

James
Bridge Over Troubled Waters (Part 1)
James 1:2-12
July 3, 2005

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Well last week we began what I'm sure will be a wonderful journey through the book of James. I mentioned last week that we would be in this book for several months, and I guess my definition of several and the definition of several of you are is quite different. Because word got around that a couple of you left the service thinking who is he kidding that he's going to cover the book of James in a couple of months. Well I didn't say a couple of months, I said several months which in my definition means fewer than 18. We will make it through this book in at least that amount of time. I really am looking forward to the journey. It's a book that is absolutely as fresh as it was in the first century from the pen of this wonderful man who grew up in the home of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We come today to the first real paragraph of the book after the brief introduction in verse 1, he takes us immediately from 0 to 60 to the issue of trials. Trials, something that we are all familiar with, it's a part of every day life. George Matheson was a 19th century Scottish preacher. You've probably heard of him because he wrote one of the hymn hymns that we occasionally sing in our services, *O Love That Will Not Let Me Go*. George Matheson was in his late teens when he began to lose his eyesight. By the time he was 20 he was blind. As he went through that process of losing his eyesight, as any of us would, he struggled greatly with the reality that God in His providence was permitting this to occur in his life.

Eventually, however he came to the point where he was willing to voice a prayer, a prayer that he recorded and that has come down to us through the years as a source of great encouragement to many Christians. Here's what he prayed, "Dear God, I have never thanked You for my thorns. I have thanked You a thousand times for my roses, but never once for my thorns. Teach me the glory of the cross I bear. Teach me the value of my thorns." Now there is a radically different way of looking at life, a radically different way of thinking and living that's absolutely foreign to the culture in which we live and unfortunately even foreign to many Christians. And yet it's that attitude, it's that mindset that is exactly what James wants us to learn from this first paragraph of his great letter.

Let me read it for you, the paragraph consists of verse 2 through 12; this is a unit of thought about the issue of trials. We'll be looking at it for the next couple of weeks because it's foundational in the Christian life. This is where James chose to begin with those whom he wrote. You follow along as I read it, verse 2,

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.

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But 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 his ways.

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.

Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him.

James' point in this paragraph could be summarized in a single sentence. The troubles of life are God's tools to refine our character and to produce in us true Christian maturity. The troubles of life are God's tools to make us what He wants us to be. The key phrase that unlocks this entire passage comes at the end of verse 2, "when you encounter various trials." That's obviously what this passage is about; it's about the issue of trials. And immediately with that phrase we are introduced to the fact that no one here is exempt from this passage. This passage applies to all of us. Notice, James says, "when you fall into various trials" not if. They're absolutely a reality. You can't avoid them. Trials are a reality for every one of us and will be as long as we are in this world.

In fact, notice what James says about these trials in verse 2. He says when you encounter various trials. The Greek word that's translated encounter literally means to fall into, which is probably a better translation, when you fall into various trials. That Greek word "encounter" or "fall into" is only used a couple of other times in the New Testament. Luke uses it both times. One time Luke is quoting the Lord Jesus when he tells the story of the Good Samaritan, and he says that a certain man went down the road to Jericho, you remember, and he fell among thieves. Luke also uses it in Acts 27 when he talks about the ship on which Paul was being carried striking a sand bar, he says it "fell into" literally a sand bar and was wrecked.

What a wonderful picture of how trials come into our lives. You don't see them coming, you can't avoid them and they're potentially dangerous. You fall into them. This is part of the human condition, even Jesus in His humanity in His earthly life said that He experienced trials in Luke 22:28. I love the words of Eliphaz in Job 5:7, he says, "for man is born for trouble as the sparks fly upward." It's a reality, it's part of life so we'd better learn how to deal with difficulty and trial, and that's what James sets out to teach us.

But before we look at how to deal with it, how to respond to trials; we better understand what he means by trials. What exactly does he mean when he uses this word trials? Well the word refers to "a test". But this Greek word can be used in two distinctly different ways. It can refer to a test that's given with an evil purpose: to cause the object that's being tested to fail. In the New Testament when it's used in that way, it's translated as "to tempt" or "temptation". It refers to "an internal solicitation to sin". This is one way this word is used: an internal solicitation to sin. You and I know all about that, and James will get to that issue down in verse 13 and the verses following. We'll look at it in detail. Exactly how we are led away internally to sin?

