



Message **Transcript**

The Blessings of Trials

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Pastor Jeff:

Father, we give You great glory, honor, and praise. Lord, we thank You for this new campus today. Lord, for all that You're doing and the way that You're expanding Your kingdom. We give You glory, we give You honor, and we give You praise. And Lord, we thank You for Your living and active Word that every time that it is faithfully and accurately proclaimed that You speak. And so our prayer this morning, Lord, is speak, for we are ready to hear. And so now for those who have gathered who desire to hear the Lord Jesus speak to you, who will believe what He says and who will by faith put into practice what He shows you, will you agree with me very loudly this morning by saying the word amen. Amen.

One of the biggest criticisms of those who are followers of Jesus Christ and one of the greatest challenges of the church are for those who say they're Christians, but then don't walk it out. And when the world looks on at people like that, they have a word for it. They say, "I wouldn't go to church because the only group that's there is just a bunch of," say it with me, "hypocrites." That's what people say all the time. Sometimes those aren't very valid descriptions, other times perhaps that they are. And so God in His Word, He not only tells us how it is that we can be saved, but how we can grow in our faith and grow into spiritual maturity. And that is just as important as being saved. And I'm afraid too often in the church, we tell the story of how to come to know Jesus personally as our Lord and Savior, but we don't do as good of a job with explaining to people now that you know Him, how do you continue to grow in Him?

And so we're going to begin a new series in the book of James called Walk Your Talk. If you're truly a believer in Christ, how is it that you can live out what you say that you believe? Because it's so important not only for our witness to the world, but for you personally. There are many people who have come to Christ that when you don't walk it out, you lose your spiritual life with Christ and your enjoyment in being all that He wants you to be. So I know this is going to be a great series for us.

I want to encourage you to open your Bible up to the book of James and as you're turning there, let me give you just a little history of this book. The author of this book is the half brother of Jesus. The reason he's only a half brother is because Jesus Christ was born of a virgin. Jesus didn't have an earthly father, He had His Heavenly Father. And Jude and James, those two books in the back of your New Testament are both written by His half brothers. And I love this book of James because James does not pull any punches. You'll see from the very beginning of this book, he comes out like a title fighter just punching and helping people to grow in their sanctification.

Some people throughout the church history age has said, "I don't like the book of James." Matter of fact, Martin Luther, one of the great reformers, hated this book. He called it a "right straw epistle." Because he was so much about grace through faith and he saw James saying, "Yeah, but what good is your faith if you don't have any works?" And both are equally true. We're saved by grace through faith, but if you are saved, what good is it to be saved if you're not walking it out? This book is all on walking your talk.

Now let me be clear from the beginning. This is not how to help your neighbor walk their talk. This is not for the person that should have been in church today to walk their talk, to get them to listen. This is for you personally to walk your talk. And today we're going to talk about the blessing of trials. The blessing of trials. You heard me right and by the end of the message you'll understand why. So I want you to open your Bibles up to the book of James and we'll start walking our way through those first 12 verses here this morning. And you're going to see in those first couple, James is going to introduce himself and then he's going to talk about who he's addressing this book to.

He says, "James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." Now let's just pause there for a second. He doesn't defend his apostleship. He doesn't say, Jesus was my older brother when He was here on the earth and I have special privilege. How does he refer to himself? He refers to himself as a bond-servant or literally the word is slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. Meaning this, "The only significance I have in relationship to Jesus Christ is that He's my God and I am His slave. I will do whatever He asks of me." He doesn't pull on family privilege. He doesn't pull on anything he ever known. He doesn't say, "I grew up with a guy, you should know what He's really like." He talks about the fact that Jesus is God and I'm here to serve Him. That's his only introduction. I'm a bond-servant to God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. And then he's going to tell us who he writes to.

He says, "To the 12 tribes who are dispersed abroad." And here's his big introduction, "Greetings." That's it. Now, if you're familiar with the New Testament, oftentimes when the apostle Paul writes a letter, he tells about who he is. He's apostle

of the Lord Jesus Christ, grace and peace to you. I've been praying for you. I've been thinking this. So-and-so has been praying for you. This is it. James is like, "Hey, let me tell you who I am. I'm a slave of Jesus and I'm writing to you who are dispersed." And who were dispersed? Well, the Jews throughout their history have been dispersed all over the place. In 721 BC they were dispersed by the Assyrians, but I believe James is writing more to the dispersed crowd that happened in Acts 8. After the stoning of Stephen, martyrdom began to take place, persecution began to spread, everybody scattered.

James stayed in Jerusalem, was the head of the church in Jerusalem until he was martyred. And he's writing to all those dispersed and here's his big word, "Greetings." Now who's he writing to? He's writing to those who have lost their homes, they've lost family members to martyrdom, they've lost their jobs, they've been persecuted, they've been suffering. This is who he's writing to. Now get that in your head, because when you're talking to somebody who's hurting because they've been through significant challenge and trial, how would you want to spend time talking to them? He says, "Greetings." Then the first words out, penned by the Holy Spirit, are this, "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 so that you may be perfect and complete lacking in nothing."

