Good morning! My name is Emerson Kennedy and I am an associate pastor here at The Creek. We are currently in a series called Awaken. Last week Dan talked about how James, the half-brother of Jesus, was awakened to faith in Christ (evidence of resurrection) in James 1:1 and today we’re in James 1:2-18dealing with people who say, “We believe Jesus is King, but it doesn’t feel like it.”

And the question that they’ve had to ask themselves in the middle of all of that is the question that James is going to be answering today in James 1: How are we to think about the times we don’t like to think about?

Which made me think about myself. How would I handle that? It also made me think about US and how we are to think about the times that we don’t like to think about.

That’s a question, not just for Christians suffering because of their faith, but a question for all of us to ask whenever something comes down the pike that we don’t like.

With that in mind, I want us to walk through James 1:2-18 because God’s Word has a response to that question. James is going to encourage us to see these hardships as opportunities to mature. He wants to awaken us to maturity. We see this in the text when after introducing himself in verse 1 James writes, “2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds…”

Let’s take a moment to break this down.

First, James tells us to *consider*ourtrials as joy. That word “consider” has behind it the idea of a king or a ruler – someone who is *considered* to be the most important person in the room or someone highly esteemed. So, James is saying that there is a *primary way* to think about the things that we don’t like to think about. We should consider it an opportunity for *pure joy*!

Next, notice he says that there are “…trials of many kinds.”*“OK,* what kinds of trials does he mean, Emerson?”Does it mean issues in figuring out where your life is headed? Does it look like financial concerns? Yes. Does it look like parenting problems? Yeah. What about illness? Yep. Life group issues? That fits too. Difficulty in marriage? That would fall in the category of “many.” Bad preaching? Haha…no.

Also notice he says *whenever* they face trials. What does that word “whenever” mean? Well, I looked up the Greek and turns out “whenever” quite literally means whenever.

But why? Well, James continues, “…because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.” This “testing”isn’t like a school test where you get a multiple choice option. This testing is the kind of testing that your car goes through that proves its durability and pushes it to the limits of its capability.

In fact, I heard another pastor illustrate this “testing” well in his sermon on James 1 by talking about cars. Think about all the testing that your vehicle has to go through to get to you. It gets built, then tested. It gets driven on-road and off-road. It gets bumped, rolled, banged around, and crashed just to see whether or not this car can live up to what its designer intended, or if it’s all smoke, and no cigar. What a field test is to a vehicle, trials are to a disciple of Jesus. All of that bumping, tossing, and jolting us produces endurance in helping us become all that we can be in Christ.

Because endurance isn’t the goal. James specifies (4) “Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”James is saying here that the thing you’ve got to think about when you have things you don’t want to think about going on in your life is that your hardships have the ability to mature you. This is entirely my main point.

James says *all this* testing is so you can become “mature and complete.” What does that mean? Well, he’s not talking about…

* Whether you’re totally, utterly self-reliant
* Whether you’re married, have 2.5 kids, a house, and two cars
* Whether you’ve finally transcended childish ways by now being able to say, “ma-toor-ity” instead of “ma-chur-ity.”

To be “mature and complete”, means, as Paul says in Romans 8:29, is “To be conformed to the image of his Son.”It means we are to grow up to look and live, think and act like Jesus.

Truthfully, this is easier said than done. I have two roommates and we like to go on walks around the neighborhood on occasion, and I wanted to find a way to gauge my maturity level. So I asked them their thoughts on me. I basically asked, “Do I have any fatal flaws? Any immaturity? If so, what?”

The first roommate thought about it and then he said, “Well, you know,when I’m speaki you stay silent, don’t offer advice, and you don’t say a whole lot.” I responded, “So my fatal flaw is that when you speak, I listen?”

Then, I asked my other roommate and without missing a beat he looked me in the eyes and said, “Arrogance.” Yeah, imagine hearing it firsthand! You see, my immaturity, whether in reality or not, has been leaking out to him in the form of arrogance, which is not Christ-like. Jesus was confident – in his identity, in his mission, in his teaching, but he wasn’t an arrogant jerk.