It's used this way in 1 Timothy 6. Turn there, and you'll see it in its context. First Timothy 6:9, Paul writes, "But those who want to get rich fall into temptation" [There's our word, this time it's used in an evil sense so it's translated temptation,] "and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction."

So, this word, "trial" can be used as the word "temptation". It refers to "an inner solicitation to sin". But it can also be used as "an external test or trial", an external test or trial. You see when the test comes not from an evil purpose, but from a good purpose, either of demonstrating the quality of the tested object, or of strengthening that object then it's not a temptation, it's a trial or it's a test, which is how it's translated in the New Testament. You can see this usage not only here in James 1, but over a couple of pages in 1 Peter 1:6 he writes: 1 Peter 1:6, "In this you

greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,” [same Greek word.] So, it can refer to temptation if the intention is evil, or it can refer to a test or a trial if the intention is good. Back in James 1, James uses this word in verse 2 “various trials”, and also in verse 12, “blessed is the man who perseveres under trial.” The context of these two occurrences and the paragraph between makes it clear that James is discussing not the internal solicitation of evil which he’ll pick up in verse 13, but rather the issue of external tests or trials.

Now, when we think of trial, I think some of us have a faulty definition in our minds. We think, I’m afraid, of trials as something absolutely trivial (like you ask some people what their trial is, and they’ll say: their mother-in-law), all the way to (a trial really is only those devastating tragic events in life in which we only encounter a few in our life time). But, in reality, a trial is any external difficulty outside of your control, any external difficulty outside of your control that you just sort of fall into. James Hiebert in his excellent commentary says that “trials are those undesirable events that assail us from without.”

As James goes through his letter, he identifies several of these, we won’t take time to turn to each one. We’ll encounter them as they come. He identifies for example in verse 1 of chapter 1, being relocated, being forced to leave your home as a trial. Poverty is another trial that he’ll deal with in the flow of this book. Persecution was a trial that his readers were encountering. Illness when you get to chapter 5, illness is considered a trial. But James is not intending to say that only those things he deals with in his book are in fact trials. That’s why he uses this expression “consider it all joy my brethren, when you fall into various trials.” The word “various” literally means “multi-faceted, multi-colored”. It’s even used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament to refer to Joseph’s many-colored coat. He says, listen, trials are going to come to you in every imaginable shade of color.

In a similar passage, in fact, what really is a parallel passage even though it’s in Paul. In Romans 5:3, Paul uses the word not trial, but tribulation which is a word literally that means “pressure”, pressure. So, whether you’re talking about external difficult circumstances, and you use the word trial, or whether you’re talking about those circumstances as pressure, it’s all encompassed in the concept that James is discussing here. As an example, let me just give you a list of this week’s various trials and pressures in my life. This is just a just a thumbnail sketch.

Jackie Stanford took me to the airport on Monday morning as I was flying out to do the funeral of my friend, and we were talking about the fact that none of us really likes to teach on James 1

because invariably when you teach on trials, the Lord gives you more than your share to put into practice all that you're learning. Here's a list: a close friend died, the garage door broke, I attended 2 funerals, 3 days of airline travel (now there's a trial), 1 crucial flight was late, and I missed a connection. Sheila, who was supposed to go with me to the funeral on Monday, couldn't go because on Sunday Lauren developed an ear problem, and that night another child got sick. On Monday Sheila got sick, my mother was hospitalized in serious condition, and in the middle of all that, I still had the pressure of making sure I was prepared to have something to say to you this morning.

Now that's a fairly typical week around the Pennington household. And it probably is in your house as well, and all of those events and many others that I didn't list are covered with the term various trials. In the end there is no trouble, listen carefully, there is no trouble that comes into our lives that doesn't fall within James' instruction here in James 1. Trouble, pressure, difficulty that's what he's talking about whether it's physical illness, financial problems, marriage issues, pressures or setbacks at work, family struggles, persecution, loneliness, the death of a loved one, all the way to just the routine daily pressures of living in our world. When you fall into any difficult external circumstances, James says, here's how you should respond. And in this amazing paragraph, James gives us four Godly responses to trials; four wonderful insights into how to respond to the trials that are never ending in our lives.

