The Joy of Trials
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What we're going to talk about today is universally relevant, right? Because there's nobody in here right now that I know of—I know a lot of you. I talk to you sometimes. I hear stuff, right? Sometimes I hear things you might not want me to hear. But I hear it. I know there's a lot of struggle, a lot of pain, a lot of hurt, a lot of angst, and a lot of sleepless nights. I get that. I have them too.

And these trials that you face—the trials I face—sometimes aren't the same ones you face, and the ones you face might not be the same as the person next to you. Trials come in all different shapes, sizes, and colors. They can be painful. They can be disruptive. They're never pleasant. They're hard to bear.

But I'm not talking to just anybody this morning. I'm talking to a group of people who have put their faith and their trust in Jesus. Okay? That's who we are. And so for Christians, how you walk through adversity—because you're all going to face it, we're all going to have it—how you walk through that adversity and those trials is going to be one of the most powerful witnesses that you will ever have for Christ in this world.

Nobody's looking at you when things are great. Nobody's looking at you and saying, "Oh boy, things are great for him." They're looking and saying, "Well, I wish things were going great for me." But they don't really notice. Where they do notice is when your life is falling apart, when the storm comes, when the wheels fall off, when you get that diagnosis, when the relationship fails, when you lose your job, when your kid goes prodigal. That's when they look at you and say, "Okay, they say they're a Christian. They say they follow Jesus. Let's see what this looks like."

And what James says to us is *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds* (James 1:2). That's our theme for today. That's our banner. That's the big idea. That's the goal. That's what we're shooting for.

People are watching you when you go through trials, when you're going through struggles, when you've been diagnosed with cancer, when you fell off a roof, right? People are watching to see how you're going to respond in those kinds of situations.

And the natural direction—I'll just tell you the natural direction. I know this because I'm a person, and I have a flesh too, right? The natural direction is that when bad things come, we are tempted to throw our hands up in the air and just give up. We're tempted to say, "You

know what? God must have done something to me. God must have allowed this, and now I'm frustrated with God. Why would He have allowed this to happen to me?"

So, what we sometimes do is say, "Well, I'm just going to do whatever I want. I'm going to pick this thing up, and I'm going to fix it on my own. I'm going to be God in my life." And what happens? We end up sinning.

You see, trials in our life will go one direction or the other. And I've said this to you before—when bad things happen in your life, you'll do one of two things. Nobody's ever just standing still in their relationship with God. You've got God in front of you—nobody stands still. Something good happens, you either go toward God or drift. Something bad happens, and you're struggling, you either run toward God and embrace Him or you run away and say, "Well, I'm mad at You."That's how it is. And if you're thinking, "Maybe I'm unique in this"—you're not. Everybody's that way. None of us are exempt from that. We're all that way.

So, here's what I want you to see: both God and the devil have separate purposes for the trial and the struggle you're going through. They both have their own purposes. God allows trials to happen. He allowed trials to happen to Job. He allowed trials to happen to all the disciples. He allows trials to happen to all of us. But what He wants to do in that trial—and what the devil wants to do in that trial—are completely different.

So, the question is, which are you going to follow? Which way are you going to go?

Let's jump in here to James chapter one, verse two. I'm going to pray, and I want God to really teach us this morning.

"God, in Jesus' name, we're looking at Your Word—James chapter one, verse two and following. God, You've got a word for us as people that's really relevant to us because we're struggling through stuff. We've got pain, right? Some of it's perpetual. Some of us—we know it'll never leave us. Some of our ailments and our struggles are things we have, and we see no solution for. But God, You've got a prescription for us this morning. So God, open our eyes and our hearts, open our ears, so that we can follow You and be Your people. Empower us by Your Holy Spirit to really make some changes in our life and be what You call us to be. In Jesus' name, amen."

Now let me be clear before we get into this. When it talks about trials, I'm talking about real trials. I'm talking about real problems. I'm talking about things that are painful. This isn't going to say that you're not going to experience pain, okay? So this isn't a solution to get you out of pain. This is just about how you're going to respond in pain.

