

How to be Blessed in Suffering

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[0:00] I'm going to invite Anne up, who's going to read scripture for us. She's going to read James chapter 1, verses 9 to 18. These are the verses that Corey's going to teach from just shortly.

! Thank you, Anne. Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away.

For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass, its flower falls and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

Let no one say when he is tempted, I am being tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

[1:07] Then desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures. Amen. All right, well, I don't know if you've had the experience, I think I do know you have, that you go to bed on a weeknight too late, and then you get up too late the next morning, and your morning self hates your nighttime self for it.

And then you can't find your keys, and then, or you go to the bus stop, and the bus never comes, despite the fact that the app said it was two minutes away. And then you get into work or uni, and you're frustrated, and you're flustered, and you get an email, and it says, we need to talk, and it's from your boss.

It's the email I send to David Court every week. We need to talk now. And then the next day comes, and you get that unexpected bill. And the next day comes, and you get a ticket, because you drove in the bus lane.

[2:33] And then the next day comes, and your friend wants to talk, and poor, and addiction they're struggling with, into your life, and say, I need your help. And it's good, but it's a burden. And then you come, you drag yourself to church on a Sunday.

After a hard week, and an ordinary week, and the text is James 1, verse 2, that says, count it all joy, brothers and sisters, when you face trials of various kinds, big and small.

Now, the week I just described is not martyrdom. It's not the persecution that the first century scattered church was facing, and the week I described was not a life-ending diagnosis.

But sometimes those weeks do come as well. It was quite a normal week, quite an ordinary week, that we face. Various trials, big and small, James says. Count it joy when you face them, no matter what they are.

So we saw last week that Christians meet trouble on ordinary roads. And just because you're a Christian, it doesn't mean that you're exempt from suffering.

[3 : 36] In fact, it's exactly the opposite. It's a guarantee that you will suffer. And we learned that when you're a follower of Jesus, you need an entire cognitive reframe of what suffering is.

And James is telling us the reason suffering is so different, we receive it so different as believers, is because God can grow you and mature you in the midst of it. It has a completely different purpose than we normally think about suffering.

And so he said, count it all joy. Consider it joy. Put the events of that week in the credit of joy instead of the debit of misery. It's a thinking term.

It's a thinking command. And he says also that every single moment like that, the week I described, is a, quote, testing of your faith. It's a trial. That's a testing.

And a testing is a smelting term. That's the Greek word that's chosen as one of the verbs for how you smelt precious metals. And so if you're going to smelt gold, you've got to stick gold into a furnace and heat it up to at least 1,064 degrees Celsius to smelt gold.

[4 : 44] And you do it in cycles, over and over again, pulling it out, sticking it back in the furnace. And the impurities fall away over time. And you move from 80% gold to 90% to 92, 93, 94, up to 98, 99% gold.

That's as good as you can get. It's never perfect. And that's exactly what he means by reentering the furnace over and over again. You can become perfect. Not sinless, but whole.

More and more mature. More and more Christ-like over time is the idea. And so today, we come back. He's talking about the same stuff in the passage we read. But today, he's getting more specific and saying, well, how does this work exactly?

What does this mean in certain circumstances more precisely? So he's talking here about how to be blessed in the midst of reentering the furnace.

Whether the bus, that's the bus doesn't come day after day or the life-ending diagnosis, you reenter the furnace big and small all the time. And how can you be blessed? How really can you? What does it look like practically?

[5 : 48] And you see that in verse 12. He said, blessed is the one who remains steadfast. You say, how could we be blessed in that? And so that's what he's answering for us today. Now, this is James, the biological brother of Jesus Christ, writing to the church, Jews and Gentiles, scattered all throughout the Roman Empire in the first century or all the empires of this world today to us.

And he's going to teach you today in verses 9 to 18 that you can be blessed in the midst of suffering when you will see that number one, suffering will strip away your idols. Number two, that suffering exposes your truest, greatest problem.

And finally, your suffering will point you to the man who is the blessed one. All right, so first, let's think about that. Suffering, suffering can bring a blessing when you will allow it to strip your idols away.

