a chain.

Around your neck. It will cause destructive. Consequences. In your life. Now that's taken to the extreme. Of course.

But it can happen. With anything. It can happen. With anything. That is the difference. Of facing a trial. And responding. With humility. And facing a trial.

And responding. With pride. And so. How should we respond. To difficulty. Hardship. In life. How do we persevere. And endure. Keep on keeping on.

Don't be embarrassed. Resist the temptation. To think you know best. God gives generously. To the humble. Without finding fault. He won't belittle you.

[28 : 24] Or mock you. He delights in you. And he'll give you what you need. Verse 12. Verse 12 is amazing. Blessed. Is the one who perseveres. Under trial. Because having stood the test.

That person will receive. The crown of life. That the Lord. Has promised. To those who love him.

Asking God for help. Admitting you don't have all the answers. Is okay. Admitting you don't have the strength.

Admitting that you're overwhelmed. And need God's wisdom. To know what to do. How to live. That is at the core of what it means. To be a follower of Jesus Christ. Standing tall.

Is not trying hard to get through life. But standing tall. Is asking Jesus. To strengthen you. When you're falling. To give you the wisdom you need. To know what to do.

In the circumstances of life. And that person. Receives life. We could rewrite verse 15. For the humble follower. After godly desire.

[29 : 22] Has been conceived. It gives birth. To wisdom. To righteousness. To peace. To hope. And faith. And when they are fully grown. Gives birth.

To eternal life. Go to Jesus. He'll give the wisdom. For your life. He's the wisest person. That ever lived. And he prayed to his father. To help him.

Help to endure. To endure. What the difficulty. That he needed to get through. To walk that lonely road. To Calvary itself. For what?

The joy. That was set before him. Let's pray. Almighty God. You know our lives.

You know the ups and the downs. You know what we've been through. In our past. You know what we'll go through. In our future. Even amongst us today.

[30 : 22] And even those who are not with us. But are part of the members here. The kids through there. You know which of us. Are in the middle of a trial. You know those of us.

Who've had weeks. That have been testing. You know those who. Next week will be testing. You know everything. And so we come to you.

And we ask that in the middle of trials. That you would give us wisdom. That you would show us how to live. And that we would. You'd give us the humility. To ask. To ask for help.

To ask to know what to do. When we feel like it's too hard. We pray. Even in the little circumstances. The small things in life. That we'd still come to you.

And ask for help. And we know. We trust. That you've made this promise. That you'll give it to us. And so bless us. We pray.

[31 : 19] We thank you. That we. That asking for wisdom. Is asking for you. To take control of our lives. That you'd show us how to walk.

Like you did. And we just ask for forgiveness. For the times. When we've. Looked to ourselves. And other things. For wisdom. And thought it would.

Would work. And it didn't. And so we went to somewhere else. And we were tossed. Around by the waves. We're sorry for when we've done that. Forgive us. And pray. That you'd.

As we turn from. Those times. That you'd build. And grow. And strengthen us. And make us a humble people. We commit. All this.

Into your hands. We pray for your blessing. Upon us. Upon your people. Upon the church. We ask. We ask for all this. In Jesus name. Amen.