It says in verse two: *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds (James 1:2), for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness* (James 1:3).

In other words, it's not saying, "Hey, enjoy your trial." That's not what it's saying. It's not saying, "Hey, this is going to be fun." You're not naturally going to find happiness or get pleasure out of this. That's why it says, Count it all joy. It didn't say it is pure joy—it said that you are supposed to consider it joy by an act of your will—Consider it pure joy. The trial is still going to be painful, but it's going to be different.

Now, what does "consider" mean? What does it mean to "consider"? Okay, here's the definition of consider; it's a conscious judgment. It's a conscious judgment of something based on deliberately weighing all the facts. Okay?

So, when we moved here into the area—we lived in one place, and we had to make a consideration. We considered. So, we took all the good points that we could think of, and we listed them all on one side. Honestly, we put them all down and looked at them. We said, "Man, all the reasons say that we should just stay in Seattle. And all the reasons to come—there's hardly any of them. But God called us here." So, we just went. You see, I considered. But it was consideration. It wasn't just natural. If it were all natural, and we just did whatever we felt like, I would've never come here—not that you're not lovely people, and not that I don't love you. I love you now. I love everything about you. Well, not everything, but some things.

But I had to consider it pure joy. I had to consider it and say, "I've got to make a decision based on what God is doing." And that's what this is about. This is about making a decision, and my attitude is going to follow what I think God is doing.

Okay, in this trial, in this pain, in this hurt, in this family relationship, in this financial struggle, in this health problem—whatever it is—"God, what are You doing?" You see, because the world looks at it and says, "Well, it's all natural. There's nothing I can do about it. It just is what it is, and I'm just going to fight until I get through the thing."

But that's not how God's people work. It says here to *Consider it pure joy* (James 1:2).

Now you're like, "Come on, James, really? Consider it pure joy? Right? Yeah, I got a huge toothache here—they're pulling all my teeth is out, and now I'm supposed to consider that pure joy, right? I got a hemorrhoid, and I'm supposed to consider that pure joy, right?" You never thought I'd use that word in a church service, did you? Well, hallelujah. Praise the Lord. There we go.

So, what are the facts? If we're going to consider this and deliberate and decide how we're going to act, what *are the facts that he wants?*

Consider it pure joy. On the one hand, this trial is very unpleasant. On the other hand, I know—verse three—because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance (James 1:3).

So, there's something that's going to happen in my trial as a result of this issue that I hate, that I really don't like, that is really painful. In the midst of this, God has a purpose in it. And when I consider the whole of the thing, and I look at it—not just from the trial standpoint, but from the view of everything God's doing—I'm going to change the way I think about this by an act of my will.

And I'm going to consider it pure joy, because now I can smile, because I know God's doing something.

Man, this is hard now. Now why is God doing something? Why? Why is God doing something in that process? It says it develops strength to persevere and endure.

You say, "Well, what good is that? Why? I don't care about enduring. I care about not being in pain. I care about my kids not hating me. I care about whatever. I'm not concerned about enduring." Enduring to what? In what? Endure for what? What is endurance? What am I enduring for?

It says, *And let perseverance finish its work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing* (James 1:4).

Okay, now I see what You're saying. You're saying that by experiencing this trial, it's going to grow me, and I'm going to be able to persevere through more and more and more, because I'm getting stronger in my faith.

What would have caused me to give up and run away from God and say, "I don't want to be with God anymore." What would have caused me to not endure in my faith to the very end and lose the whole crown—lose the whole battle? What might have done that before, I'm not going to let it happen now, because You have been so good in my life. You've allowed these things to happen—these trials—and they are building my faith up.

Why are You allowing this trial to happen in my life? Because You want me to endure to the end. You're wanting to make sure that I don't give up on my faith before I see You. You're wanting to make sure that I don't give up on my faith before I die.