All right, so if you look down at verse 9, he says, let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation and the rich brother or sister in their humiliation. Now, it looks like James is switching topics here.

Suffering, wisdom, and now rich people and poor people. But this is the same topic. He's still in the realm of talking about suffering. And we've already said just this morning that a trial for James, suffering is a test of your faith.

[7 : 13] And so what he's talking about when he brings up the poor, the lowly brother or sister, the lowly, the poor Christian or the rich Christian, he's saying that if you're poor, if you're a Christian and you're poor, you don't have money.

If you're a Christian and you're rich and you've got a lot of wealth, you're still going to face the same problems. And that's suffering. But you come at them from different perspectives.

He's drawing a difference of perspective there. Now, the first thing he says is to the lowly person. And the word for lowly here is not the most normal word for a poor person.

So it would be different in English than saying the homeless or something like that. Instead, it's a word that's more closely associated with a person who has been humbled. And so it's more than economics.

It's, you know, there's, as we grow older, I think we learn that there's lots of different ways to be wealthy. You know, you can have a lot of money, but you can have really poor friendships. And so there's lots of ways to be lowered, to be a lowly person.

[8 : 16] And I think the reason he uses this particular word is because, if you remember last week, he's talking to people who in the first century were scattered by persecution across the Roman Empire.

And from Acts 8, Stephen was stoned to death, and then people dispersed. And if you were one of those Jewish Christians that got dispersed from Jerusalem, you ran, and you left behind friendship.

You left behind your money. You left behind everything that you would call wealth in this life. You left behind market relationships. You know, you don't even have a source of generating a new business and living in Antioch or Corinth or Thessalonica.

You don't have anything. And so he's talking to that lowly person who has lost it in life. All material wealth, friendship wealth, market wealth. And he's saying, you've entered into that station in life, and that is the trial.

That is the test. And you've got to take it, and you've got to think of your exaltation. What is he talking about? He's explaining how exactly a person who doesn't have a lot in this life would consider it joy or count it joy.

[9 : 22] So he's saying to the lowly person, look, it'll be your temptation if you don't have a lot in this life, if you don't have a lot financially, if you don't have a lot in terms of relationship, whatever it may be, whatever lack of wealth, it will be your temptation to despair, to even say things like, God doesn't care about me.

God doesn't value me. I've done everything I could, and God's left me where I am. And so God clearly doesn't care what I'm doing. And that'll be the temptation. And there's another temptation that you will face, and that's the same temptation that the rich face.

And that's that you might say, if only I had economic wealth, if only I had these different types of wealth, then my life would be better, then everything would be okay. And so the poor person who's suffering is facing all sorts of temptations to think God hates them, even.

And what he's saying is you've got to, how do you move that suffering from the ledger of debit to credit, of misery to joy, and you've got to consider your exaltation?

What is he saying? He's saying you've got to realize that if you're a Christian and you don't have a lot in this life, that you are so united to Jesus that His glory is your glory.

[10 : 37] In other words, you've got to actually think about the fact that God sees you as exalted. You think God hates me in the midst of my lowliness, my suffering, my poverty. No, no, no.

He's saying when you're a believer, you can suffer differently even when you're poor because you can say, inasmuch as Jesus Christ was exalted into the heavenly realm at His resurrection, so God the Father sees me like He sees Him.

See, boast in your exaltation. Boast in the fact that you have glory because you're connected to Jesus. Be lifted up in that. Think about the next life. That's what he's saying.

And this is striking something so hard for us as modern people because in our culture, in our moment, really since the time of the Enlightenment, we think we're tempted to secular materialism all the time, even as Christians, to think that way, to live in that framework.

And when you live that way, you don't believe that there's a life to come. Not really. Not practically. And so if you are a person in this life who's a materialist and you lose all this stuff in life, you lose your economic wealth, you lose your friendship wealth, you lose relational wealth, you lose market possibility, business opportunity, you fail your degree, whatever it may be, you're left saying, I don't have anything left.

[11:58] I don't have a glory that is to come for me. And so you're living in this horizontal plane without any hope. And he's saying, but when you're a believer and you face suffering, you might lose everything and you can still say, I boast in the fact that I know I will be exalted.

