

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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I want you to find the book of James, if you will, and I want you to find the first chapter in that book. And we're going to think today about what God teaches in that wonderful book about learning to endure.

I'm going to tell you something about God. God is a strange teacher. He gives the test first and then gives the lesson. And many of you are going through a test or a trial.

Look here in James chapter 1. Let's begin in verse 2 and read through verse 5, *"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations,"* that is, just simply different kinds of temptations, *"knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him."*

Now look up here and I want to ask you a question. How many of you this morning want strength? How many of you want victory? How many of you want prosperity? How many of you want contentment? All of us do. But let me ask you another question. How many of you want tribulation? Most of us don't. But it is tribulation that works patience, which literally means, endurance. And without patience, without endurance, you're not going to have these other things, because tribulation works endurance. Now the word patience in our King James Bible here doesn't mean the ability to thread a needle. The Greek word *hupomono*, means to abide under. God lays certain burdens on us, and we must abide under those burdens or we're not going to have anything else. Now, folks, let me tell you something. We need to work by faith, and we need to praise God by faith, but we need to wait by faith.

Years ago, when the earth's crust was first hardening, I was playing football. And, you know, when I got out there on that football field, for the first time in my life I had the ball and there was no one between myself and the goal. Now you just have to understand what a thrill that was. The first time ever I had the ball, I had broken loose, and there was the goal line. This was my big day. And I was running as hard as I could, but I was running out of steam also. And I saw the goal line, and I said, "Well, one thing for certain. That guy behind me is not going to catch me before I score." And I dived over the goal line, had it made. But do you know what? It wasn't the goal line. It was the five-yard line. How humiliating that I never reached the goal because I quit too soon. Some of us can quit too soon. We don't learn to endure.

Now if you don't learn to endure, you're not going to learn much of anything. You're not going to learn to play the piano if you don't learn to endure and do the scales. You're not going to learn Greek if you don't endure and do the Greek verbs. You're not going to lose weight unless you learn to endure. You're not going to build character unless you endure.

Now in the passage that we have here, the word for temptation in verse 2 literally means trials or testing. Look if you will in James 1 verse 2, *"My brethren, count*

it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.” Well, what does he mean there by divers temptations? Should we say, “Praise God, I’m being tempted to sin?” No, the word may be used as a temptation to sin, or that same word is used in the Bible as a testing, a trial. Now let’s look at those. You see, we get the test from God. We get the temptations from the devil. Don’t get the idea that God is tempting you to sin. In James chapter 1 verse 13, “*Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with sin, neither tempteth He any man.*” God will not tempt you to sin. The devil will, but God will not. You know if God tempted you to sin, you’d have a perfect excuse. Who can resist God? He’s the master tempter. No, only the devil will tempt you to sin. God will test you. The devil will tempt you to cause you to stumble. God will test you to cause you to stand. And what we’re talking about this morning is endurance under trials, under testings, that God gives to us so we can grow. And notice he doesn’t say not if you’re tempted, but when you’re tempted. Look in verse 2, “*My brethren, count it all joy when, when ye fall into divers temptations.*”

Now these tests, these trials produce patience. That is endurance. And let me give you an ancillary Scripture to put in your margin there if you have a Bible and don’t mind writing in it. Write right alongside James, Romans 5 verse 3, “*And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience.*”

Now when you’re praying to God, “God, give me endurance, give me patience,” well, you’re going to have to have something to endure before you can ever learn anything about endurance and patience. And so, when you pray for patience, don’t be afraid to do that. Don’t be afraid of God’s tribulation. God is not trying to cause you to stumble, but to stand. A wise man said, “The bumps are what you climb on.” And that is so true.

Now I want to say to all of us who are sons and daughters of God, don’t get the idea that the Christian life is all sunlight and roses, that there will be no heartaches, that there will be no tears. There is tribulation, and Jesus said in John 16 verse 33, “*In this world ye shall have tribulation.*” So if you’re going through deep sorrow, trouble, pain, anguish disappointment, that doesn’t mean something has gone wrong. It means that the Word of God is true.