I remember talking to Hugh very specifically. Hugh was going through a lot of pain in his last days. I'm not trying to bring anything up to hurt anybody—but I remember sitting down with him, because he was starting to get squirrely and starting to pop off, and sometimes he'd

even get a little mean, right? You know why? Because he was in so much pain. And when you're in pain, you start to lose your composure.

And I remember talking to him—this might have been a week before he died—and I said, “Hugh, you’re so close. You are so close. You’ve run the race. You’ve run it. You’ve run it wonderfully. Do not—do not—now at the end, fail your faith. Stay strong in God. Continue to serve Him. Continue to love. Continue to be gentle. Continue to be those things.”

And we talked about that. And honestly, I don’t even know if he remembers what I said—he was in so much pain. But I remember we talked about that. That you’re in a race. This idea that you get saved and then, “Okay, well, I’m saved, so that’s it. I don’t have to have faith anymore for the rest of my life”—that’s baloney. The whole Bible is about this idea that you get saved and then— “Okay, well, I’m saved, so that’s it. I don’t have to have faith anymore for the rest of my life”—that’s balogna.

The whole Bible is about faithfulness. It’s not about “I had faith once; therefore, I’m just saved forever, now I can do whatever I want.” That’s not how it works, right? We are to be faithful to the end. You have to run the race. You don’t just get to start at the starting line and just sit there: “Hey look, I started the race. I must be done now.” That’s not how it works.

In the Christian faith, you run the race, and as you're running the race of life, there are trials. Your side hurts. Some guy jumps out in front of you. There’s pain here, there’s pain there—there’s all kinds of struggle. And you work through those things, hopefully holding on to your faith to the very end.

And , it says, Let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:4). You see, because if your faith isn’t tested, it’s going to lie unexercised.

Any of you ever had atrophy coming in your body? I was watching this video. There was this kid, and he couldn’t use his right arm—he could only use his left. So he lifts weights all the time with that arm, and it’s huge—this guy’s like a giant man. I mean, if he had both arms like that, he'd be massive. But this other arm is tiny because he can’t use it. This arm over here though, is huge—it can withstand all kinds of trials, all kinds of struggles. He’s not giving up for nothing with that one.

Now, the other side might have some problems.

I remember I had a back problem. I had to have a back surgery, and it pinched something, and I couldn’t—this leg got really small. That was one of the problems with it—I could hardly lift my leg. It atrophied, right? If you don’t use it…

And so what God is doing is: He tests your faith so that you have to use it. You're in training so that you'll be able to finish this race. He doesn't want you to not be able to finish. See, it benefits you. It provides an opportunity to exercise your faith and get stronger so that you'll endure to the end.

So, go to verse 12, because the question is, why do I care about that? Why do I care about getting to the end?

Here's what it says at the end—verse 12: 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 (James 1:12).

Now you say, "What's that crown? Is that like a real, literal crown?" I don't think it's a real crown. I don't think it's a literal crown. It's not like royalty—like you show up and all of a sudden they go, "You are now the king." That's not what's happening here.

The crown here is the crown of somebody who's run a race. Back in Greek times, when you entered the race and you were victorious, they put a garland around your head. It was a proof, a symbol that you had received a reward for finishing the race.

But in order to finish the race, you've got to overcome the pain, you've got to overcome the problems, you've got to overcome everything so that you'll finish the race.

So, those who persevere in faith to the end are promised and guaranteed a prize—not those who don't finish the race.

And what James is saying is that this reward you're going to get by standing firm until the very end, by following God to the end and not giving up, not renouncing your faith, is worth all the trial. That's the point.

The trial that you're going through? It's worth it to follow through. It's worth it to stay faithful, because at the finish line, the reward for being faithful is so incredible that you'll be like, "Wow." When you get there, you'll say, "That was nothing compared to the reward I got. That was nothing compared to what I received as a result of finishing the race and being faithful to the very end."

So, I can withstand anything. And as a result of that, I can consider it pure joy when the trial comes. My attitude is, "Oh, there's a trial. God must love me, right? God cares about my faith. If He didn't care about my faith, I might just walk through life without any trial at all, right? I'd atrophy. I wouldn't build character. I wouldn't become stronger in my faith. I wouldn't be able to help anybody else.