So he is writing to his friends, he's saying, "Brothers," he's like, "I'm in this with you. Greetings to you. I know you've been through some of the worst trials you've ever

had in your life. So let me just tell you this, consider it all joy when you face trials of many kinds." Or various kinds. That word there is really multicolored. Now, what's a trial? It's hard to define, but you know it when you have it, don't you? I mean, I'll give you a definition and then I'll shorten the definition so we can have one that we can work with and remember, but I think of a trial as a temporary season of increased intensity or challenge, designed by God for significant spiritual growth in you and greater kingdom impact for others. That's what a trial is. I'll say it again. It's a temporary season of increased intensity or challenge, designed by God for significant spiritual growth in you and greater kingdom impact for others. That's what a trial is.

Let me sum up that. Brave, what's a trial? A trial is God designed seasons for spiritual growth. That's what a trial is. It is a God designed season for spiritual growth. Here's why you need to know that. Because when things go well in our lives, we get a promotion, we get engaged, we get married, we have our first child, people speak highly of us. Here's what we think, "God praise You. Thank You so much that You're in control of this world because I know You're in control 'cause my life is going so well right now." And when trials come, what do we do? "God, why'd You leave your throne? And why is this happening to me and why would You allow this to happen? And God, if You're so good, then how come?" Right? No, no, no. Trials are God ordained seasons in your life for significant spiritual growth. The purpose of a trial is to grow you. God wants you to know four ways this morning that you can grow through trials. Now, here's the truth. Here's the truth. Listen, if you're a believer, here's a promise, biblical promise, you will experience trials.

I got no amens. Okay, let me say it again. As a believer, you will experience trials and when you do, they're not fun. They're not fun. That's why we don't like to talk about them. There's nothing in our self or in our flesh or in this world where we would say, "Oh, it's so fun. I'm praying to God for more trials in my life." We don't. We would never design them, we would never engineer them, but you need to know that God is behind the scenes and He's the one in charge of every trial. When you lose that job because you work for a bad boss and he promoted somebody else when you deserved it, and you earned it, and it was right, you can spend all your energy and time getting mad at that boss. Or you can think, "God, You designed this trial for me. You're in charge of all this and there's an opportunity here for significant spiritual growth."

Trials come in all sorts of kinds. They're multicolored. They're multifaceted. They come and they attack your health. They come and attack your family. They come and attack you as a single. They come and attack your children. They come and attack you at work. They come and attack your finances. I mean, there's all sorts of different ways and whatever trial it is that you're going through, there's a tendency to think, "I wish I had their trials. Their trial will be a lot easier." But God designs the trial for you, because He knows what He needs to get out of you. That's why your trials are different because God loves you enough to give you a curriculum for your life that's different than anybody else's. And God uses those circumstances in trial to get your attention. It's as if He's on a megaphone when you go through a trial like, "Okay, may I have your attention please."

If you're not a believer and you've been exploring the truths of the faith, perhaps you're going through a trial, perhaps you're finding yourself face down. Here's what the Lord is doing in your life. He loves you so much, He wants you to know that He sent His Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross for you. Who paid for all your sins. He rose from the dead. He's looking to have a relationship with you. The reason you're going through trials is God's trying to get your attention so that you can come into a relationship with Christ. And if you know Christ and you're going through a trial, here's what God is saying, "May I have your attention, please. There are some things in your life that I'm trying to chisel away that otherwise I wouldn't be able to chisel away to help you become everything that I want you to be."

This is why when James writes and he says, "This is who I am. I'm a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ, I'm writing to those dispersed Jews. Greetings. Consider it all joy." Let me just cut right to the quick. "When you face trials of many kinds, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let the endurance have its perfect result so you may be perfect and complete lacking in nothing." Let me give you the first way to respond to a trial that'll give you a benefit. We'll talk about four benefits today, four blessings today. When you respond correctly to a trial, you grow in spiritual maturity resulting in greater Christ likeness. When you go through a trial and you respond correctly, you grow in spiritual maturity resulting in greater Christ likeness.

Now this word, consider, it's an accounting term. You guys ever met any accountants? Accountants by trade are not very emotional creatures. This is an accounting term. This is consider it. This means when you go through a trial, it's not

like, "Oh, praise God, this is awesome." That's not what it means. It means consider that this is actually something to rejoice in because the benefit about what's about ready to happen is more significant than what you're currently experiencing. It doesn't mean I rejoice about my trials, I rejoice in the trial, right? I rejoice that God loves me enough that He has sent this trial my way because there's something He wants to see me grow in that otherwise I wouldn't be able to grow in. So I'm going to stop, I'm going to pause, I'm going to consider it, that this is all joy. This is a really good thing because if we come here and we're a Christian and "Hey, I'll sign up for spiritual maturity, I want more of that, but don't send me any trials."