I have hope in the next life. So in other words, he's saying that the opportunity, the blessing, the blessing, even when you're poor, is that you're having your idol stripped away from you, even when you're poor.

Because you're being told that there is a hope of everlasting life that's far greater and that's sharing in the glory of Jesus Christ. Now, I've got to move on. To the rich, he says, secondly, he gives more words to the rich, more clauses to the rich.

Because when you're rich, it's far harder to have your idol stripped. It's far harder to let go. And you see, I think one of the reasons he chooses humiliation for the rich, exaltation for the poor, is he's saying, you're facing the same things, but you've got to think about it in opposite ways.

And that means that suffering, when you suffer with Jesus, it almost lifts the poor to the same plane as the rich, and it lowers the rich down. See, it humbles the rich to be equal to the poor, and it raises the poor to be equal to the rich.

[13:20] Because you're all facing the same things. And so he turns to the rich here and he says, you know, the poor man or woman is going to be tempted to despair, to say, God hates me.

I'm not a person of value. Nobody sees me in this life. You've got to think of your glory with Jesus. But the rich person is going to be far more tempted to hang on as tightly as possible to the pursuits that that person has pursued, to the things of this world, to get it back, to say, no, this is what completes me.

I've got to have these things that I've built my life around. And so he's saying, you've got to consider it joy, count it joy, by thinking about the grace or the humiliation, the humbling that you're experiencing.

You've got to think not about the glory that you're to receive because you've been living that life. You've already lived a life of glory. But you've got to thank God and say, here's how I can count it blessing because God is lowering me to remember that everything is grace.

Everything is a gift. The rich man suffers, the rich woman suffers, and the gift of God in that is your humiliation. You're being humbled. You're having your idol stripped away from you.

[14:31] The poor person suffers and they're being lifted up and say, remember that you're sharing in the sufferings of Christ to share in the glory of Christ. You see how it goes two different ways to make an even plane right across the board.

Now, the reason I think he's focused a little bit more on the rich here is because what's the biggest danger pretty much every one of us faces?

So James is talking here to first century people who ran away from their homes. They're living as refugees. They don't have anything. That's none of us. We are the rich.

Very few of us in here can say that we're the poor, really, when we talk about this. If we eat every day, we're the rich that James is talking about. So that's all of us, mostly in the modern Western world, mostly everyone sitting in this room today.

And so the reason he focuses on us a little bit more is because the most dangerous place to be is to be wealthy, to have plenty of food, plenty of water, plenty of shelter, and to never have trouble.

[15:29] That's the most dangerous place to be, to be prosperous, to have a lot, but to never have any trouble in this life. That's the greatest spiritual danger you can face, the Bible says, is to be prosperous but not suffer.

Whoa. You see, he's saying that suffering is a blessing because it strips away your tight hold on the potential idols that we all have in this world.

And so he gives you a little illustration in verse 11. And here's why it's so dangerous. You know, the flower rises in the morning, it's beautiful in the springtime, but then the summer heat comes and it falls to the ground.

And he says, all of us in our pursuits are the same way. The flower fades in the summer. And in the same way, when you hitch your heart to something, to some pursuit that's going to fade, if you hitch your heart too tightly to it, you're going to fade with it.

So as it fades, you will fade. And suffering is meant to strip that away from us, to take that away from our hearts. Best time of the year in Edinburgh, it's not the Christmas market, it is when the cherry blossoms bloom in the meadows, right?

[16:41] And you can walk through the meadows or wherever else under those archway trees in the meadows and the cherry blossoms are out and it's late April and they're out. And you know that if you've lived here for any time, probably far longer than me, that you can walk underneath those beautiful blossoms in the morning and you come back in the evening and where are they?

They're all on the ground. You know, it just goes by like that. And that's exactly the nature of the wealthy life. The glory will fade and if you have your heart too tightly attached to the cherry blossom, you're going to fade with it.

And it still will remain beautiful because it is beautiful on the ground for a while, but you know it turns to vapor and dust eventually. And that's the warning he's given us. There's a genre of art called memento mori art from that Latin phrase, remember, you must die.

