

## James 1

Justin Beadles

June 8, 2008

Everyone one of us that comes here to Grace has the appearance of normality in each one of our lives. Typically, on this morning, we get up and put on our good clothes and come into church. Independent of what happens in the car on the way to church, we put on a great face once we get in here, and we all really look like we have our act together. We can manage to pull that off until about lunch, and then we go home. And the truth is we are hit again with the realities of life. Your life and my life are very much the same, in that we both have problems. I pay the same amount for gas that you pay. You have jobs that are great at times and are trying at times. You have children that are great at times and are trying at times. You have spouses that are great at times, and then you're trying at times (laughter).

It seems like one continual stream of some sort of trouble in life. In fact, if we were going to poll everybody and said, "Who is going through a trying time?" Pretty much everybody is going to raise their hand. If you didn't raise your hand, then you just came out of one. Or you're next. That just seems to be the way life works.

Sometimes people get an idea of Christianity that says it is a sweet thing for one's head, and it applies to some. But its practicality does not really address the needs of my life because the facts are, I have pain. You may not be going through unmistakable pain in your life, but the pain in your life is real pain to you. What I mean by that is puppy love is real love to a puppy. Its real pain and a real trial to you.

**How can I learn to love the pain?** That's the question that we want to answer today, and it's going to be found in the first 12 verses of the first chapter of James.

And yes, if you're wondering, Justin, I Corinthians 14 is coming up... what are you waiting on? I'm not. When I feel as though I have prepared adequately such that I can give you great answers to the difficulties that lie in that text, then we'll be ready. Until such time, we'll continue to march here. Won't that be fun? So the question that we want to answer today is **how can I learn to love the pain?**

You're like, I don't want to. Well, you're going to have to. Or life is not going to be fun at all.

In the book of James, we can see it is obviously written by the half brother of the Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 2 of chapter 1, he gives a command when he says,

**Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.**

Now, you and I know that there are a couple of ways that life can be looked at. In a secular sense, there's the person who I call "pukey positive." And that's the "oh, life is great!" If you lose a leg in an accident, they just say that you only have to put on half as

many shoes! There is no basis for the positivity. You know at the end of the day, after you have walked on hot coals and all that sort of stuff, that really you just kind of spun yourself into a happy place. That nothing of any foundational essence was accomplished here. You just thought better of it. And so, in my view, that is just woefully short-sighted. Now the other extreme is to be profoundly negative, and nobody likes you.... that is to see life as a continual stream of problems for which there is no hope at all.

But here is something the Bible is going to show us that can be profoundly and practically life-changing where **we can learn to love the pain.**

He tells them to **consider it pure joy** so that presents this idea of a choice. You have a scattered group of Jewish believers who are living in a time of difficulty, and he shows them here that your trials bring to you a choice that you must **consider them pure joy.**

Now this **pure joy** clearly has to have a meaning that is different than just put on a happy face and try to convince other people that it is going to be OK. Rather, there is something about the manner in which you can go through trials, such that **you can learn to love the pain.** When I talk about this learning to love the pain, in my own personal life, I liken it to running. I see that there are all sorts of different types of runners. There is the runner that has to have on about 48 different devices that can pump all sorts of music into their head. This is a person that... I don't care if you listen to music, it's an illustration... but this is the person who is not learning to love the pain that comes with running. They are trying to distract themselves from the pain so they can keep running. And I say, you have to learn to love the pain.

And there is other person that will do all sorts of things in an effort to distract themselves. No, no, no, no! He's not saying here try and find a distraction from your pain. He says **consider it pure joy**, meaning "Guys, you are going to have to learn to love the pain." See, it's different than when I run and I tend to hurt, what I say is "find a happy place." I get that from the movie "Dumb and Dumber," (an incredibly deep and theologically rich movie) where Jim Carey tries to find a happy place when he's being beaten up. I use a little mental distraction, like when I go out to Pizza Hut in my mind, and find my happy place.

He says, "No! Learn to love the pain." But how? How can we do that? He says "you're my brothers, you're Christians! Whenever you face trials of many kinds learn to love the pain."

