

Good morning. It's a pleasure to be with you this morning. My name is Brian Berry and my family and I have been attending IBC for a little over a year now. My wife Amber and I have been married for almost 9 years and we have two wonderful daughters who are 4 and 1...you'll get to hear a little more about them as we go this morning. This morning I want to preach out of a text that is probably familiar to most of you if you spent any amount of time in the church and my prayer this week has been that you would maybe give it a chance to be heard with new ears this morning. The passage is James 1:2-4. If you're using the black Bibles in the seat in front of you, it's on page \_\_\_\_\_. If you're using your device, go ahead and turn on your Bible and scroll to James 1:2-4. I'll be reading out of the New American Standard Version:

2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Let me pray for our time together this morning.

### **Structure:**

Overview – James is so practical:

- Be doers, not just hearers of the Word

- How to handle favoritism

- How faith and works interact

- How we should speak to each other

- What's the difference between earthly and Godly wisdom?

- What's the source of interpersonal conflict

- How we should view our future plans

Basic equation: trials → testing of faith → endurance → perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (earthly sanctification)

So, when we first encounter trials, what is the eventual goal of those trials? Well James tells us that through the testing of our faith which produces endurance we eventually get to the point where we are perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. Now, I would say that that perfection is not an earthly perfection, right? Other texts tell us that we will never not sin. 1 John says that we claim to be without sin then the truth is not in us. But eventually, we will be perfect when we get to glory. But while on earth, trials are a tool that God uses to help us to move toward being perfect and complete lacking in nothing. We know from other parts of Scripture that our holiness is pretty important to God. He wants us to be like a mirror reflecting Him to the world. Now don't get it twisted, our holiness or how sanctified we become doesn't save us – faith in Jesus is what saves us, but it seems to me that our earthly sanctification is pretty important to God because the more like Jesus we become, the more glory God gets from our lives. I would actually say that it is His highest priority for our lives. The more we are sanctified, the more glory God gets from us. What are some things that are NOT God's priorities for our lives? Well, we can clearly see in this passage that God's highest priority for our lives isn't a hassle-free life or else the passage would have said something like "Consider it a sign from God that you are in sin when you experience trials..." We can see that God's highest priority for our lives isn't our comfort or else the passage would have said "Consider it a burden when experience trials of many kinds..." We can see that's God's highest priority for our lives isn't even that everything would go just as we planned it or else the passage would say "Consider what you could have done differently

to avoid trials of many kinds...” But it doesn’t say any of those things. So I would submit to you that based on this passage, one of if not THE highest priority of God for our lives is our sanctification.

It’s also important to note that the text says “WHEN you encounter various trials” mean that it’s not a question of IF, but a matter of WHEN. We had a pastor tell us regularly that if life is good right now, praise God, but the wave of trials is coming. It only takes one phone call to turn your life upside down. This passage supports that idea because James says WHEN we encounter trials. There are many other places in Scripture where difficulties are promised. An easy life is never promised to the Christian, but the Savior we obtain is worth it all, amen?

So if God’s goal for your life is your sanctification and trials are inevitably coming then the great news is that God’s end-game with trials is your sanctification and that means that God has PURPOSE for you in your trials. Let me say that again, God has PURPOSE for you in your trials. So if we can recognize that, it’s a good first step in letting the Spirit do the work He needs to through that trial.

Because God’s highest priority for our lives is sanctification (and subsequently His glory) there is always PURPOSE IN THE TRIALS. When you are in a difficult place, remember that God either placed you there or allowed you to be there, for reason perhaps known for now only to Him. The book of Job is an easy example of this, right? He loses everything and all of his friends tell him to curse God and die, but one thing that is clear in Job is that God was always at work in the trials. I’d encourage you to spend some time reading Job if you find yourself in a difficult place, but one of my favorite examples is in Exodus 14 – God leads the Israelites out of Egypt via the cloud of smoke. Remember they had this cloud that they would follow, it would shade them from the heat during the day and keep them warm at night. God lead them directly to the edge of the red sea and then God even hardened Pharaohs heart so that he would go and chase after the Israelites to try and get his slaves back. So there they were – totally stuck. They couldn’t cross the Red Sea, they had no boats and it was far too big to swim. They certainly couldn’t go around it and they couldn’t turn back to Egypt. God had brought them to a place where they had zero options except to trust Him. How does the story go from there?

<sup>11</sup> Then they said to Moses, “Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? <sup>12</sup> Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.”

<sup>13</sup> But Moses said to the people, “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. <sup>14</sup> The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent.”