And that genre of art is reminding us with skulls and crossbones and all sorts of things. Remember, you must, and that's what he's saying, remember, you must die. The rich man has got to remember that you're sharing in the suffering of Christ, your humiliation.

The poor man, the poor woman has got to remember you're sharing in your suffering in the glory of Christ. You're being lifted up like he was lifted up. You see, vice versa. It's how you can be blessed in the midst of suffering.

[17:58] Boy. Secondly, the second way he teaches us here is to be blessed in the midst of suffering is that suffering then exposes our deepest problem, our truest problem.

So let me bring you down, we'll pass over verse 12 and come back to it, but verse 13 to 15. Now he says, let no one say when you're tempted, I'm being tempted by God. Now there's a temptation.

If you're rich or poor or something in between, if you're a human being, you're a sufferer. You're facing trials all the time, big and small trials. And now he's turning and saying, with that suffering, with those trials, there are temptations coming about in your life all the time.

Let me say it like this. Trials are a test of faith. He keeps saying that over and over again. Your suffering is there to test your faith. And that testing of your faith can grow you, it can make you mature, it can make you compassionate, it can make you, it can strip away your idols, it can do so much good to make you like Jesus, becoming more and more like Him.

But it can also break you, it can make you bitter, you can respond to it in ways that you actually end up chasing after addictions because of it. So we can respond to our suffering with coping mechanisms. There's things that we need to run from suffering with these addictions in life, we can respond with anger at God, anger at other people, bitterness, this isn't fair, why have you put this into my life?

[19 : 27] All sorts of ways. It's not automatic. Suffering can make you or break you. And so now in verse 13 to 15, he's addressing that temptation because the temptation for anybody who faces suffering is going to be something like, yeah, I've been in this long season of suffering and maybe I haven't handled it well all the time.

It's made me into an angry person, a bitter person, an addicted person. But you know, God made me like this. This is just who I am. These addictions that I grab hold of when I'm suffering to cope with my life, this is just who God made me to be.

Or you might come and say, on the other side, in the midst of my suffering and my pain and my sorrows, it's clear that God hates me. And you can take the approach of Job's wife and say, you know, curse God and die.

You've done something bad. He hates you. He's left you in the midst of this misery. And in verse 13, he says, let nobody say that. Verse 16, don't be deceived, brothers and sisters.

Let nobody say that. If you're in the midst of suffering, God hates me. Or if you're not handling it well, not with wisdom, but with foolishness, it's God's fault, not my fault.

[20 : 40] He's the one tempting me to this. He's the one that made me like this. He says, let nobody say that. You can't say that. So in verse 13, look at the language really specifically because it's so specific. Let nobody say when they're tempted, I'm being tempted by God.

Now, the word temptation there, you can't see this in English, but it's so important that the word temptation there is the same word in Greek as the word trial throughout the passage.

All right, so when it says in verse 13, let no one say when he is tempted, there's two different uses of the word temptation or trial in that verse. So let me translate it a different way. Let no one say when they are under a trial of suffering, I am being tempted.

All right, it's the same word in Greek. Let no one say when they're under trial, I'm under trial. Let no one say when they're tempted, I'm being tempted. What is he saying? He's using it in two different ways. Let no one say when they're under the yoke of a trial, God is tempting me to sin in the midst of it.

Now, what is he talking about us today? He's making this very important distinction about the psychology of sin, how does sin work in our lives? When we react badly to suffering, whose fault is it?

[21 : 53] And he's saying, you've got to know that God will put you into trials. Yes, God gives you suffering, but he never gives you desire in your heart to sin in that suffering.

So God will place you in an objective situation of test, of trial, of suffering. God never gives you the desire in your heart to react badly, to sin in the midst of that.

Never. See, it's the difference between objective testing and subjective temptation. God does not tempt. He never gives you evil desires. No. Any evil desire you have, any way you react poorly, who did it?

You did it. I did it. That's what he's saying. And so he uses a couple illustrations here. Let me give you one that's not in the text. We all know this. So if you're in school, you're in uni, or you have been, you know that a good teacher gives you a test in order to grow you, not to break you.