James is saying that the primary way to think about what we don’t like thinking about, challenges or hardships, is by seeing them as opportunities for spiritual growth. As kilns turning us from malleable, disobedient clay into sturdy, obedient followers of Jesus. Difficulties, mini or mega, have the capacity to be the forge for our Christ-likeness.

Let’s pause right here for a moment. God’s Word here is a hard word to hear because it cuts right against the grain of our culture’s main mantra: something, something happiness and comfort. We live in a culture that says that happiness is the chief end of man. But if that’s the case, then when mega-trials come, they’re going to flatten you, and when mini trials come they’re going to frustrate you. Instead of living your life with joy, hope, and love, you harbor resentment, bitterness, and despair. See, if the goal of human living is your or my happiness then trials are the worst thing that can happen. They are, at best, a mild inconvenience or an interruption with your regularly scheduled programming. At worst, they are a colossal waste. Like think about 2020. If the goal is happiness, then POOF, a whole year gone. Wasted. But if the goal is maturing into Christlikeness, then what fertile ground for growth.

I read this excerpt from AW Tozer and it fits just perfectly. He’s writing about two kinds of fields – one field that goes uncultivated and one field that gets cultivated. Of the uncultivated field he says it becomes…

“…Smug, contented, protected from the shock of the plow and the agitation of the harrow. Such a field has stability. Nature has adopted it. It can be counted upon to remain always the same, safe and undisturbed. It sprawls lazily in the sunshine, the picture of sleepy contentment.

But it is paying a terrible price for its tranquility. Never does it feel the motions of mounting life, nor see the wonders of bursting seed, nor the beauty of ripening grain. Fruit it can never know, because it is afraid of the plow and the harrow.

In direct opposite to this, the cultivated field has yielded itself to the adventure of living. The protecting fence has opened to admit the plow, and the plow has come as plows always come, practical, cruel, business-like, and in a hurry. Peace has been shattered by the shouting farmer and the rattle of machinery. The field has felt the travail of change; it has been upset, turned over, bruised and broken.

But its rewards come hard upon its labors. The seed shoots up into the daylight its miracle of life, curious, exploring the new world above it. All over the field, the hand of God is at work in the age-old and ever renewed service of creation. New things are born, to grow, mature, and consummate the grand prophecy latent in the seed when it entered the ground. Nature's wonders follow the plow.”

Isn’t that good? Isn’t that a different outlook on trials and hardship? The truth is that there’s no such thing as a field that’s “Safe and undisturbed, it sprawls lazily in the sunshine, the picture of sleepy contentment.” Live any bit of life and you know something is going to plow right into you. That’s how life works. The question is, “Are we going to allow the Farmer to cultivate us into the kind of field he wants us to be or are we going to harden and fill up with brambles and thorns, thistles and weeds?”

Now, let me pause again and say that while there is a primary way that God wants us to view our trials, that’s doesn’t mean there aren’t secondary or tertiary ways to view them also. We also have opportunities to weep, grieve, and lament. We don’t sweep hard things under the rug and fake it. We anchor ourselves in the sovereignty of God who is working all things for the good of those who love Him.

Of course, this is easier said than done. James knows this as he is a pastor writing to struggling believers. This is why James gives us three commands in the remaining verses as we think about thinking about trials as opportunities for maturing in Christ.

He commands us to 1) ask, 2) take pride, and 3) know.

1. **ASK**

James continues. (5) “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. (6) But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. (7) That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. (8) Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.” Obviously, when you’re going through it, it’s not easy to know how to think when we’re going through times we don’t like to think about. So, James recommends asking for wisdom. “God, help me to see the good in this. God, help me to navigate through this. God, walk with me through this.” But he says to do so without doubting or, rather, without “double-mindedness” - meaning not that you have questions but meaning that “I want the wisdom of God when it benefits me.” I want God as my easy button, as my get out of jail free card.

God would say “Why would you expect I help you, if you’re just going to use me? You don’t actually care what I have to say.”