Trials is oftentimes how God grows us to become spiritually mature, resulting in what? Christ's likeness. That's the goal of our faith is to be like Christ. One day in eternity will be translated, transformed into the very glory of who we are in Christ. And it'll be a glorious day, but in the meantime, God's trying to grow us. And here's the problem. There's nothing wrong with being new to the faith. There's nothing wrong with being a babe in Christ as the New Testament talks about. It's just like when you have a child and you bring them home and you have no idea what you're doing with that first child. And the child cries and it wets and it is selfish and wants everything to eat right on time and all those things, even as that child grows when the child's young, the child wants everything in his own way or her own way, that's fine. I mean we can handle that from ages zero to four sometimes. But if that child's 18 acting just like that, we got a big problem, don't we?

Oftentimes in the church, there's nothing wrong. If you're brand new to Christ and there's things that you need to grow, we love you. We're so glad you're here. We don't have any higher expectations for you than God does. But for some of us, God's been trying to send trials in our life and help us grow because we've been Christians for three or four or five decades and we're still acting just like we did when we first came to Christ, and that's a problem. That's when the world looks on and says, "You've been a Christian for how long and you still act like this, and you still do that, and there's no difference in you?" That becomes the problem, and if you want to grow in spiritual maturity, then you got to respond rightly to the trials that God sends your way.

You don't need to pray for trials. I promise you they'll come. Some of you're in the middle of a hard one right now. Some of you, whether you know it or not, are about ready to enter one. Some of you're coming out of one and if you say, "I have no idea what you're talking about," check out this message in a couple of weeks and it'll be really timely for you and that's why God wants us to respond that way. Paul said it this way in Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I'll say it again, rejoice." He says it in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, "Rejoice always. Give thanks in all circumstances." Right? I mean rejoice, that's part of what God wants us to do. And notice the benefit of doing that. When you can rejoice in a trial, it not only begins to bless your heart and show where your identity is rooted, but others around you begin to ask questions.

"Why is it you're rejoicing when I see what you're going through and there's anything but good?" And your answer? "Well, because Jesus Christ is my Lord." Which is why he tells us that he grows our testimony. Notice what he says, "Knowing that the

testing of your faith produces endurance." Trials test your faith. I believe in Jesus, He's my Lord and Savior. Trial comes, do you still? Do you still? Trials are opportunities for you to demonstrate that you really believe what you say you believe. Not only for your own personal growth and edification, but for all the others out there that heard you say, "I'm no longer like this. I'm like this." The trial hits and that's where the rubber meets the road. Are you really going to walk your talk? Do you really believe that Jesus is still in charge even when you're going through this challenge, even when you're going through this difficulty, even when the intensity has been turned way, way up in your life?

That's how we grow spiritually. Trials are great because it tests our testimony. I don't have a testimony. If you've been through a trial, you have a testimony. That's why God sends them and designs them. And notice this word. Endurance. Sometimes it says steadfastness, sometimes it says perseverance. The Greek word is hupomone. It means to remain under. It's as if you have a weight on your back. If you've been through a trial, it feels like the walls are closing in and on top of the walls closing in, it feels like there's a weight on top of you and there's nothing you can do to remove it. And the only thing you can do is what? Hupomone. Endure. Endure. Take the next endure.

Because what happens when trials hit oftentimes if we stay in our flesh, I want to get out of the trial as fast as I can. I want to either muscle out of it, I want to complain my way out of it. I want to make changes to how things happen out of it. I'm not going

to handle this trial. I'm leaving this one. I'm going to go over here.

Here's how loving our heavenly Father is. Listen Christian, listen to me. He loves you so much that if He sends a trial your way and you fail to respond the way God wants you to respond to grow spiritually, He'll send you another. Until you pass that test. And then there's some Christian like, "How come it is in my life? I keep saying the same thing over and over. I have the same trial, I have the same trial." Perhaps, and it's just perhaps, perhaps God's been sending you an opportunity to grow spiritually, you just haven't taken advantage of it. You haven't rolled it back onto the Lord and say, "Okay, this stinks. This is hard. This is horrible. I'm going to let the walls close in on me a little bit. I'm going to let the weight get on me and I'm going to continue to go."

Now you realize if you play a sport or if you're in school or whatever, if you're going to grow academically or if you're going to grow physically or whatever, there has to be things that you do that you do not enjoy in order to get there. And nobody wakes up and this decides when they're 30, "Think I'll be a brain surgeon. I have a passion for that." There are painstaking ways and schooling you have to do and training you have to have to get there. Professional athletes, same thing. Business owners, same thing. Whatever your skill or discipline is, if it's cutting hair or whatever, if you're good at what you do, there were pain taking things that had to happen in order for you to grow to be able to do what you have to do. Spiritually is no different.

Spiritual maturity is not automatic just because you're a Christian and the Holy Spirit's living inside of you. You have all the Holy Spirit inside of you from the moment you trust Christ. The question is, does the Holy Spirit have all of you? And trials are

opportunities to give the Holy Spirit more and more reign in your life so that He can lead who you are. Amen? When trials come, if you correctly respond, you'll grow in spiritual maturity, growing in Christ's likeness. And you'll run with perseverance. Maybe you just look back a couple chapters in the book of Hebrews, it says, "Therefore, since we have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily tangles and let us run with" what? "Endurance the race that is before us."