Right? And that good teacher tells you in advance, this is when the exam is coming. And that exam is meant to force you to study and to raise up your knowledge.

[23:03] And if you go and you take the test and you make a, you make an F, you fail miserably, you can't turn and say, the reason I made an F is because the teacher, it's the teacher's fault.

You know, the teacher should have never tested me. The teacher, the teacher tried to trick me. The teacher tried to do this or that. A good teacher, no, no. A good teacher wants to grow you through the test. So he's saying, look, God puts you in objective situations of suffering in order to grow you and change you.

But when we make the wrong choices, when we adapt to those situations foolishly, it's us. It's us that are doing the wrong, that are doing the sin. You can never say, like Job's wife, you can never say, God's hating me in this moment.

And you can never say, it's God's fault that I keep doing this, that I keep coming back. You keep seeing that same test of faith in your life, that same person, that same image, and your heart is lured and enticed.

You can't say, it's God's fault he made me like this. So he uses here a sexual metaphor to explain it. And you'll see that down in verse 14 and 15. Each person is tempted when they are lured and enticed by their own desires.

[24:17] And that word for desire is a very important word and I want to give it to you in the Greek because you'll know it partially in English. And it's this word, epithumia. Thumia just means desire, but epi, epi, like epic, epic, big, bold, epicenter, the core, bold desires, big desires, centering desires, deep desires is the word.

It's not the normal word for desire, it's deep desires. Why? Because he's saying, how does sin take place in our lives? Especially when we're reacting to situations of trial and suffering. He's saying that deep down at the core of your heart, deeper than all of your thoughts, deeper than the self that you even know, there is epi desire, deep desire.

And that deep desire sees opportunity for sin. And then, you see the rest of the metaphor, then it gives, it conceives. So when your deepest desires for something that is other than God, see opportunity, there's a conception that takes place.

See, it's a sexual metaphor. And then, that conception grows. It says it grows and it grows and then it gives birth. And birth brings forth death. So it's saying, every act of sin follows that trajectory.

And what are these epi desires? Thomas Aquinas helped us know what they are and all sorts of Christian thinkers from the Bible throughout world history. There's really only four. So you can desire all sorts of things in this life, chase after things that are sin, but there's only four epi desires, really, epithumia, deep desires in you, and that is the desire for the illicit, disordered desire for power, the disordered desire for security, a disordered desire for comfort or pleasure, and a disordered desire for approval.

[26:09] So if you take power, pleasure, approval, or security, and you want those things more than you want God, that's the real core of epithumia.

That's what's at the bottom of all of our souls, giving birth to actionable sins all throughout our life. And you can think about Genesis chapter 3, Eve. This is just, I think James here is just teaching us Genesis 3.

It says that Eve saw that the fruit could make her like God, wise like God. So those epithumia were triggered with an opportunity. And it says, it tells us that she saw, she delighted in the opportunity.

She reached out her hand, she took, and it gave birth to death. And James says the same thing. Your deepest desires see an opportunity, it conceives, you let it grow, and then it gives birth.

And when you reach out your hand and you take, death has entered the room. The psychology of sin, it's the way it works every single time. And he's specifically bringing it to the lens of suffering and saying, when we're walking through trials and suffering in our life, and we keep grabbing the fruit, grabbing the apple, keep chasing that same thing, we say we're faced with the test of faith, and it's a, boy, is it suffering.

[27 : 23] Yes, it is. It keeps coming back, the same temptation, and we keep reaching out. He's saying, who did it? You did. Not God. God puts you in the test to grow you, but when you fail, when you struggle, it's me, it's you that struggle.

It's our sinful desire at the bottom. There's a golem, there's a golem at the very bottom. That's what he's saying. And what can you do about that? And what you can do about that is, I think, just one or two things, because we can't say everything that could be said about what to do about it, but today, in the passage, what can you do about it?

He says, blessed are you when you use trials and suffering and even your failures to actually understand yourself. So I think one of the things you can do today is realize, he's calling me here to self-knowledge.

What are my deepest desires that are giving birth to sin in my life when I face trials and suffering and tests? Do you know them? Do you know yourself? Do you know what your deep idols are? Do you know what your deep idols are?