I mean, look at your life—the things that really made you grow in your life, the things that you say, “Man, this changed me. This made me”? They’re all bad. Can you think of anything that happened in your life where you said, “Amen, this was just a wonderful thing, and boy, I grew in character a lot because of that”? That’s just not how it works.

God uses those things in order to draw us to Himself.

It goes on. It says, *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him* (James 1:5). Now, why does he say that? Because when you’re going through a trial, the natural question is, “What the heck is going on? Why is this happening to me?” I need some wisdom to know why this trial is shaking me. Should I go through it? Is this for good? Should I be trying to get out of this trial, or should I be walking through it? But I need wisdom. And who are you going to ask? Your friends? People? No. You should ask the one who’s allowing the trial to happen. Ask God.

You say, “Well, I don’t want to ask God, because if I ask God, He’ll think I’m… He’ll think I’m not very smart. He’ll think that I don’t have a lot of faith.” God already knows you don’t have a lot of faith, right? It says right here: Ask. He gives generously without finding fault (James 1:5). In other words, He’s not going to hold it against you that you’re asking Him to give you some answers for why you’re going through this. He’s not holding that against you. So, go ahead and ask. Don’t be embarrassed. Come to God and say, “God, why in the world is this happening? This bugs me. I don’t like this at all. Am I supposed to try to escape this?”

Now, to escape it, I might have to get involved in some shenanigans and some sin to get out of this do something I ought not do?” Well, no—that’s not God. That’s not what You want me to do. You want me to endure this and be a good witness for You. “Are You doing something great in my life? Are You making me stronger?” God, that’s something to have joy about. You’re at work in my life. And boy, the pain hurts—man, I’m hating every minute of this—but I’m going to *consider it pure joy, because the testing of my faith develops perseverance, and perseverance must finish its course so that I may become mature and complete, not lacking anything* (James 1:2–4).

And 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* (James 1:5).

And he goes on. It says, *But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind* (James 1:6).

Now, why would you ask God for wisdom if you don't believe that He has the ability and desire to give it to you? Right? That would be like going up to somebody and saying, "Hey, can you give me a ride somewhere?"—and they don't have a car, and they hate your guts.

Well, what? I must be double-minded. I must have two minds. I must live in a fantasy world over here that thinks this guy's got a car and this guy likes me—because I'm asking the question. I must be double-minded and unstable. Well, that's what he says here. *That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do* (James 1:7–8).

A person that's asking God for something but doesn't believe? You say, "Well, maybe I'm double-minded because I sometimes have doubts. Am I double-minded? Are you calling me double-minded?"

What about the guy in Mark chapter 9 who said, *'Lord, I believe; help my unbelief'* (Mark 9:24)? Is that guy double-minded?

Well no, he's not double-minded, because he's declaring his belief—he wants to believe even more. He has belief. He's just saying, "God, I trust You, but there's some doubts here, and I need You to fill in the blanks. God, I want You to build my faith, bring me through the trial, so that on the other side of the trial, I will trust You more, and I will see how faithful You've been in this."

Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. But the rich should take pride in their humiliation, since they will pass away like a wildflower. 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 will fade away even while they go about their business (James 1:9–11).

You say, "Now you're picking on rich people! Dustin, you're picking on rich people." And that's—well, maybe that's what you're thinking.

I don't know. I mean, it looks really, here, like James has just shifted topics. He's gone from, "Hey, we were talking about dealing with hard times and how to have a good attitude about that and consider it pure joy," and now he's talking about rich people and poor people. But it's very much related. Let me explain this.

If you are rich, you may live a more comfortable life, but your life of comfort is going to fade away like a wildflower, okay? That's the point—because life is short on Earth. Do you see how short life is? I mean, I feel like I was 10 years old last week. It just seems like time goes like this. Some of you, maybe you're in your 70s and 80s, and you're like, "Man, I remember

prom like it was yesterday." You're like, "Hey, I wonder if that person's still available," right? You're thinking to yourself, "Wow, that was—it just seems so quick."