Now, what if the temptation is a temptation to sin from the devil, what should you do? You ought to pray. You ought to praise God. I mean, in the midst of it, praise God. Now you know what the devil’s going to say? “Look here what I’m doing to this individual, and it’s causing him to pray and praise God. I’d better stop.” If it’s from God, you ought to praise Him and pray because He does all things well. And it’s not a sin to be tempted. Jesus was tempted in all points like as we are.

And, let me tell you something about these tests. These tests are tests to let us know that God is real in the darkest night. Would you like to fly on an airplane that had never been tested? Well, listen, the faith that can’t be tested can’t be trusted. And so, God is going to give us tests and trials. And I want to mention five things that I’ve

learned, and I pray that God will write them on your heart and see if you can learn them also.

And the first one's going to surprise you. I have learned **enjoyment**, enjoyment. Look in James chapter 1 verse 2, "*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.*" Count it joy. Now that doesn't mean grin and bear it, but it means to rejoice in the Lord. Why do we count it all joy? Because if God gives you a test and you overcome, overcoming Christians are joyful Christians. So when they come rather than moaning and groaning, pull some of the groans out of your prayers, shove in a few hallelujahs, and count it all joy.

Barbara Johnson wrote a book. One statement in that book is worth the entire book, where she said in that book that pain is inevitable, but misery is optional. Pain in inevitable; misery is optional. Now you can be miserable if you want to, but you can, in the midst of your trial, in the midst of your tribulation, have joy.

Paul and Silas were in that Philippian jail, and at midnight they were singing praises unto God. The writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 10 verse 34 that you, "*Took joyfully the spoiling of your goods.*"

One of my dearest friends is a man named Joseph T'son. He was a modern-day apostle to Romania. When that cruel despot, Ceausescu was persecuting the Christians, putting them in prison, putting many of them to death by one means or another, Joseph was preaching the Word of God. They tried to put a bridle on Joseph, but he kept preaching. One day, the Gestapo, as it were, the strong-armed people of Ceausescu, came to Joseph's home, unannounced, and said, "We're going to go through your library." Well, a preacher's library is very precious to him. It's like a good friend. "And we're going to make you sign every one of the books in your library. And then we're going to go back and have the scholars to look through those books. And if there's any book in this library that denigrates the government, then we're going to put you in jail." And Joseph and his wife sat there as they were taking his books down, one book after another, and making him sign that book. And Joseph told me, he said, "I was miserable, I was miserable. It was awful." But he said, "Then they handed me a book to sign. It said, 'Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory: Are You Experiencing It Now?'" And Joseph learned what Barbara Johnson said that, "Pain is inevitable, but misery is optional." Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory. And Joseph said, "I will rejoice in You, our God." And he told his wife, "Elizabeth, we have guests in our house. Fix some coffee for them." And he began to praise the Lord.

You see, the first fruit of tribulation ought to be enjoyment. Paul said in Second Corinthians 7 and verse 4, "*I'm exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation.*" Well, that's great. So great. Put that Scripture in the margin, Second Corinthians chapter 7 and verse 4.

Now here's the second truth that I have learned. Not only enjoyment, but **enlargement**, enlargement. You grow when trials come. Look, if you will, in James 1

verse 4. Look at it, “*But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*” Now look at that word perfect. It’s the Greek word teleos. And it doesn’t mean sinless. The Bible says of Jesus in Hebrews 2:10, “*The captain of our salvation was made perfect through suffering.*” He wasn’t made sinless through suffering. He was already perfect and sinless. But it’s the word teleos which means mature.

An oak tree is the perfection of an acorn. And somebody has written these words: When you’re discouraged and feeling a little blue, take a look at a mighty oak and see what a nut can do. That oak tree is the perfection of an acorn. It means maturity. We grow under stress.

I was looking at Psalm 4 and verse 1. The Psalmist said, “*Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress.*” When did you grow much? When did you grow the most, when you had no problems or when stress came? When problems came and you learned to endure, that is when you grew the most. And it, not only does enjoyment come, but enlargement comes. Maturity comes. Now when you’re under stress, your physical body is under stress when you’re lifting weights, then your muscles begin to grow. You know, the problem today is so many Christians who are not teleos. They’re not mature. They’re not perfect. They’re not fully ripe.