We're going to examine only the first of those four responses today, and it's this found in verses 2 – 4: develop the right attitude, develop the right attitude. If you're going to respond in a Godly way to the trials and the difficulties and the trouble that comes into you life, you've got to develop the right attitude. You want to benefit from life's trials, then you must respond to them in the right way. What exactly is the right attitude? Well verse 2 tells us very simply, "consider it all joy." Now before we look at what it means and what is the right response, let me just remind you of a few common wrong responses to trials. See if you find yourself in this list.

First of all, some people respond to trials by: denial. This is sort of the Pollyanna approach to trials, these are the people who just pretend nothings happening. They just act like everything's fine. I've encountered families who have a loved one dying; days, weeks away from dying, and they just pretend that everything's fine. The person's going to leave the hospital and walk out. Denial is how some people handle trials. And if that's how you respond, you're not going to benefit from the trials that come into your life.

A second wrong response is (and this one is a common one): complaining. Oh, there goes that garage door again. You understand, we all find ourselves responding this way to trials from time to time, don't we? But it's a wrong response. We looked at this in detail when we studied Philippians 2, "do all things", the Apostle says, "without grumbling and complaining." It's a wrong response.

And a third wrong response to trials is: self-pity. There're people who go through life thinking that their load is worse. You know what, in my experience the people who really have the worst load never complain about it, they never pity themselves they always somebody else has it worse. It's only those people who really don't have it the worst that pity themselves. Poor me. As one writer said "poor me" is a long way from pure joy.

Another response to our trials that's wrong is: anger and bitterness. We saw this in Ephesians 4, this is again how some people respond. They either blow up or they clam up, and then they take that anger, and they send it down into their hearts, and it becomes bitterness; bitterness toward God, bitterness at life, bitterness toward a spouse, toward family, toward anyone. They're just bitter because of the trials they've had to encounter.

Another response that isn't as common in our day but has been before is: stoicism. These are the people who said, who say to themselves the right response for me is just to grin and bear it, just to smile and put up with the pain.

But I think, one of the more common, in our day is: (what I'll call) epicureanism. The epicurean response to trials. You see Epicurus taught that life is an inevitable mixture of good and bad experiences, and since you can't avoid the bad experiences, the way to respond is to load your life with more pleasure than pain so the bottom line is positive. This is how many in our culture live. They just load their lives with enough good things so that the good things outweigh the bad, and this is how they respond to trials.

Those aren't the right ways to respond to trials; instead, James tells us here, Christians, when you come and encounter trials, consider it all joy. That's the right attitude, what does it mean? Consider it all joy. The Greek word that's translated "consider" means "to count", "to deem", "to regard as", it means "to come to an objective mental evaluation after a careful weighing of the facts". It means "thinking about it and concluding that in fact it is all joy". The verb tense here for "consider" implies that there will come a point in every life when you and I will decide that this is how we are going to face our trials. Up to this point they're our enemies. We

respond in one of these negative ways, but there comes a point in our lives when we decide that from this point forward, this is how I'm going to respond to the various trials that come into our lives. We don't always do it perfectly, but as a pattern, as a rule it becomes what describes us. We will begin to make the deliberate choice to consider the various trials we encounter to be all joy.

All joy, James, buddy, what are you talking about? All joy, what does that mean? To count it all joy, and this is very important, does not mean exclusively joy. In other words, James isn't saying that your only emotional response to trials must be joy. In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul is talking to families who have lost loved ones. And he says to them, even though those were believers, he says "we sorrow". We just don't sorrow like those who have no hope. It's okay to sorrow, even our Lord's heart was grieved by the sickness and pain and death of those He loved. So, by "all joy" here James doesn't mean that joy must be our only response to trials. He doesn't say you should feel only joy or that you should enjoy your trials or that trials are all joy. James isn't calling on us to go on sort of an eager search for trials because they just bring us so much joy. Instead here's what James is saying. He's saying we should count the trials God brings as a genuine source of joy, because we understand something. We understand that God will use them to produce wonderful results in us. That's where the joy comes from, not from the trial, but from the results, the way God is going to use it in our lives.