Endurance is spiritual muscle. It means this, as a Christian, you're going to get kicked. As a Christian, you're going to get pushed down. Anyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. In this world, you will have tribulation. Endurance is what gives you the spiritual muscle when you get kicked as a Christian or spoken poorly of as a Christian or pushed around as a Christian. Okay, but I'm going to get back up and I'm not exchanging what I know for what I don't know and I know Jesus Christ is my Lord and I'm going to keep on walking. Endurance is what helps us do that. Amen. And trials build that. Trials, build that. So when we have trials and endurance leads to maturity, that's where we get this word perfection. Now, James is borrowing from his older brother Jesus' best sermon ever, Sermon on the Mount.

And we read the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5:48 it says, "Therefore, be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." And we read the Sermon on the Mount, we're like, "Well, that's not for me." Well, who is it for? Who is He talking to? He's talking to those that are going to be followers of His. "Be perfect therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Here's what we say, "Well, I know I never can be because

I have sin on this side of heaven. I'll never be perfect, so why try?"

That's not what Jesus was saying. He was saying, "I'm perfect. That's My standard. If you're growing into Christ's likeness, you're going to become more and more perfect so when trials come, remain under them so I can develop your spiritual muscle so that you will grow into Christ likeness." Trials are a blessing. They're not fun. They're not enjoyable. They're not something you're going to call your friend on the phone about and say, "Hey, let me tell you about this. I'm having a blast today. Just got a call from my doctor. I got four weeks to live. Hey, I'm having a blast today. Just found out my spouse has been having an affair and leaving me. Hey, I'm having a blast today. Hey, just found out that my kid's wayward, having a blast. It's so much fun. Just found out that my business went belly up. So much... I love this. So great."

You're never going to call anybody and tell you, tell them how blessed the trial is. What you're going to do is you're going to make a careful assessment and say, "Wow." The more difficult it is, you're going to say this, "God, You must be entrusting me with something really special, 'cause this is so hard." Amen. And also a word of caution to those in the church, which is us. When people are going through a trial, it doesn't mean that they're sinning. Oftentimes some of the strongest saints are the ones going through the greatest trials. Just remember that when you're counseling other people.

You will have trouble. You will have tribulation. But here's the good news. When you respond correctly, spiritual maturity is there, resulting in greater Christ likeness.

And you don't get to choose the trial you go through. You don't get to choose the duration. You don't get to choose anything, but here's what you know. Here's what you know. Listen, listen, listen. It's temporary. It's temporary. You say, "Well, Pastor Jeff, I remember Joni Eareckson Tada, she was paralyzed. She had it for the rest of her life." It's temporary. This world is temporary. Nothing here is permanent. Everything in this life is preparation for the life that we're about ready to spend. You don't get to choose the duration of how long your kid's going to be wayward. You don't get to choose the duration of how painful this trial's going to be. You don't get to choose any of that, but I can tell you this, it's temporary.

The apostle Paul, do you think he went through some trials? I mean every city he went in, he was going to go to prison or be beat up or have a mob or people inside the church didn't like and people outside the church hated him and wanted to kill him. And everywhere he went, he was basically on death row. And here's what he said. "These light and momentary afflictions are nothing compared to the eternal weight of glory that is to come."

Think about how weighty your trial is right now. Let me just tell you, it's a light and momentary affliction compared to the glory that is on the way. Amen. That's what he wants you to know. That's why even Peter, one of Jesus' inner circle in 1 Peter 4:12, he says, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing as though some strange thing were happening to you, but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation." Friends, this is temporary.

Trials remind us that friendship with the world is hatred towards God. The longer you live as a Christian and the longer you endure under trials, you'll feel this in your spirit. I feel it all the time. Come, Lord Jesus. You can't come too soon for me. I'm looking forward to the day I meet You face to face. I don't want to go through this.

Now, it's not like I'm a martyr and oh, I hate the world and I love God and I love His people. I love what we get to do and I'm not a victim of anything, but I'm just telling you, the more I go through this, the more I want more of Jesus and less and less of what's currently taking place. Amen. Trials are good. They're a blessing. When they coming your way, just stop and pause and thank God that He counts you worthy enough to go through a trial, 'cause He's growing your spiritual muscle and maturity and He's making you more like Jesus.

Secondly is this, when you respond correctly to a trial, you grow in spiritual insight resulting in greater faith. You grow in spiritual insight resulting in greater faith. Now, I love this, because when we go through a trial oftentimes like, "Why me and what happened?" Here's what God says in the context of trials, "But if any of you lacks wisdom." Means, I don't even know why I'm going through this or what I'm supposed to do. "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But," here's the caveat, "he must 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 that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord being a double-minded man, unstable in all of his ways." Here's what he says. When you go through a trial, God's right there.

Now you don't complain as a victim like, "Why me? This is so unfair. This is so wrong." It's, "Lord, okay, You chose me, why am I going through this now? Help me understand what You want me to gain from this. What are the significant things that I need to change in my life or that You're trying to change in me? Is there any way that I need to be cooperating with You now that would look different than if I was just to respond in my flesh? What do You want from me?" And here's what he says. If you ask questions like that, God will tell you from His Word what the answer is. He's not going to hold back. He's designed this trial for you. He'll speak to you, but here's the caveat. "But when you ask, you must ask in faith and not doubt." Meaning this, when God shows you in His word what the answer is, you better take the answer.