I had a mango for breakfast. I love mangos, I do. I believe that the Garden of Eden was full of them. And if you don’t like them, it makes me very happy because that means there’s more for me. And mangos are just a wonderful fruit. The best mango, in my estimation, is called a Haden mango, it’s exotic. I wish I could show you a Haden mango when it is fully sun-ripened. The top is red. Then it bleeds off to sort of an orangey-red. Then it bleeds into a yellow. And at the very tip is a spot of green. Now that’s the way it is when it is sun-ripened. The mangoes you get in the supermarket are not sun-ripened because they don’t have any shelf life. But when a mango is sun-ripened and you smell it, that’s exotic. That’s ecstasy to the nostrils to smell it. And when you peel it, the inside is like butter. What does it taste like? Pineapple, yes; orange, yes; peach, yes; banana, yes. It’s a combination of all of these. And it is ecstasy to get one and let the juice drip off your chin. That’s a mango.

But let me tell you about a mango. A mango, to be that way, has to be sun-ripened, not ripened on the shelf in your house, one that you brought out of the supermarket. Now those are good, and if any of you want to buy me some in the supermarket, I’m not saying don’t do that, but I’m saying there’s something about something that has become teleos. It has become mature.

Have you ever seen any Christians who were picked green? They never mature. They never quite get there. Sometimes a young preacher will show giftedness, ability, and he has the natural gift of preaching. He has a good vocabulary, and he has some convictions. But so many times, he is put on the circuit in the conferences and he preaches his handful of sermons. Then later on, you learn that he failed, he fell, he disgraced the Lord. What was the matter with this young

preacher? He was picked green. The Bible says in First Timothy 3 verse 6, when you ordain a man, don't ordain a novice, lest he be tempted with pride, lifted up with pride, and fall under the condemnation of the devil.

Now what does it teach us? Enjoyment. What does it teach us? Enlargement, maturity.

I'll tell you another thing we learn from trials and temptations, and that is **enlightenment**. We learn some wonderful things. We get wisdom when these come. Look if you will, James 1 verses 4 through 8, "*But let patience,*" that is maturity, "*have her perfect work, that ye may be mature and entire, wanting nothing. And if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not,*" that means he won't scold you for asking, "*and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think he shall receive anything of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all of his ways.*"

Now when trials come, difficulties come, you need enlightenment. You need wisdom. You know, old Job had trials and temptations. You're familiar with the book of Job. And Job was asking God, "God, why?" And Job had some friends who tried to explain to him why. And you know the whole story of Job, but, finally, Job said to God, "I'd like to bring you into court. I want to sue you for damages." Now it wasn't that Job was being disrespectful, but he said, "O God, I would like to argue with you about this thing." And God said, "Okay, you want to argue?" And God began to ask Job questions, I mean, questions that Job could not even begin to give the reason for, about things that Job could not understand at all. And in the end of the book, Job stops asking why and starts remembering Who. And that's what we have to do. Remember Who.

Those of you who are counselors; your job is not to solve peoples' problems. If you do that, they'll become dependent upon you. Ultimately, your job is to bring them to God. Not to answer the why, but to point them to the Who. And in tribulation, God will give you this kind of wisdom if you'll pray and ask Him for this kind of wisdom. It is a mark of growth when we stop asking why and start remembering who. You know, a person can have a Ph.D. and still act like a fool. When trials come, ask God for wisdom. Look again in James 1 verses 4 through 7, "*But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.*" But now watch verse 6, "*But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering, for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think he shall receive anything of the Lord.*" And you pray in faith and you can say, "Dear God, I know that it is Your will that I have wisdom. Thank You for giving me wisdom." Don't be like a wave. A wave is treacherous.