Now how can we do that? How can we consider it all joy? How can we come to the settled deliberate conclusion that the trials we encounter are a genuine source of joy to us? Well, in verse 3 James tells us how, it's by reminding ourselves of what we know. How can we consistently respond to trials with joy? Verse 3, "knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance." You see what James is calling us to do is to lift our minds up from the troubles we are encountering, and to think about the spiritual realities that lie behind every circumstance in life. You see what we tend to do when we respond wrongly is we tend to focus on the external, on the circumstance. But circumstances are merely surface events. We must constantly remind ourselves that there are true spiritual realities that lie behind those circumstances, and if we fail to do that, then that trial is, to some degree, wasted. The trouble that you and I face is never about our circumstances, it's always about some spiritual reality that God is trying to accomplish in your life and mine. There are some specific biblical truths, that if we know them, can enable us to respond to our trials with joy.

There are several facts in verse 3 that are either stated or implied that we must know if we're going to consider our trials as a genuine source of joy. Notice he says, "knowing," first of all, if

you're going to face your trials with joy, you must know that God is behind every trial you face. God is behind every difficulty, trouble, trial, pressure you face. Notice in verse 3, "knowing that the testing of your faith". That expression testing implies that someone is administering the test. When there is a test, somebody has to be administering it. Who here is administering it? Obviously, it's God. Verse 5, "... if any of you lacks wisdom during this test, let him ask of God and God will give it to you." Verse 12, "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved" [That is by God,] "God will give him the crown of life."

The clear implication in verse 3 is that God is behind every trial you face. You know, it's fascinating to think that from our perspective, we fall into trials; but from God's perspective we never fall into trials, they're always planned. I don't know about you, but for me that's a lot easier to believe in experience when it's something completely out of man's control; something like cancer. Man had nothing to do with that, we know this is sent from God, but it's a lot more difficult, it's a lot harder when we're talking about the sin of another person against you. But even in that, it comes from God for His purposes. You remember the words of Joseph in Genesis 50, his brothers sinned against him horribly, selling him into slavery, and yet how did Joseph see that experience. He saw it from the hand of God, he says, "you" what? "meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." He says God was behind the scenes accomplishing something that your evil intentions didn't intend; not tainted by your sin, not causing your sin, but using your sin for His eternal purposes. So, I can say and you need to believe and embrace the reality that whatever the test, wherever it comes from, whatever the circumstance, God is behind it ultimately for your good.

There's a second thing you must know if you're going to face your trials with joy, and that is that God intends that trial for your spiritual good. God intends that trial that He has brought for your spiritual good. Notice again verse 3, "knowing that the testing of your faith." This word "testing" is a rare Greek word, it occurs only here in the New Testament and 1 Peter 1:7. In the Septuagint it only occurs in two places, and you can look them up at your leisure, Psalm 12:6 and Proverbs 27:21. In three of those, in all but the James passage they the context is the testing and refining of metals. That is like gold or silver. So, there's every reason to expect that that's his intention here in James as well because that's how this word is used in the rest of Scripture without exception. James' point here is that God sometimes tests us to prove the genuineness of our metal if you will the genuineness of our faith, and to refine our faith as you would silver and gold. That is the way it's used in those other passages; the way this word test is used. If you want to benefit from trials, you must remember that God intends the trial for your spiritual good. God intends it to show the genuineness of your faith and to purify that faith to remove the dross

from your life. God has only good purposes with that trial. It's to refine you; it's to make you what He wants you to be.

Romans 8, we often quote to people who are going through difficulty. I'm afraid sometimes we do it rather trivially, but it's still true nonetheless. Romans 8:28, "We know" [Here's something we know] "that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose." If you're going to benefit from your trials, if you're going to respond to them and say they are a genuine source of joy to me, then you must know that God is behind every trial you encounter, and that God intends it for your good.

There's a third biblical truth here in James 1:3 that you must know if you're going to respond properly. Every trial, properly responded to, will strengthen your faith. Every trial that you properly respond to will strengthen your faith. Notice again verse 3 of James 1, "knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance."

What specific quality of our faith do trials or does trials strengthen? They strengthen our endurance, endurance. I love this word. I've talked to you about it before; it's a Greek word that's made up of two Greek words. One means "to remain" and other means "under". Literally the word means and in this case the etymology doesn't lead us astray. It literally means "to remain under". The picture as I've shared with you before we went through Philippians and encountered this word is of an Olympic weightlifter. You know those men who weigh too much and eat too much and sweat too much, and they go down, and they pick up this bar, and they pull it above their head to their shoulders, and then they thrust it above their head with all the energy they can muster, huge amount of weight. But then the rules say for it to be a valid lift, they must remain under it for a certain period of time. And so, they stand there with their bodies quivering attempting to keep that weight above their heads until the alarm has sounded, and they've held it for the amount appointed amount of time. During that time that they are under that weight, they are doing what this Greek word describes. They're "remaining under." It speaks of endurance. Ropes, one commentator calls it staying power, the ability to remain under.