Most of the Israelites chose to grumble at Moses and subsequently God. But God had a plan to rescue them in a way where only He could get the glory. Now I’m not promising to you a miraculous delivery from YOUR trial, but the Bible is incredibly clear that God led them to this place, God led them to these exact circumstances where they faced all terrible options and needed a miracle to survive. This trial certainly tested their faith – and many of them failed the test! They grumbled against God’s plan, but hopefully (since they survived) this will help them to trust God with more endurance the next time they face this trial. God regularly brought trials into the lives of the Israelites in the OT and God knew that the Israelites (like us) were a forgetful people. At one point in Joshua 4, God tells Israel through Joshua to setup a pile of stones called the “stones of remembrance.” The stones of remembrance as a sign to Israel to remember how God had acted faithfully in a different trial they faced. We are a forgetful people. We, too, need stones of remembrance. We need those things in our lives where we can look back and go “yeah, God was at work there, I felt Him in that trial.” Maybe you still don’t know WHY you went through that specific trial, but it serves as a reminder to you that God is faithful no matter the circumstances. (SLIDE?) Charles Spurgeon once said “I have looked back to times of

trial with a kind of longing, not to have them return, but to feel the strength of God as I have felt it then, to feel the power of faith, as I have felt it then, to hang upon God's powerful arm as I hung upon it then, and to see God at work as I saw him then." I wonder what those stones of remembrance are for you? What are the things that you look back on in life and go – there, there's where God delivered me. I'd encourage you to share those with a friend after the service today.

It's easy to grumble, it's it? It's easy to want that life of comfort or control instead of dealing with adversity. But Scripture tells us that these actively DO something in our lives if we'll let them. And I say "if we let them" on purpose, but as Pastor Tim has preached many times, we have an active role to play. When we encounter trials, we can grumble at God and shake our fist at Him, we can grumble like Israel OR we can see these trials as an opportunity for growth. Remember, there is PURPOSE in the trials. The passage says that trials will test our faith and when our faith is tested it produces endurance. The word translated as "endurance" is translated as "patience" or "steadfastness" in other English translations. This word means something more like "to stay under" (something) or to continue on under something even though it may be hard. The picture being painted here though is not some passive patience like you're in a waiting room of a doctor's office (apologies to the doctors in our body), but an active choosing of endurance to continue to carry on. Endurance is a strange thing though because it's not something that we always need. We only really need endurance when things get hard. I have a friend who trained for a marathon recently and he talked to me a lot about "the wall." When you run (or bike or swim or whatever) long distances you eventually hit "the wall." When you hit the wall, you feel like you can't go another step. Your lungs start to tighten, your muscles fatigue, they are heavy and tight and your body is quite literally out of energy. It is crippling both physically and mentally. My friend described it as "losing all of your will to keep going." But as you train, the wall becomes further away. You can go further before you hit the wall because you've trained. Maybe when you first start, you hit the wall at 5 KM, but then after a few more weeks of training, maybe it's now 5.5 KM. It's a slow process to push the wall further away from you, but absolutely necessary if you're going to run a marathon. To apply this example to our text, God is telling us that we can endure more, we can walk further with Him through more difficult circumstances as we endure more trials. We can go through more and walk faithfully with God because He has brought us through a difficult time.

Now look, maybe you can get out there and run a sprint on your own power, right, maybe you can run a short distance without relying on God, but does God ever get the glory when we do things under our own power? No.

TRANSITION: one thing that I think is important to note here is that there are no exceptions to this passage. I mean that the passage does not say "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials UNLESS you lost a loved one...UNLESS you were forcibly removed from your country...UNLESS your rights were stepped on...right?"

Just so you don't think I'm taking the verse to mean too much... it's important that we compare this verse with other verses in the Bible that have categorically sweeping statements. You won't be surprised to find out that there are lots of other places where God gives commands that do not have exceptions.

SLIDE:

1 Thess 5:16-18 - Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:4-8 - Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

Phil 1:27 - Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

These are all categorically sweeping statements – no exceptions here. So in these passages we have lots of commands that don't let us off the hook. But, there's a human side to it, right? You might say "but Brian, you don't know what I've been through..." you're right and I'm not trying to make light of some serious suffering that is inevitably happening in a room this size but what I'm saying, what THE BIBLE is saying is that there is no set of circumstances that gets you off the hook of this verse.

The reason there are no exceptions is because God loves and doesn't want to leave us where we are. Remember, there is PURPOSE in our trials – God is trying to make us more like Jesus. Trials are a powerful tool in the hand of the Maker. They are so much more purposeful for the believer because GOD is at work in our lives shaping us and molding us into the kind of people that we should be! They aren't arbitrary. They aren't just because, they aren't meaningless! God is at work in our lives in this space maybe more than any other space.