One time, Joyce and I were in Hawaii, and we went down to the beach. And I saw the most magnificent waves. And I said to Joyce, "Joyce, you sit up here on the

shore. These are the biggest waves I think I've ever seen. I'm going to go out and do some body surfing." So I went out there and I waited for my wave. And I started paddling to get on the front end of that wave. That wave picked me up, shook me, body slammed to the bottom of the beach, and, friend, I just lay there. I said, "I don't want to move anything. Is my spine broken?" I'm serious; under the water, I just waited there for a while. And I moved this and this and my legs, and I said, "Well, at least I'm still alive," and got up and got out of there. And when I turned around, there was a sign I'd not seen. It said, "No body surfing allowed; spinal injury may occur." I walked right past that sign; never saw it, never read it. But I have learned one thing, friend, you can't trust a wave. And God won't trust a Christian who's like a wave of the sea. No, with a rock-like faith you ask God for wisdom, and God will give you wisdom.

Did you know that knowledge and wisdom come from God? I'm talking about godly knowledge. But knowledge is learned from looking around; wisdom is learned from looking up. And, really, you need wisdom to learn how to use knowledge. Knowledge comes by study; wisdom comes by prayer. Sometimes these young people ask me, "Pastor, pray for me. I'm having finals; that God will give me wisdom." I say, "Son, I'll pray for you that God will help you to study." I mean, being a Christian doesn't increase your IQ. You see, we need wisdom. Thank God for the wisdom. And, friend, in trials you will learn more than you'll learn when the sun is shining.

"I walked a mile with pleasure, she chatted all the way; but made me none the wiser for all she had to say. I walked a mile with sorrow, not a word said she; but, oh the things I learned from sorrow when sorrow walked with me."

Fourthly, here's something else I've learned, and that is **enthronement**. I've learned that in difficulty and sorrow and pain and perplexity, you can actually learn to live as a king during these things, not without these things. Look in James chapter 1 and verse 12, "*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive,*" now watch this, "*the crown of life.*" He'll be crowned. He'll become a king. Now he's not talking about a crown when we get into Heaven; not talking about a crown in the future. He's talking about a crown right now. The apostle Paul said in Romans 5 verse 17 that we are to reign in life. God wants you to have dominion over all of these things. But you'll never learn to be over until you learn to be under; until you endure. Without endurance you're not going to have enthronement. Friend, let me tell you something. If you do not bear the cross, you can't wear the crown. In life, when these things come, get under and stay under until God is finished, and God will give you the crown of life. God will enthrone you. You know, the Bible says in Proverbs chapter 25 verse 28, "*He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down and without walls.*" If you don't learn to rule, to be the king over your own spirit, you're like a city without walls. Enemies can come and go. But God wants you to be a king and to rule in this life. And if you don't learn to rule, I'm telling you, you're in danger. You're like a city whose walls are broken down.

Now here's the fifth and final thing I want to mention that will come through trials and difficulties, and God is teaching me. I haven't learned everything yet, but you know something about God? He never flunks you; just re-enrolls you. He just re-enrolls you so you can learn. But here's the next thing, **enrichment**. Look again in James chapter 1 and verse 4, "*Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect,*" that's teleos, mature, "*and entire,*" now watch this next phrase, "*wanting nothing.*" How would you like to come to the place where there's nothing you want? Well, according to this, you can come to that place. Now that doesn't mean you have the key to Fort Knox. If you want to know how rich you are, add up everything that you have that money cannot buy and death cannot take away. Then you will know just exactly how rich you are. And God says, "If you learn to endure, I'll bring you to the place where you will need nothing." Now the word wanting there does not mean desire. It means necessity. There will be no necessity that, what God is able to meet.