Sometimes we go through a trial, you're dating someone and things go bad and you ask the Lord what's going on and God says, "Because I don't want you with them anymore." Now, if you hear the Lord say that, then you're done with them and you move on. If not, then you say, "Well, the Lord said this, but you know what? I'm going to do it my way. I'm going to stay in this relationship. I'm going to make it work." Which is only going to make it worse. And then if you get married, then you have a significant trial that you didn't have to begin with. Because God loves you so much that He will continue to intensify the heat until He gets your attention. That's what the Lord does. If you fail to listen in the little things, it's only going to get bigger and bigger and bigger. Why? Because He loves you so much and He wants you to have spiritual insight.

And I find even as somebody's been walking with the Lord for 30 plus years and

has read through the Bible significant times and knows what the Word of God says, there's oftentimes in a situation when I'm going through a trial, I'll open the Bible and all over I'll see things. I'm like, "I've never seen it like this before. I never noticed this, but God, I'm sorry. This is what it is." And sometimes even that's uncomfortable. Well, why didn't You tell me that 20 years ago? I could have been working on. Why do I have to go through this pain to learn this? It's always through pain that we learn. Pain has a way of growing us and growing us spiritually if we'll embrace it. In the book of Hebrews, it says, "No discipline is fun at the time, but painful. But if we'll be trained by the discipline, we can grow into something different." That's why God disciplines us like a loving parent. He cares about us. That's who our God is. And we get spiritual insight.

So when you lack wisdom, like why am I going through this trial? You should be able to answer from the Word of God why you're going in it. Trials produce a greater understanding of God's Word, God's will and God's ways. So when you're going through a trial, this book should come alive. The Word of God is living and active. It's sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates to divide both soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the attitude, the intentions of the heart. When you're going through a trial, I find that this book shouts. This book has a way of reading me like no other words in the world have a way of reading me.

And when I'm going through a trial and I'm asking the question, "Okay, Lord, help me understand why I'm going through. What do You want to say to me? I mean, You have my attention." When God has my attention, He has a way of speaking through His Word where things jump off the page. And if normally I read my Bible and some days

He speaks a little more clearly than others, and other days it's not so strong, but during a trial, oftentimes the words are jumping off the page in my heart. Especially the words I don't want to see or hear. Because He's trying to make me aware of what His Word says. Why is His Word so important? Because His Word will give you the answers to what you're looking for. That's why His Word has always been from the very beginning, a place of debate.

I mean even the enemy. First thing the enemy says quoted in the Bible is what? "Did God really say that?" And I promise you, when you're going through a trial and you read what God says, you'll hear the enemy in your ear saying, "Did God really say that? I mean, that's different than your family did it. That's different than your office place does it. That's different than how you've ever handled money before. That's different than how you've ever handled a relationship. I mean, are you sure? Did God really mean?" Yeah, He meant everything He says. He meant everything He says. And I found in my life through multicolored trials all the time, God's taught me how to love people different. He's taught me how to forgive people better. He's taught me how to pray blessing on people who have been hurtful to me. And I wish I could tell you, man, He's done so much. I could spend five hours talking about trials I've been through and ways God's grown me in it, but He's not done.

I mean, I knew when I was preaching through the book of James and I'm looking at the first week, I'm like, "Okay, where's it going to come from now?" And God was so gracious, He gave it to me. I've had friends I'm close to that I've had really challenging week with two of them this week. Been super, super hard. It's taken me

back to the Word where God's shown me things in His Word to help me understand how much He loves me and what He's trying to teach me and what He's trying to do. And how to love people. And that's the whole purpose. In Matthew 5, He said, "Blessed are you when people insult you or say all kinds of evil about you. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven's great."

All of the Sermon on the Mount is all the same stuff. You're blessed. And you get spiritual insight, because you'll start asking questions like this during trials. Are there changes I need to make? Are there new ways I need to see things? Are there new opportunities I need to pursue? Is it just that You're wanting me to remain under and that this is terrible and this doesn't seem fair and this doesn't seem right, but I'm staying in this because I'm doing it for You, Jesus, because You gave it all for me and I'm giving it all for You. See, it's not just escaping it. Because if you escape it, you get a retest, because God loves you so much. And wouldn't we want greater spiritual insight? Wouldn't we want to result in greater faith? I mean he must ask in faith and when you know what God's doing. It says, "For that man that asked without faith is double-minded, unstable in all of his ways." It's really two souled. It's the two-faced person. They say this, but they act like that. God says this, they do that.

And many of you have, if you've been walking with the Lord for a long time, you've had the experience where you're counseling another believer, and I don't mean in a formal counseling session, but you're talking to someone, they're going through a trial. And you're showing them in the Word, "But this is what God says, and I know that's uncomfortable for you, but God wants you to stay in this. God wants you to fight

like this. God wants you to forgive them. God actually wants you to pray blessing over them." And the person says, "Yeah, I see that, but I'm not doing that. I'm going to do just the opposite." It breaks your heart, right? It happens all the time. It's God's Word.