I want to take a hard pause right here and be REALLY CLEAR about something. If what you just heard me say is that if you aren't joyful in your circumstances right now, you are not a good Christian – that's not what I want you to hear. If you just heard me say you should just grit your teeth and somehow be joyful even though it's hard – that's not what I said. If you just heard me say that you should be joyful in the same instant you get that terrible phone call that turns your life upside down – that's not what I said. If you felt a burden of guilt come over you because you are struggling to be joyful in this season, that is NOT what I desire for you to hear. Guilt is not from the Holy Spirit – conviction is. Guilt is from the adversary. So please don't walk away from this sermon just feeling like you blew it and there's no hope. We'll get to some ways we can try to find some joy in a minute so stay with me. My point with all that I previously said is that these verses and this one specifically doesn't have an asterisk. In each and every circumstance, we are called to be joyful. But that's REALLY hard, right? Look, my family and I have walked with enough people through difficult seasons to know that this is a process because God is at work. He is transforming us from one degree of glory to the next and if you find yourself feeling bad because joy isn't instantaneous happening in your trial, I'm here to tell you: one step at a time.\*\*\*\*\*

Maybe today you find yourself in difficult circumstances. Chances are, you probably do. Certainly in the life of our church we are facing a trial of sorts as we search for a permanent replacement for Pastor Tim. If you're having a hard time trusting God right now, my guess is that practically one of two things or both of these things are true about your view of God: Either you understand your trials are a sign from God that He has abandon you or, if God hasn't abandoned you, He certainly isn't good enough towards you to relieve you have your circumstances. He has done bad to you.

So let's take those in order and look at them: When hardship comes, it's a sign that God has abandoned me. God has removed his presence from me. Now, again, I want to be really careful here not to make anyone's suffering seem trite or insignificant. I am quite sure that deep suffering has occurred in the lives of our body. When those dark nights of the soul happen to us, I think it's natural to feel abandoned, but I also think we should fight against those feelings. In Scripture, David clearly felt abandoned by God more than once:

SLIDE?

Psalm 13:1-2 "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?"

Psalm 6:3 "My soul is in deep anguish. How long, Lord, how long?"

Psalm 10:1 "Why, Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?"

And oh by the way, there's an entire book in the OT called Lamentations that is full of laments towards God.

Clearly even David (a man after God's own heart) felt like the Lord abandoned him at times. He felt distraught and desperate. He cried out to God in anguish! Can I tell you a secret? God can handle all of your emotions. God created all of our emotions and do you know that you can experience every single one of your God-given emotions and not sin? The Bible never says "don't be angry" but rather "in your anger, do not sin." (Eph 4:26). You can be angry, sad, happy, depressed, jubilant, sorrowful, fearful, excited and upset and still NOT sin. Now, it's what you DO with all those emotions that determines whether or not you sin. Now listen, we should still approach God with a holy fear because we need to recognize who HE is relative to who we are, but I think sometimes we come TOO quietly and cautiously. God can handle everything we give Him and we need not be afraid that He will reject us because we are being honest with Him about our situation. God can handle it when we are raw, emotional and brutally honest with Him. Personally, this is just me talking, I think God would rather us be real and honest with Him about how we truly feel rather than tip-toe around Him for fear of bruising His ego. No matter what you are feeling today or how far you feel that God is from you today, I can promise you that if you are in the faith, He has not removed His presence from you. Scripture tells us that the very hairs on our head are numbered, that He knows when we rise and when we sit, that He directs our very steps (categorically sweeping as well) and the Psalms tell us that the Lord is near to all who call up Him. In chapter four of this very book James says that if we draw near to God, He will draw near to us. Isaiah says "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are MINE! When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior..." Even though God is talking to Israel in that passage, it is still representative of how God interacts with those who are HIS. If you are in the faith, you are GOD's. Our God is one who is near to us and if you aren't feeling that today, I would recommend that you draw near to Him through prayer, Bible reading, musical worship or fellowship and see if He makes good on His promise to be a God who is near.

Now let's talk about God's character specifically because I think this can be the other place of struggle. Many people think that trials or negative circumstances are a sign that God is not good. Why is this?

First and foremost, it's easy to take how our parents treated us and transpose that onto God. My earthly father or mother was a certain way so my heavenly Father must be the same way. So if your earthly parents, even though they did their best, weren't gracious or kind or generous, it's easy to think that God is the same way.