This is the first of four ideas that I want to communicate to you about learning to love the pain. And that is just simply seeing that trials are unpreventable. I will always have trials. They are always going to be there. Most of our lives we rightly gear them around the avoidance of difficulty. If you have an automobile, you know that if you properly maintain it you greatly decrease the likelihood that you will be stranded between here and your daily trip to the grocery store. You can prevent that problem. You know that if you spend your money wisely you can prevent a certain amount of problems. If you only go out at night you can likely prevent skin cancer or something like that. If you make your kids wear a helmet while they're in their safety seat while they're eating, you're crazy!

(laughter) We tend to buy this mentally that I can operate in life, and I can outthink life to the degree that I will no longer have trials. This is how I can prove to you that, subconsciously, you operate that way... because your trials surprise you, don't they. All too often, they do me! I think I've been in the Christian life how long, and I thought I was through this, and here this trial is now pressing down upon me again! I'm surprised! That can mean nothing other than I have subtly adopted this idea that says "trials are somehow preventable." Or that somehow I will outgrow them. Or somehow I will get to the place in my life where they won't be there. If you are ever going to learn to love the pain like He has told us to here, you are going to have to drive a stake pretty deep in life that says I'm always going to have trials. They are always going to be there. Congratulations. It will never, ever get easier. It will get different. But it never is going to get easier.

You see the pain that afflicts the 6-year-old, and you look and say, "What in the world are you crying about, Son?" That's the biggest deal going in his life... whether or not he has the red or the yellow bowl! You say, "That's the dumbest thing in the world!" But that's a huge deal in his world. And the biggest deal in our lives looks like a fundamentally small deal to someone else, but the facts are it will never, ever diminish.

Do we have a view of God that somehow thinks it will? All too often, I think that, God, since I'm being faithful to you, You are somehow being unfaithful to me by allowing me to experience these trials. And the facts are, they're never, ever going to go away. It's just like Brittany Spears...never leaving! You've got to realize, it's going to be there.

But that alone is not going to be hope, is it? Because if you just found out that the dripping faucet is never going to go away, then that's a short-sighted view of a dripping faucet. What you would do in your mind is distract yourself from this dripping faucet. You'd say "it's just a nuisance that is never going away, so I guess that I'll just deal with it." You manage to do this sometimes with a certain pain in one of your joints; you say "this is the way it is, so I'll just deal with it." It's never going to go away. That's just life. But God is showing us here that this is not learning to love the pain of life. It is short-sighted to say that it is never going to go away. That is kind of a fatalistic view.

Here is where the hope begins to come in. I have to buy the idea that says my trials are unpreventable. But we look in Verse 3 of Chapter 1 of James, he says...

You should **Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, here's why; because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. That Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.**

That brings us to the second principle that I think is deeply important, and that is **that trials are necessary**. They are a fundamentally necessary part of my spiritual life. What? I learn this now, I learn it again and learn it again, but I know that the more I'm able to spiral toward an understanding and embracing of this-- it's life-changing in my ability to learn to love the pain.

When I see whatever trial it is that's afflicting me, I say "if it's not this one, God, it's going to be another one. That is just life." So, I can't ever expect – it's foolish of me to expect a life that is trouble-free. It's not going to happen. Don't even pray for it. I can guarantee you God is going to answer that one "No." Troubles are going to come your way. You may be delivered from that one, but the next one is coming. Why? Because we see right here **they are necessary** in our spiritual lives. Necessary? Problems? Show me! OK, let's look through it closely.

He says...

You should **consider it joy** because there is this knowing, this deep knowing, that this **testing of your faith**, and that word testing has this idea if you have a medal that is silver, and you want to determine if it's really silver, you would subject it to the flames. You burn it up and discover what it is really made of.

And he says...