Here's the point: the trials that you face on Earth are only on Earth. Life is really short. Are you better off to avoid all types of trials and all types of struggles so that you'll be happy for just a little while, while you're on Earth—for maybe 70 years, maybe 80 years, maybe 90 if you're lucky. Should I give up on following God—being faithful to God—because I just don't want to have any pain for the next 20, 30 days?

No, right? Because life is short, which means our trials are short also. But many people—here's what we do—we live for the comforts of this life and are willing to sacrifice the endless joys of eternity to stay happy and comfortable for just a little while. And so they're tempted by the trials to not trust God, to give up, and not endure.

So, it says, *The rich will fade away even while they go about their business* (James 1:11). If you put your faith and your trust and your identity in things that fade away, if that's where you put all of your stuff, then you're going to fade away with it. That's what it's saying. You're going to follow where your treasure is. If your treasure is here, then that's what you get. You got this! Congratulations. But here's the thing: it's short. Life is short.

So don't allow your trial to cause you to sin by disbelieving God and failing to endure in faith through the trial to the end.

You say, "Well then, how do I do that? Dustin, how do I do that?" Here's how. Verse 2: *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance* (James 1:2–3).

Consider and decide to be joyful that God loves you so much that He deliberately wants your faith to endure to the very end of your earthly life.

Consider and decide to be joyful you're going through trials. Consider and decide to be joyful that God is not allowing your faith to develop atrophy and die.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, that this trial is making me more like Jesus and building my faith.

Consider it pure joy. Consider and decide to be joyful—joyful about how God is using my response to this trial as a great witness to all the people around me.

Consider and decide to be joyful. There is absolutely no problem, struggle, pain, trial, hurt, or tribulation that God will allow into my life that He does not also provide grace, compassion, love, strength, and power to match. So, look at this. I've got my hand—this is

the hand full of trials. I've got this trial, and this trial, and this trial, and this trial, and this trial. And you're like, “Look at all those trials.”

Here's the problem: there is no trial on this hand that is not equally matched by the love and grace and purpose and joy of God to walk through that. Every single one of them has a match. So what about this one? “This is a bad one.” Match for that one. God is matching that one. God is in this with you. He's suffering with you. “Well, what about this one right here?” Yep, right there—see? Everyone. God is with you in all of them.

If I take on my left hand all the trials of my life, not once has God not been there in that trial—on my right hand—to meet it.

Oh, friends, when trials come, don't get defiant and boast about how you're going to battle that thing on your own.

Friends, don't lose heart and give up under the pressure. Don't grumble. Don't complain. Don't bellyache. Don't fall into self-pity. Don't try to get sympathy from everybody around you. No. Say, “God, I consider it pure joy, because I see the bigger picture. I see what You're doing here.”

I'm not like everybody else in the world that just thinks You're out to get me. God's never out to get you. God is in this with you, and He is suffering with you.

“How do you know God's suffering with me?”

The guy went on the cross. The guy suffered on the cross. He suffered suffering that you haven't even experienced yet. All the suffering that you are going through—He took it all on the cross. He has suffered it all already. God, You've allowed this trial to come to me, and it has purpose, and you're exercising my faith so that I'm going to endure and not miss out on everything you got waiting for me someday, God for you say this, and we'll close with this. It says,

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial, because in having stood the test that that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

CLOSING PRAYER:

God, I thank you so much for bringing us here. And God, we all have trials. Some of us, there's a good hunk of us that is going through major trials right now. And God, for those that are going through that now, I pray that you would give them strength in their trial, that you would meet them here like, like the right hand in the left hand, you'd meet them in that trial that you give them courage, that You would help them to recognize that you got a bigger plan for this, and that you use these bad things. Our trials are not proof that you don't exist

or that you don't love us. The trials are proof that you care about our faith and you want us. God help us to Consider it pure joy to walk through them in victory with those that we love next to us. We pray that in Jesus name. Amen.