Instead, James reminds us to ask with all belief, all allegiance to God because we have a God “(5) who gives [wisdom] generously to all without finding fault.” We may have doubts and questions when going through trials but understand that God is a good God wanting the good of those who love Him.

So we need to **1) Ask** for wisdom in thinking about trials as opportunities for maturing in Christ, but we also need to **2)TAKE PRIDE**:

“(9) Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. (10) But the rich should take pride in their humiliation since they will pass away like a wildflower. (11) For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business. (12) Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. James is saying to believers who are low position to take pride because they are, in reality, in a “high position” if they withstand the trial of poverty. They are those crowned with the crown of life. Much unlike the rich brothers and sisters to whom James is addressing, who are more likely to be worried about fashioning crowns of their own making, who should take pride in being humbled, in losing their affluence or comfortable lives since money, stocks, 401ks, etc. will ultimately fade away. Look, the reality is that if we have Jesus and we have nothing, we have everything; but if have everything, but we don’t have Jesus, then we have nothing! So, whether poor or rich, James is saying take pride in your hardship. God can use whatever happens to mature you.

Lastly, James encourages us to not only ask and take pride, but to **3) KNOW.** In verse 16 he says, “(16) Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters.”Don’t be deceived? If we aren’t to be deceived, it means we are to know something. What does he want us to know? Two things: one thing about us, the other about God.

Know this first about US: “(13) When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; (14) but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. (15) Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” I love this. James knows that instead of using trials as an opportunity to mature, they can be used as opportunities for immaturity to come out. James knows that when you’re going through the ringer, it’s tempting to grumble or slander or harbor bitterness or to blame God. James is saying “Know this. Don’t be deceived.” In hardship, it’s easy for your immaturity to come seeping out.” Know that your desires will go wonky. “(14) but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.”

James is like, “Bro…be honest with yourself. *That is your own heart!*” And he’s right. We’re led away by our evil desires and enticed by them.

(Get prop)

I saw Francis Chan share this illustration. That word “entice” is a hunting/fishing term. It has the idea of a hook that’s disguised by bait, by something alluring and attractive. So, I have a fishing line here with something mildly enticing to me - Albanese gummies. James is trying to get us to realize that we when we sin it’s because we’re enticed like a hook baited with something colorful and appetizing appeals to a fish, drawing it away from whatever it was doing (idk what fish do), drawing it away from its fish buddies. Until BOOM! He’s got us on the hook!

Sometimes though we make it through. We’re wise enough to not take the bait. And Satan is like, “Ok, not biting today. How about THIS?” *Put money on the line.* Satan’s like, “Let’s see how this one gets him! It usually works. It’s $100.” And suddenly we say “Aghhhh! Ok, fine.”

In dealing with that stuff day in and day out, we believe the lie. We take the bait. We give in to our desires. And we’re left wallowing in our sin and immaturity. We feel guilty and ashamed like “Ugh…How could I be so stupid?” Or we’re so used to biting and getting thrown back in that we don’t even care anymore. We’re calloused to the pain of the hook and getting away with it, not realizing that one day we’re going to take the bait and end up not back in the pond but in someone’s ice cooler. As James says, “(15) After desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.This is why trials can be so useful. They can break down our idols.”

James says, “I know it’s easy when you’re going through trials to give in to temptation and it’s easy for the immaturity to leak out. But stay the course, and know also the second thing about GOD, “(17) Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. (18) He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.”

James wants us to know that while our sin births death, God, the giver of every good and perfect gift, the Father of heavenly lights, in whom there is no darkness, in whom we can trust to not change like the shadows, whom we don’t have to worry if he’s going to change his mind about us – this God chose to give us a new birth through the word of truth.

The same word that spoke the galaxies into being, the same word that created the heavenly hosts, the same word that manifested the mountains and oceans, the same word that said to dead Lazarus, “Lazarus, come out!” And out he came!

That same word is still bringing dead people back to life. Christian, you have been born again. You have a new birth because God spoke it by His Son Jesus Christ – the totally mature and complete one – so that despite our immaturity we might be made mature through his sacrifice.

Imagine…

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