This **testing of your faith**, this crucible, this crunch time in life, these wind-sprints of the spiritual life do something. It says they **develop perseverance**. They actually make your spiritual life stronger. If you have a rope, and it's very slack, you can't walk on it at all. You see tight-rope walkers, right, you don't see loose-rope walkers in the circus? I don't think they have those. But when that rope is stretched incredibly tight, nothing is fundamentally different about the rope. But it's stretched so tight that now people can walk on it. What is happening here is he is saying **your faith must be stretched so that it becomes really useful**. Man, that is an amazing way of looking at the problems you are in right now. I don't want to list off a thousand. That one comes to mind... that big problem, right now. It is not going away. It's a necessary part of your life. Can you imagine how life can be different if instead of saying, "This is a nuisance that is coming to me; this problem is meant to trip me up." Instead you said, "This is something that God is sending in my life to develop stamina" This isn't an accident. This isn't something that God merely allowed. It is something that He sent. He put it here.

It says this **perseverance must finish its work**. What will result in my life? **So that you may be mature and complete**. It doesn't mean that you will be spiritually perfect but it has the idea that your faith becomes ripened; that it is not lacking something, that it is strengthened, that it is ready. That is why you can see that some people's lives, spiritually, are very observably different than others' lives. It's typically how they have gotten through some of the deep waters of life. You can see persons that have made it through those deep waters, and they are on to different waters. Or ones who are under no illusion that says this is going away. **They have learned to love the pain because they can see it as a necessary part of life**. Man, that's a tough one for me to be able to see! But the facts are the Bible says that it is necessary. Necessary means I won't grow spiritually without it. That changes the way you parent, doesn't it? It means for me to rescue my child from every problem they have is to deny them opportunities for their own faith to be ripened. This means for me to appeal to God to simply rescue and deliver me from this without any lesson, is to be denied the opportunity to grow spiritually.

Well, at this point you say, “They are not going away, and they are a necessary part of my life, but the problem I’m in is of such a caliber that I don’t know what to do! Justin, you’re just talking about dealing with kids that are fighting over the color of cup they have gotten for supper. My kids are out to lunch. My business is going in the tank. I just lost a ton of money. My marriage is on the brink. My future is indeed in jeopardy. I have no idea what to do.” To that, I would say you’re normal.

In Verse 5 he says,

**If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”**

See, that is the third thing we’re talking about, and that is **the truth that help is available**. He assumes right here **if any of you lacks wisdom**, that is a given! We are not going to know what to do in the midst of this trial. And the wisdom he is talking about is, God, what are trying to teach me in this? What is it about my character, God, that you are trying to shape in the midst of this problem? We don’t know! I think the majority of problems that I undergo – I don’t know! Why am I here? I don’t know! Isn’t it comforting to know that the God we serve is not frustrated by us not knowing. I know that in my life, all too often, I think that God would be frustrated with me because He would say “For heaven’s sakes, you’re 37 years old! You ought to know this by now.” And God never says that. He says if any of you lack wisdom, we simply ask God. And it says, **He gives generously to all**, and then it’s right there, **without finding fault**. Meaning, He is not frustrated with you for asking. You know how it was when you had made the mistake 14 times, and you have to go ask your boss to show you again! Your boss is like – Ahhhh! Sigh! Reboot the computer! Yet, God is not frustrated here.

What does it look like to ask for wisdom? It is to take this problem of mine before the throne of Grace, and to admit **“God, I don’t know. Please show me what it is that you are trying to change about me or teach me about You that I need to know. Open my eyes that I may see.”** This is so refreshing, guys, because God is not playing hide and seek with you here. He’s not saying, “Oops, almost found the reason that you’re in the problem! Oops! No, you didn’t! Oops, miss me, miss me!” It’s saying that we have a God who wants to mold us and shape us in the midst of this trial, if we simply ask.

Now there is a caveat in the midst of asking. We find that in Verse 6.