And then what else is it? It's God's will. You want to know what God's will is? Everybody's always asked, "What's God's will for my life?" When you go through a trial, you'll understand the will of God much, much better because things will be spelled out for you. And you're asking the question, "Lord, is this the way You want me to go, because I want You to go this way. I want to do what You want me to do." And you'll understand God's ways. How does God operate and what does He do?

Have you've ever been met somebody that's significantly older in the faith and you see them and when they talk, they talk with just incredible wisdom and they seem to know what to do in every situation and you're almost jealous of what they know of the Lord. And you're asking, "I wish I had that kind of insight." When you have that person in your mind, just go ask them the question sometime, say, "Have you been through any trials in your life?" And they will laugh at you. And then follow up with this, "What are some of the trials you've been through in your life and how have those trials grown you in Christ?"

And it's really interesting because when you watch a believer go through a trial that endures through it, that remains under it, it's pretty obvious to say, "Man, they're going through it. And that stinks." And when somebody stays in there and their prayer life is growing and their love for God's growing and their worship's growing, it does

something in your heart too to say, "I want to grow more like that." They're a testimony and a witness to the world because of their insight. You can read the Bible every day for the rest of your life and God will give you some insight, but sometimes going through one trial will give you more insight than reading the entire New Testament. If you respond correctly.

It's not about how much you know, it's about what you've been experiencing with Him. And we all want to grow in our spiritual insight. We all want greater faith. And this is where it comes. It comes through trials. And the Bible says in Hebrews 11:6, "Without faith, it's impossible to please God." When you go through trial, you have a new way of operating in faith. It's a new opportunity. It's a new experience. I mean anything that comes in your life is an opportunity. You get a fight in your marriage, that's a marital opportunity. You get in a fight with your kids, it's a parenting opportunity. You got a challenge at work, that's a work opportunity. I mean, if you see it as opportunities to grow in Christ, you'll view the response differently. Invite Jesus into it. Say, "I want to grow in spiritual maturity. I want to grow in spiritual insight. I want to be more like Christ. I want to have greater faith. That's what I want to do." God will come through, He'll do that.

And then the third one, when you respond correctly to a trial, you grow in spiritual dependence which results in greater power. Spiritual dependence, which results in greater power. Now notice verses 9, 10, and 11, they seem as if they're out of place, but contextually they perfectly fit. Notice what he says, he says, "But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position and the rich man is to 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."

Now he's talking about two different groups of people. He's talking about the one in humble circumstances. The one in humble circumstances when they go through a trial, they do not have the money to get their way out of the trial. They don't have enough money at the end of the month to pay their bill. They don't have enough money when they get the call for cancer and they don't have the insurance to get it taken care of. They're in humble circumstances. They don't have the means to help get them out of the trial. And when that happens to you, glory in God. Glory in your position. Glory in the fact that you belong to Christ. Glory in the fact that this place is just temporary even when you don't have the means to solve your problems. Amen. It's good news.

And then he starts talking to the rich. And just so we're clear on who rich is, if you have a car and a house, you're rich compared to the whole world, okay? He's talking to the rich and he says, there's a time where trials come into lives even if you have all the means that money won't buy your way out of the trial. You can't buy your way out of cancer. You can't buy your way to extend your life. You can't buy a relationship. I mean, there's certain things that even money can't buy. And here's what he's saying to both groups of people, whether you have the means or don't have the means, there are certain trials that come into your life, you don't have the answers to. And if you do get answers where money can help, hey, be humble, that God's the one that provided.

If you don't, glory in the fact that God is the provider. Either way, we're totally dependent upon the Lord Jesus Christ for whatever He wants to do. Because God has a way of orchestrating trials regardless of your means that hit your heart really, really hard.

Rich people have trials, poor people have trials, and here's what God says, "We're all passing and fading away." So don't try to get rich so you can take care of your trial. That's what he's trying to say. He's trying to say, cling dependence upon the Lord. And the more dependence you have on the Lord, the more you'll see spiritual power. You say, "Well, where do you get that from the Bible?" Well, I'm glad you asked. In this very book, if you flip over to chapter four, we'll get there, but I want to highlight this verse for you today in chapter 4:6 he says, "Therefore" it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." This is a quote from Proverbs 3:34. "God opposes the proud, but He gives grace to the humble."

Now, we have to ask ourselves, well, what is grace? Grace is God's power on display in our life. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith." It's not your own doing. It's a gift of God. So no one should boast. Well, what is grace? Grace is the spiritual power that can take a person who is far from God, who is completely dead in their sins, who's doing their own thing, who's rebelling, and God's grace, His supernatural power, is able to rescue them from the kingdom of darkness, transfer them into the kingdom of God's beloved Son in whom we have redemption and forgiveness of sins. That's power on display. Amen. But God's power doesn't stop there. God's power continues on.

In the book of Titus, as Paul writes to Titus 2:11, he writes to him and he says this, he says, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men." All those who have been saved have been saved by the power of God. But notice he doesn't stop there. "Instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." So what's he say? He says, "Yes, grace is the power that saves, but grace is also the power that sanctifies." And the same measure of grace you needed to get saved, which had nothing to do with you, you need that same measure of grace to continue to mature in Christ. Because maturity in Christ is what helps us to say no to ungodliness and worldly behavior and to live differently.