In that same vein, it's easy to think that God doesn't want to give us good gifts, He only wants to punish us, but there's lots of Scripture to counter this (SLIDE) – even later in this very chapter James says, "every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow." Hebrews 11:6 says, "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." Did you catch that? He is a rewarder of those who seek Him!! He is a good God. Matthew 7:7-11 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. "Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? "Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" Now, don't get me wrong, these passages have been abused by the Health and Wealth Gospel and I don't want to join them in their abuse. These passages don't mean that God exists solely to give you what you want because that wouldn't be very loving (just like how I don't give my kids candy for dinner when they ask because it wouldn't be good for them). My point with these passages is that God's disposition towards us is GOOD. God is not out to get us. God is for us and He is for our good.

I think that the biggest way that we can see God's character rightly is to see Jesus rightly. John 3:16 tells us that God so loved the world that He sent His only Son... So we know that Jesus being on earth is one of if not THE biggest way we can see God's character because it's an overt expression of His love for us.

It's easy to point to the cross as God's ultimate display of his love and goodness towards us, and rightly so, but have you ever given consideration to the story of when Jesus washed the disciples feet? We find this story John 13. In our house, we read a children's version of the Bible to our kids every night who are 4 and 1. It's called the Jesus storybook Bible. Maybe you've heard of it, maybe you haven't, but I'm going to read a portion of the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet from this version. Sometimes hearing it told so simply can give a fresh perspective.

“Jesus and his friends were having the Passover meal together in an upstairs room. But Jesus' friends were arguing. What about? They were arguing about stinky feet. Stinky feet? Yes, that's right. Stinky feet. (Now the thing about feet back then was that people didn't wear shoes; they only wore sandals, which might not sound unusual, except that the streets in those days were dirty – and I don't mean just dusty dirty – I mean really stinky dirty. With all those cows and horses everywhere you can imagine the stuff on the street that ended up on their feet!) So anyway, some had to wash away the dirt, but it was a dreadful job. Who on earth would ever dream of volunteering to do it? Only the lowliest of servant. “I'm not the servant!” Peter said. “Nor am I!” said Matthew. Quietly, Jesus got up from the table, took off his robe, picked up a basin of water, knelt down, and started to wash his friends' feet.”

Just try to grasp this contrast – Jesus – He comes to earth and lives a perfect life. If anyone ever deserved a life without trials or hardship, it was Jesus. Jesus never sinned, He never did anything wrong. Jesus: the **image** of the invisible God, the **first** born of all creation, the One by whom **all things were created** both in heaven and earth, **visible** and **invisible**, in Him all things **hold together**, the **Fullness** of God dwelt in Him, He is the **God-man** who is **perfect** and has the **Name** above every Name, the **Lamb** of God who is worthy to **break** the seven seals and open the scroll, the One about whom **myriads** upon myriads will sing “Worthy is the Lamb having been slain to receive the power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing.” The one because of whom there is no need for **sun or moon** in eternity because he is the Light. The one before whom every knee will one day **bow**, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that He is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father. The one who has the **incomparable, incomprehensible, matchless** Name – Jesus. He is the King of kings, the Lord of lords, He is the **eternal Son of Man**... He bent down and washed His friends' stinky feet. You want to see how God feels about you? You want to know what God's general disposition is towards you? Just look to Jesus. The One who has higher status than anyone who has ever walked on this earth took the lowliest position, the position that the disciples would not even dream of taking. And then died a criminal's death so that you and I might be redeemed because of His blood. Oh that we might recall this glorious gift that was given to us by God when we question His character. Might we rightly see what God did for us in Jesus and remember that this is the God we serve, this is the God upon whose strong arm we can hang during times of trials. He is GOOD no matter what we face.

To open our service today we read Psalm 71 and that was on purpose. The author says 9: Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone... 11 They say “God has forsaken him... for no one will rescue him. 12 Do not be far from me, my God, come quickly, God, to help me... 20 Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again...

How does it finish? 22 I will praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, my God. I will sing praise to you with the lyre, Holy One of Israel. 23 My lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to you – I whom you delivered. 24 My tongue will tell of your righteous acts all day long... It finishes with

worship! Even when God might feel far off, even when the trials come, we can press into Him by worship because He is still God.

2 Corinthians 4: 16-18 “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

James concludes his own book by telling us how we should endure trials – 5:8 You, too, be patient and stand firm because the Lord’s coming is near...11 The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

My prayer for our body today is that we would be a changed people, I hope that we wouldn’t be so worried about our own relief from the trial that we miss what God might be trying to do in our lives THROUGH the trial. There is purpose in whatever we are walking through and if we can fix our eyes on Jesus remember that He is a present Savior and that our God is a good Father, then that will help us to be able to walk through anything with joy. Let’s pray.

First go: 32:03

Second go: 32:27

Third go: 33:35