One of the ways you can learn is in the midst of your own failures and your struggles to ask, to do a sort of removal process.

[28 : 35] So, do I really crave power or security or pleasure or approval more than the other four? Right? So you can almost take them away and say, I know I can, I won't spill the beans on my own, but, you know, I can look at my life and I can say, I know that it's not security that I love most.

I know it's not, it's not comfort that I love most and I can whittle down to what it really is in the bottom of the soul. Have you done that? Have you, have you looked at your idols? That's what, that's what tests actually show you, self-knowledge.

The second thing he tells you to do is he says, instead of saying, what is God doing? He must hate me. Instead, he said, you've got to do some theology and you've got to say, God is never doing wrong by me in this.

And so you'll see in verse 13, remember, God tempts nobody. He never creates a desire in your life to sin because he cannot desire evil. He can't desire sin.

So he would never give you a desire for sin. No, not at all. It comes from you. But then secondly, in verse 17, cognitive reframe. Instead, verse 17, he is giving you gifts in the midst of this process of learning.

[29 : 51] And what are those gifts? Now, as we read our English Bibles, as we kind of do a day-by-day reading plan, and you're reading through James, in verse 17, you would read this clause very quickly.

Every good and perfect gift is from above. But you've got to slow down right there and realize that when he says every good gift and perfect gift, he's talking about two different types of gifts. So it's a temptation just to say, oh, every good and perfect gift.

It's all from God. Good gifts there are what kind of gifts? They are the sunshine and the rain and the food that tastes good and music and Spotify and, you know, all the good gifts that we have in this life.

Right? Every good gift is from God. And he's saying that first category, remember, what do you got to do? You got to realize all the good gifts in your life are coming from God. He's not tempting you toward evil desire.

That's coming from your heart. Instead, in the midst of that, you got to realize that the only reason you even know you're suffering, the only reason you know you're suffering is because you're being lavished with gifts.

[30:58] You're in the context of being surrounded all the time. You know, you might be in the midst of trial, but did you eat today? Did you drink water today? Do you have a friendship? Do you have a church? Yeah. You're being lavished with gifts all the time.

That's the only way you can even know you're suffering. You see? He's reframing and helping you see. If you're a materialist, secular materialist in the room today, you got to think about it.

You got to say, do you say, it's not fair? I hate my suffering. But if God doesn't exist, if there's no gift coming down from on high, the lion doesn't care when he eats the gazelle.

And cancer doesn't care when it eats up your body. But if you're really committed to materialism, you've got to say the same thing. I don't have any right to be upset about this. This is the ordinary process of nature.

But you're not. You're not happy with that. And the reason you're not is because you know that your life is being lavish with gifts. You know that you weren't made for suffering, that that's not what true humanity is meant to be like.

[31:59] And so you struggle with it. You wrestle with it. But it's not just good gifts. He says, then it's perfect gifts. And the word perfect there is the same word as in verse 4 when he says, your suffering can make you perfect.

So he's saying, what is he saying? He's saying that when he gives you trials and tests, they are gifts. They're perfecting gifts. So he's saying, you've got to reframe and realize that your life is being lavish with gifts.

But when suffering does come, the Christian can say, that's a perfecting gift in my life. God is actually using that to grow me. He's testing me. And I've got to see it that way. I've got to reframe my life in that way.

God never gives you desire to sin. And he doesn't hate you. He loves you. He wants to grow you. Why? Because he is the God with whom there is no shadow due to change.

He gives you a little metaphor. He says, look, God never changes. And that means that the God who gave the suffering into Job's life in order to grow him is the same God who's giving this suffering in your life to grow you.

[33:05] It's the same exact situation. He's never changed. He's the God of the sun, moon, and stars. And as he shines, you know, he doesn't have a shadow due to change.

What does that mean? It means that when you stand outside and the sun is shining, the sun shines on you, it casts a shadow on the ground. And if you turn, if you turn one way or the other, the shadow turns, right?

He's saying God never casts a shadow. In other words, he's not a creature. He doesn't turn right or left, or he doesn't, the sun can't hit him and cast a shadow on the ground.