I had the privilege this weekend of going back on Friday night to where God called me to a hundred person church to start my ministry. And as I was standing there and I was kind of sharing, I'd even tried to get out. I was trying to think, "I don't know if I want to go back. It's a long trip back." And flew in, flew out. I got home at 2:00 in the morning, but as I was standing there, God was telling me, and I shared it with the group. This right here is where I learned to preach. This right here is where I learned to pray. This right here is where I learned to evangelize. This right here is where I learned that the church was the hope of the world. I mean, right in that place, I was moved. And I've seen even at that time how God, over those years now, almost 30 years, has continued to grow my heart to deeper intimacy with Him and deeper spiritual power.

We talk about gifts and everybody hears messages on gifts. Last week's message was great on gifts. We're like, "I want more of that. I want to be used more of God. I want more of Him." How do you get it? Through greater dependence upon Him. That's why prayer will always be the most significant part of what we do at Brave. That's why no matter how many people come on the weekend, I celebrate the fact that we had over 1500 people on three different campuses seeking the face of the Lord that first Tuesday this week. It was awesome. Because the more dependent you are on the Lord, the more spiritual power is unleashed in your life and in the life of those around you. The more salvations you'll see, the more maturity you'll see, the more holiness you'll see, because God cares about all of it.

We've been duped into believing that all God cares about is getting you saved so you can go to heaven. And as many preachers, and I've said it before too, if that's all He cared about, as soon as you got saved, He'd kill you. Go to heaven. That's not what He cares about. He cares about you being a walking, talking representative of what it looks like to be growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord until you meet Him face to face. Amen. That's the gospel. And that's what He wants. That's why even Paul, when he was going through all of his hardships and three times he asked the Lord, "Remove it." And God said, "I'm not taking that away from you, but My grace, My power, is sufficient for you." There's no trial you're going through that's too great for you. It feels that way. I give you that. It totally feels that way.

Even sometimes when I'm talking to people and I know the trial they're going through, I think, "I don't know that I could have handled that trial. I don't know if I could

ever handle that trial. That's a massive trial." But it's not too big for God's grace. It's not too hard for Him, and He's taking you through it to help build you into who He wants you to be. Spiritual dependence resulting in greater power. Now, can I just say this? If I would've told you today, I want to teach you today how you can have greater spiritual maturity and grow into Christ's likeness and how you can have greater spiritual insight and grow in your faith and how you can have spiritual dependence and grow in greater power. All of you would've said, "Come on, bring it on." So I did. This is how. This is how, it's through trials.

Let me give you a final one. I love this one. When you respond correctly to a trial, you also grow in spiritual vitality, which is life fervency, resulting in greater love. Spiritual vitality resulting in greater love. Notice what James 1:12 says. It says, "Blessed," or happy. Happy is a man or happy is a woman who perseveres. That's that word again, it's endures early on. It's perseveres here. It's the same Greek word hupomone. "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial." It means when you're feeling the weight and the walls are closing in and it's on top of you and you're like, "Jesus, this is hard, but I'm going through this. For once he has been approved," that means once he's passed the test, once God says, good job, "he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."

When you go through a trial, you will grow in your spiritual vitality or your fervency for the Lord, which will result in a greater love for God and a greater love for His people. Always does. I mean, when you go through a trial, there's something weird

about going through a trial. When you're in it, it's hard. When you're in it, it's difficult. Because God's stripping away all the things on the outside. It's like Michelangelo designing a statue and he in his mind and his gifted mind can see what the statue is supposed to look at. So he starts chiseling away things that most of us would look at, why is he cutting there and why is he doing that? And all of a sudden this beautiful statue comes. That's what a trial's like. God's chipping away and chiseling and cutting and doing, and oh, this is uncomfortable. Why are You doing that? Because at the end, God wants to present us faultless before the Father.

He's going through that and there's something on this side of heaven. If a trial is temporary where it ends on this side of heaven and you go through it and you come out the other side, everything I've just told you you'll know is true. And you'll thank God for it. And you'll say things like, "I know I'm closer to Jesus. I know I love God more. I've never experienced God quite in this way. His Word has come alive to me. I know His ways in a different way than I've ever known before. It is so, so good. God, don't ever do that again." Right? I mean, that's kind of how it feels. And then there's other trials that I believe that may be a part of your life until you meet Jesus. Just maybe. Because we don't get to choose the duration.

So I have no problem if you have cancer praying for God to heal you of cancer. I have no problem if you're looking for a job praying that God provides for you. I have no problem praying God's blessing and providence over your life. I just have no problem with that. But it could be that some of us for some reason unbeknownst to even us, that God in all of His wisdom has decided, "No, this one's going to hang and linger for a

long time because there's something special I'm creating in and through you. And one day when I show you the tapestry of everything I was able to do with the world, you'll see how I used you for greatness. And you'll see how I was preparing you for that."