Let me show you how important this virtue is; turn over to Romans 5. We don't think much about this virtue but the Bible absolutely is filled with its importance. Romans 5:3, the context here, Paul is outlining the wonderful results of our justification. We've been declared righteous before God, and here is what difference it makes in our lives.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, [Verse 1, he says] we have peace with God. [Verse 2] "... we stand" [in grace] [and then in verse 3 because we've been justified] ... we ... exult [or glory] in our tribulations ... [The word tribulation as I said before is "pressure". It's a similar word to "trials", we glory in our trials in our pressure. Why?] knowing [Here again Paul says the key the reason we can exult in our pressures in our troubles is because of what we know,] knowing that this [pressure] brings about perseverance;

The word "perseverance" is our same word to remain under, translated endurance in James 1, the trials. The pressure of life brings about endurance or perseverance, the ability to remain under. And notice, then he says, verse 4, that ... [endurance] produces "proven character". The word "proven character" is a difficult Greek word to translate into English. It essentially refers to the "veteran" as opposed to the "raw recruit". Here's somebody who has gone through it, he's proven himself; hence it's translated proven character. In other words, perseverance leads to proof that we are truly Christians, we have a character that has been proven.

You remember in the parable of the sower, there's that seed that falls in shallow ground and because it has no root when trouble and persecution comes what happens? The plant dies; it's not the real thing. In that case, persecution, trouble proved that, in fact, that seed was not genuine, that that heart was not good soil, wasn't a true believer. But in our case, when we persevere when we endure in trials, it shows that we are the real thing. We have "proven character". In verse 4 this proven character then produces "hope". As we experience first hand what God does for us and in us and the trials and troubles of life, it stirs our hope in God and in our great future. Paul is essentially saying this in this passage, I can glory in the pressures of life because I know that God will use them to build endurance which will in turn build proven character which will only strengthen my hope and hope will never let me down.

Peter makes the same point, turn to 1 Peter 1, 1 Peter 1:6, I read it earlier.

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof [the testing] of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

You see the point? Whether you're talking about Paul or whether you're talking about Peter, or whether you're talking about James all of them say that the various trials we encounter in life are

like weights, like spiritual weights that build up our spiritual muscles and develop endurance. But it isn't for everyone. You see many people who endure trials it simply makes them bitter and angry with God. John Calvin writes, "Tribulation provokes a great part of mankind to murmur against God and even to curse Him." You see for trouble, for trials, for tribulation, for pressure to have this positive effect, it must be mixed with knowledge, and with a healthy dose of faith in God, in His wisdom, and His goodness, and in His sovereignty. And when the pressures of life are mixed with that kind of faith, they produce endurance. If you know these things, and if you think about them, if you weigh them when you're facing various trials, then you can consider it all joy. You can rejoice, not because of the trial, but because of what it produces in you.

Why should we respond with joy to our trials? Why is it even important? Well notice verse 4 of James 1. We should have this attitude of considering it all joy, we do that by knowing certain things. Verse 3 and verse 4 tells us why: "let endurance have *its* perfect result," he begins. Now that sounds a little weak in English, in the Greek text it's actually a command. This is something we're to do. Let endurance finish its job. The clear implication is that the key to reaching maturity is not how many trials you have, but thinking rightly about the ones you do. He says listen you can thwart the purposes of God in trials in your life, let endurance alone, let it finish its job. James Hiebert writes,

This command that is to let endurance have its perfect result, points to a conceived danger. Trials are hard to bear uncomplainingly and it's easy to give way to an attitude which hinders endurance from exercising its proper effect and thereby to incur serious loss instead of benefit in trials.