He doesn't change. The God who has given suffering in the life of Job to grow him, the same God. He's doing the same exact thing in your life. Now, finally, and very briefly, just a couple minutes.

Thirdly, our suffering points us to the blessed man. And here's how. Verse 12. Verse 12 tells us as we close, blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial.

[34 : 05] Now, this has all been about how you can be blessed in suffering. And you might say today, can you say today with me, some of the things I listed in that ordinary week at the beginning of the service, beginning of the sermon, happened in my life this week.

Maybe they happened in your life this week. You know, the ticket that comes in the mail or the bus that doesn't run or you can't find your keys or whatever else it is. And you say, in the little annoyances and the big things of life, I have not faced the test in the trial with wisdom in every way.

And I have been frustrated with God and I have wondered, does God hate me right now? And I have wondered if I have any value. And, you know, I think suffering shows us that if we use it in Jesus' metaphor, our house is not entirely built on the rock.

It's sort of on the rock and halfway onto the sand. And when suffering comes, you know, I realize I've got to shift my life a little more on the rock because right now it's 50% sand underneath.

And that's what suffering does for us. I told you last week that when you're reading James, one way to realize is that James doesn't mention Jesus but two times in the whole book. But he's teaching Jesus' teaching all throughout.

[35 : 21] When he says in verse 12, blessed is the man who remains steadfast in all trials. He's been talking the whole time about brothers and sisters, the beloved plural, but then he uses this masculine singular, blessed is the man.

And what is he quoting there? He's quoting from the Beatitudes, Matthew chapter 5. And he's drawing us to see something that when you're walking through suffering and trial in your life, what do you need most?

You need beloved brothers and sisters. You need to know that just like the first century people James was talking to, they didn't suffer well all the time. You're not suffering well all the time. I'm not suffering well all the time.

You need to know that the blessed man has already walked the road that you're walking. The blessed man has already faced the trial and he was steadfast.

The blessed man himself, Jesus Christ, has run the race for you and now you are following in his footsteps. You need to know Jesus lover of my soul, you are with me.

[36 : 25] You need a person. And that's what verse 12 is pointing us to. He's saying that when you know that he has walked through every trial for you, he stood in the fray on your behalf, he went to the cross for you, you can say, now I'm walking a road where the rock is already secure.

He's not going to leave me. I'm going to get across the finish line. He's going to take me all the way to the crown of life. And crown of life there is not what we think of.

It's not diadem. It's the athlete's wreath. It's not the crown of a king or queen, but it's the woven athlete's wreath. You run the marathon and the king leans over and puts the athlete's wreath upon your head.

He's saying, because he has already walked the path, you will receive the crown of life. Finish with a story. The Christian life is a lot like this in the midst of our suffering.

I don't know if you've come across the video. If you are a person who scrolls, you will undoubtedly have come across the video of Derek Redman. And Derek Redman was an athlete, U.S. athlete, in the 1992 Olympics.

[37 : 38] And he had trained, he was a favorite for the 400 meter sprint. And he got about 100 meters into the 400 meter sprint at the 1992 Olympics. And he pulled his hamstring.

And maybe you've seen it. And he goes down to the ground. And he tries to get back up. And he hobbles, you know. And everybody else has already finished the race. And his dad, his father, jumps over the barriers and runs out onto the Olympic track.

And he picks, and the security guards are trying to get him, you can't come out here. And he pushes him away. And the dad picks his son up, Derek, and he puts his arm over his shoulder and he carries him all the way to the finish line, right?

And they're weeping. And he carries them across and he gets the crown of life, the athlete's wreath. That's the Christian life. You're going to pull a hamstring this week.

Maybe literally. But figuratively, definitely. And Jesus Christ, the blessed man who has already walked the road for you, he will carry you through your suffering.

[38 : 49] You might, some of you will sprint, some of you will crawl, some of you will walk fast. You will grow to different levels of maturity, but Jesus will take you all the way. Will you grow with him?

Will you become like him in that? That's the question. Let us pray. Father, we ask that you would train us to be mature in our sufferings like Jesus.

And we thank you that we have a blessed man who has run the race before us. So help us to trust in him today. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.