And that's a beautiful thing and we love it, but we don't enjoy the process. The process is never fun. I've never talked to somebody that's a world-class athlete that says, "I don't really care about the games. I just like practicing." I've never talked to a surgeon that says, "I enjoy that, but I love school. I wish I could be back in school." If they are, then they go back and teach. I mean, at the end of the day, all the things that are difficult that we go through, we don't enjoy any of them. It's the fruit that comes out of it. And when we're approved by God and we pass that test, ultimately what James is preparing us for is this. He's going to tell us later in this book that life is but a vapor. I mean, it's temporary here. I don't know how long you're going to live, but if you live another a hundred years, it's a blink compared to what's coming.

And he's telling you, if you endure this till the end, you're going to receive the crown of life which God has prepared for those who love Him. This crown was not like a regal crown, it was more like a wreath that was given at the Olympic Games to those who were victors, to those who were part of the winning team. That's what you're going to get. I mean, it's very similar to what the Apostle Paul said that you'll be familiar with at the end of his life in 2 Timothy 4:7-8 when he says, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." Then what's he say? He says, "Now there is in store for me, laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to

all who have loved His appearing."

I mean, when you go through trials, I'm telling you, you're going to yearn more for Jesus. You're going to yearn more for heaven. You're going to yearn more for Him to come set up His kingdom in this world because this world's hard and it's a challenge and it's okay, but that's what God wants to do. And you say, "Well, how does my spiritual vitality result in more love?" It's easy. Because when you go through that and you press in to the all loving being of the universe, you're going to fall more in love with Him. And guess what? You're going to love His creation a lot more too. Because there's something about being in the presence of the One that created it all that loves all, where you begin to love others that way too.

Sometimes your trial you think is other people, but we learned as we went through the last series, it's not flesh and blood, it's what the enemy's doing through those people. But God teaches you, "Hey, I forgave you so you can forgive them. I'm prospering you, so you pray prayers of blessing over them. You love the way I love. You demonstrate My love the way." And the whole Bible summed up and love for God and love for others, so that's what God teaches you when you go through a trial. God, how do I love You more and how do I love other people more? And if you'll endure that and you'll remain under that, there's great maturity that comes from that, which is why God sends trials your way. He loves you so much. Brave church, He loves you so much. I can promise every single person here who's breathing, He's going to send some trials your way. Because He loves you that much.

And don't be surprised or think it's strange, like "Why now? Now I'm walking with the Lord. I'm doing what He wants. And now all of a sudden." It's because now you're walking with the Lord and doing what He wants, and that's why He's got your attention. It's okay. I find the more steps of faith I take, the more trials I get to endure. And I know it won't stop on this side of heaven. And there's never a time I've had one, whether it be this week or any other time where I've said, "Oh, that was fun. That was awesome. Give me more of that."

But I've been trained enough by my trials over the years to know, Lord, this is an opportunity. I wasn't ready for this opportunity. I wasn't looking forward to this opportunity. I didn't even know this opportunity was on my plate. But if You in Your sovereignty decided to give it to me, Lord, help. What do you want to teach me? How do you want to grow me? What is it I'm blind to? What is it I'm not seeing? What is it You're trying to build? I'll stay in this with You, because I want what You want. I want to grow. I want to be spiritual mature. I want to be more like Christ. I want to grow in my faith. I want to grow in my dependence. I want to grow in my vitality. I want to grow in my love for You and for others. Lord, that's what I want. So even though I hate this trial, I'm thanking You for it, because I know that You care that much about me.

Some of you in here are dealing with deep trials, like so painful that you want to get up and leave right now and never come back trials. Let me say this to you. God's the one that brought that trial in your life. It wasn't your fault. I mean, there's consequences. If you go out and rob a bank and get arrested, that's not necessarily a trial. What you're going to experience after that is a trial. And then God's going to be

with you in that. But oftentimes when I'm talking trials, I mean, they just happen. I did everything right and this went wrong. And that's God's saying, "That's because I knew I could trust you 'cause I love you so much and I want you to demonstrate My love through this horrible, hurtful thing. Not only because of what I want to build in you, but because I want to bless others through it. Will you remain under? Will you not try to escape? Will you not get bitter? Will you not get resentful? Will you stay here? Because if you do, I've got great blessing for your life." Amen. Amen.

Would you stand with me? Our Father in heaven, we give You glory, honor and praise for who You are. And Lord, we thank You for the blessings that come from trials. Lord, we confess to You, they're not fun. We confess to You, they're difficult. We confess to You, we don't enjoy any part of them. But Lord, we believe that You use them. Lord, use us in trials today.

During the singing of this last song, I'm going to call up some of our elders, our pastors, just on all our campuses just to be here. If you want somebody just to pray with you for the trial that you're going through, they're here for you. But Lord, when we sing this next song that we want more, we're not talking. We want more trials. We want more of You. We want more of You. We want everything You have. And Lord, if that comes through trials, by all means, Lord, we're thankful for You loving us enough to give us that. Lord, we give You all glory. We give You all honor, we give You all praise, and we celebrate You, the mighty and matchless, Jesus Christ, Lord of the universe. Amen and amen. Can we give God praise this morning?