**But when he asks**, when that person asks, when I ask, I **must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all that he does.**

So it has this idea of me bring my problems before the Lord, and it says, when I ask for wisdom, there is a caveat, that I must believe and not doubt. Because He describes this person is a spiritual, walking Civil War. They say yes and no at the same time. They are a person who is spiritually pointing in two opposing directions. They are saying, “I believe God; I don’t believe God. God can do something about this; God won’t do

something about this.” I think its best illustrated in this way because we are tempted to take this and run with it. We say there is no way, I mean, when I pray to God in the midst of a problem, I don’t have this single-minded belief that says, “God, you are going to give me wisdom and deliver me.” Can you remember the man who had the sick son or daughter, in one of the Gospels? He came to the Lord Jesus and said, “I’m begging you to heal my child.” And Jesus said, “I will; if you can believe.” And he said, “I believe, but help my unbelief.” And this man’s child was healed. He said he was healed as the result of this man’s faith. Yet, this man’s faith was a faith that was struggling yet admitting its imperfections. That is not what he is talking about here. That is normal. So, to pray to God to please give me wisdom because I want to be honest with You and say that I believe You are going to do something about this and You’re gonna give me wisdom. But there is a part of me that doesn’t want to believe. Help, my unbelief. That’s called being honest with God. Mouthing the words of God, “Help me because You said You would, yet I really don’t think you’re gonna.” That’s the person that can’t expect to receive anything from God. They will not slow down long enough to present themselves in a position to be helped.

And he gives a couple of true life examples, now, of persons who are helped in the midst of great trials. He says...

**The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position.** This means the brother who is in the midst of deep poverty, being in this is a trial in and of itself, and he can take pride in his high position of knowing that he has been saved and delivered ultimately. So this trial that he is in the midst of shows that God is walking him through it. He says...

**But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position** – his low position meaning, realizing that my wealth is not delivering me through this- that ultimately, I rest only in Christ. He says **because he will pass away like a wild flower**. He means all of us are here for just a time.

**For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.**

It goes on to this fourth thing of dealing with these difficulties in life, as I learn to love the pain. And it’s this: **that perseverance pays off in this life**. He says,

**Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.**

That’s like the great topping here! The idea of being blessed in the Bible communicates the idea of being in an enviable state of existence, meaning that other people can see your life and say, “That is a position that I would like to be in! How in the world did you get there?”... an enviable state of existence. He says this enviable state of existence is promised to those who persevere under trial because once they have stood the test, they will receive the crown of life. I personally believe that this crowned life is not something that awaits our death. But he is saying that this person receives, in this life,

after successfully enduring trials, this enviable state of living. The rope has become tighter. And they move on to bigger trials that continue to tighten the rope. But they are the person who is able to navigate life well.

Are you learning to love the pain? Or are you using all the things in this life as simple distractions? And we are incredibly good at it. Some use alcohol as the distraction to not have to deal with life. Some use our money to buy things that are toys to make us not have to deal with life. Some of us use our jobs to not have to deal with our family, or our family to not have to deal with our jobs because we are trying to prevent the trial.

**But God wants us to learn to love the pain.** Because it is in the midst of these trials that God is accomplishing these incredible works in us. Why? That is so our lives are better able to communicate the saving power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Because if, after all, folks, we endure the same trials that other people go through, and we go through them in the very same way, what benefit is Christianity to them? We are no different. But if we are ones who successfully deal with the trials as the result of Christ working in our lives, then we are able to communicate to those people God's love for them and the hope that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, if you're one who is here and has never heard about the Gospel, and you're thinking, wow, you mean God is using these trials to mold my spiritual life and that sort of thing... no, He is not. He's using your problems to humble you to the point that you will recognize your sinfulness and that you will trust in Christ for the very first time. He's breaking you. He's wanting you to recognize that and to trust that Christ died on the cross for your sins. If that is something that you've never done, you simply believe that now, and then begins, this shaping process.

When we take the Lord's Supper, it's an opportunity to corporately celebrate what Christ has done on the cross for us – to corporately realize that He will come again and receive us into Him, and recognizing that life will never get so good now, that we need not long for His return. So, as we take this together, let's take it longing for His return.

Let's pray as we prepare our hearts.

“Heavenly Father, You are all together good. You are One who desires to accomplish great spiritual things in our lives, for our benefit, and for Your glory. I would ask, Father, that You would work in each of our hearts now such that we would celebrate this Lord's Supper with the appropriate amount of introspection and celebration. I would ask, Father, that You would give us all wisdom to deal with our trials and trust that You will do so.

In Christ name I pray, AMEN.