Years ago, I went out to a camp meeting back in the back woods of Florida. I was driving a little Volkswagen in those days, and I loved that little car. It was a great car. But one thing about the Volkswagen in those days, it didn't have a gasoline gauge. It had two tanks, and when you ran out of gas in the first tank, you just turned a little lever and you turned on the second tank. Now in the second tank there was just a mite more, as I remember, of a gallon of gasoline, and so a Volkswagen would go pretty far on a gallon of gasoline till you find a service station. But I had forgotten I was already on that little tank. And we were out in the back woods. I had a friend with me. And I said, "Oh, no, we are going to run out of gasoline. I was meaning to get gasoline before we ever came out here, and we have driven way out here, and now we're coming back on this lonely road." I said to my friend, "Let's pray, O God, that we'll find a place, a service station." And we prayed and we drove and drove, and I knew after a while we were running on fumes, and I thought we're going to run out of gasoline, but we kept on praying. And I saw the gas station in the distance just when the car ran out of gasoline and the motor stopped. I put it into neutral and we began to coast. No exaggeration. I coasted right to the pump, right to the pump, and a man came out; that's when they serviced your car. You didn't put it in self-service. And he said, "May I help you?" I said, "Yes, I'd like \$.75 worth of gasoline." That's all I had. I had given the rest to the camp meeting. I had \$.75 in my pocket.

Now let me tell you something. God doesn't always work miracles like that for you or for me, but the thing I'm trying to illustrate is I didn't need any gas. I came right to the service station, I didn't need any gas. And I didn't need any money because I had \$.75. God will bring you to the place if you'll learn to trust Him, I promise you that God will be there to meet your need.

Now listen, look, if you will, in James 5 verses 7 and 8, "*Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman,*" that means the farmer or the vine dresser, "*waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain.*" You can't hurry the harvest. God wants to give you riches, but you can't hurry the harvest.

Back in Bible times is what you call the former rain and the latter rain. Oh, it's still true over in Israel today. The former rain is in the fall. It causes the seed to germinate. The latter rain is in the spring that causes the grain to swell up and get ripe and ready for harvest. Now the Bible says you've got to endure if you want the harvest. If you want to be enriched? You've got to endure. The problem with many of us is that we want it now. Our forefathers would get upset if they missed a stagecoach, and they'd say, "Well, another one will belong in a month." We get upset today if we miss a section of a revolving door. We want it now. That's the reason why so many people are up to their ears in worshipping the god of credit. These credit cards have destroyed them. They're buying things they don't need with money they don't have to impress people they don't like. And there are plenty of people who will be happy to sell you those things. But what God says, "Endure! Endure! I'll make you rich. I'll give you the real riches of life."

And so, friend, I wish I could tell you more that I've learned, but time has gone. I've learned this much, indeed, and I thank God for it. But let me just close with a line from an old song.

"When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie, my grace all sufficient shall be thy supply; the flames shall not hurt thee, I only design, Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine."

Now, you say, "Pastor, I want to live that way. I want to be in God's school." Listen to me now. You've got to enroll. You've got to enroll. You say, "I'm in the school of hard knocks." No, that's not God's school. I'm not talking about the difficulties that all of us have in life. I'm talking about the trials, the testings that come from God that cause us and enable us to endure.

Would you bow your heads in prayer? Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. And if you're not absolutely certain that you know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, I've got wonderful news for you. Our Lord is knocking at your heart's door. He is closer to you than the person sitting next to you in this service. He desires to save you. He wants to save you. He will save you. He died to save you. He promised to save you if you would trust Him. The Bible says simply and sweetly and sublimely, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.*" To be saved means that every sin is forgiven. To be saved means that God, through the Holy Spirit, comes into us to give us life, peace, power, purpose, and joy. And to be saved means that when Jesus comes again, or we die, we'll go straight to Heaven. Would you like that today? Would you like to have a personal relationship with God through Christ? Let me guide you in a prayer. And you pray right there, silently, but fervently in your seat. And make this prayer, if you can, your prayer and don't just repeat the words. But pray this way, "Dear God, I know that You love me, and I know that You want to save me. Jesus, You died to save me. You paid my sin debt on the cross with Your shed blood. Thank You for doing that, Jesus. Now, Lord Jesus, I open my life up to You. Right now I receive You as my Lord and Master. I turn from my sinful ways to You, Lord Jesus. Come into my heart, forgive my sin, and save me, Lord Jesus." Pray that

prayer and mean it. Listen. You can put it in a sentence, “Save me, Lord Jesus.” Did you pray that prayer? Then I want to suggest you pray this way, “Thank You for doing it. And I’ll not be ashamed of You because You died for me. I will make it public today. I will not be ashamed of You, Lord Jesus. Thank you for saving me.”