Now notice verse 4, endurance turns out not to be the end itself, but rather the way that we arrive at Christian maturity. That's the real goal. He says let endurance finish its work, its perfect result, and when that happens, "you ... [will] be perfect and complete lacking in nothing." This is a description of Christian maturity. Notice he responds it or he or he describes it rather positively first. He says, "... so that you may be perfect and complete ..." The word "perfect", when it's used of animals and people, speaks of maturity in the Greek language. It speaks of maturity. So, here he's describing a Christian who is no longer a baby but a mature adult. The word "complete", the next word that he uses speaks of "wholeness"; something that has all of its parts. And he says, if you're perfect and complete, negatively you'll lack in nothing. Now what's he saying here? He's saying that if you will allow trials to have their work they will

produce endurance in you. And when endurance has finished its job, it will leave you at the state of Christian maturity.

And that Christian maturity is described as having all of the virtues you need, that's the second word, "complete". Having all of the virtues and perfect, that means all of those virtues won't be adolescent virtues; they won't be infant virtues; they'll be mature. So, you'll have all of your parts, and all of those parts will be mature. Knowling, one commentator, puts it this way, "In the perfect character, no grace is merely in its weak and perfect beginnings, but all have reached a certain rightness and maturity. In the complete character, no grace which ought to be in a Christian is lacking." And that is what trials will accomplish if you respond to them rightly.

Let me ask you, do you long, do you hunger and thirst for righteousness? If you're a Christian, you do. Do you want to be more like Jesus Christ? Do you long to be all that God wants you to be? Do you want to have all those virtues that characterize a mature believer? Then choose to respond with joy to every trial from the daily pressures of life to the tragic events and circumstances, because God has sent each of those experiences to produce endurance. And when endurance finishes its job, you will be mature in Christ.

When I was growing up, there was a fad that hit. Rock tumblers were very popular. Some of you'll remember. Some of you may still have one buried in a closet somewhere. You need to break it out, and sell it on eBay. But these rock tumblers were these small devices, small drums with a small motor attached and into that tumbler you would put some rocks that had the potential to have beautiful colors of various kinds but were kind of dirty and encrusted and misshapen. And you would put those rocks into this drum; and you would add water and some sort of a grit substance; and it varied depending of the style of tumbler you had. And then you would plug that tumbler in, and you would let it go for weeks, even like a month, this tumbler would run, day and night tumbling those rocks; and they would constantly fall against that grit. The water would move the grit around and gradually grind down the surface of those rocks. And when the time was done, and you unplugged the tumbler, and you took the rocks out; over time that grit had smoothed the edges of all of those rocks, and now what you held were these smooth beautiful hued rocks.

There's a sense in which our lives are in the rock tumbler of God. God has placed us there and constantly from moment to moment from day to day throughout our lives; our lives are churning in a mixture of grit. And that grit is trials, it's trouble, it's pressure. And if we respond properly over time, God uses that to wear down the rough edges and to leave us like Christ, the place of

Christian maturity. That's how God uses trials and troubles in our life. But not everyone here will benefit from life's troubles.

Notice how James begins verse 2, "Consider it all joy, my brethren...." You see only those who are James brethren can really benefit from life's trials. He defines what he means in 2:1. "My brethren, [you're the ones who have] ... faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ."

You see the only people whose trials have eternal benefit are those who have faith in Jesus as their Messiah and their Lord. If you're here this morning, and you've never embraced Jesus as Lord and Savior, then you're not benefiting from your trials, you can't. All they cause for you is misery in this life and an eternity without God. I plead with you this morning on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. Commit yourself to Christ, and then He can do for you what He does for all of us. He can take those trials and make them the shaping influences in your life to make you like Jesus Christ. Let's pray together.

Father, it's hard for us to do, but we thank You for the thorns. We thank You for the difficulties, for the troubles, for the trials. Like George Matheson, Lord, we've thanked You thousands of times for the roses, but never for the thorns. Thank you for the work in our lives, thank you that You use troubles and trials to build endurance, and then when endurance is finished, Christian maturity. Lord, help us to consider our trials joy: not because we get joy out of them, but because of what they produce in us by Your gracious hand.

Father, I pray for the person here this morning who's never really made the decision in life to face trials this way. I pray that today would be the day they would make that determination, and from this point forward they would encounter their trials with this mindset, knowing these things.

Lord, I pray for those who have already made this commitment; I pray that You would only strengthen their resolve in light of our study of James today.

And finally, Lord, I pray for those who might be here this morning whose trials are utterly wasted, who will go through life facing difficulty after difficulty with no benefit because they don't know Christ. I pray that today would be the day that they would turn and embrace Christ as Lord and Savior.

To Your glory we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

