

All right, good to see you here this morning, church. Do me favor as you're grabbing a seat. Go ahead and grab a Bible, if you would. Turn to James, chapter 1. If you don't have a Bible, there should be one in the seatback underneath in front of you. That's our gift to you. If you don't have a Bible, we want you to have that. So take that.

As you're turning to James, chapter 1, if you weren't with us last week, kind of here is where we're at. For about a four-week period, we are walking through what it means to have an understanding of a theology of suffering, a theology of trials. We talked about last week the reality is every one of us cannot escape the reality that trials exist and we're going to walk through them. Some of us are going to walk in spurts and seasons; some of us are going to walk in heavier seasons than that, but none of us can escape trials. It's part and parcel to life.

So what we're wrestling with is really how should the Christian understand trials? What should be our understanding biblically of a theology of why trials exist and God's purposes in them? So last week we started in James, chapter 1. James, chapter 1 is one of the classic texts in your Bible on suffering, on trials. James really kind of started by giving us kind of a grand understanding of God's purposes in trials and how we're to perceive them.

We learned last week that James said for the Christian we're not to perceive trials when they come upon us or when we walk into them as some sort of cosmic accident that is detached from some sort of purpose that leaves us in hopelessness and despair. Instead, we're to perceive them with an attitude of joy, a joy that is an act of faith because we know something to be true about God. God is loving and holy, and we know he is using these trials in a divine purpose in our lives for his glory and for our good.

So we're not to view them as some sort of cosmic accident, or worse, that God has maybe used this as some puppeteer of evil in our lives. We're to perceive them with an attitude of joy. Our response in those trials... When we are overwhelmed by the pain, by the countless waves that are crashing against us, in those moments, we can cry out for the wisdom of God. It's a wisdom of God that is not like the wisdom of man.

Though we may not understand this trial, it may be painful and we see no good in it, the fact is there is a good God who is sovereign over it. We can run to him and his wisdom and his counsel in the midst of those

trials. When we do so, James implored us that we don't come to God in the same way (like we talked about) as a kid who is on the edge of the pool, wondering whether he should jump to his father or not in learning to swim. You don't come as a double-minded individual when it comes to the counsel of God.

Unlike that child in that pool... He is double-minded and he is conflicted because he knows what he knows to be true about Dad, and he knows what he knows to be true about water and concrete edges. He is paranoid in between. God says, "Get your eyes off your circumstances. You don't have to understand why they're here. They're here. All you need to know is I'm good. You can jump, and I will catch you. I will not forsake you or abandon you.

You can trust me to know I am working something out in this trial, righteousness in your life, maturity and sanctification in this trial. More than anything, you're getting more of Jesus in this trial. You're experiencing his full sufficiency for you in a way your sufficiency cannot hold in yourself, knowing not only is there a work happening in this trial, but the promise that one day there is a crown waiting for you of life ever after." There is more we'll talk about next week in that.

If you remember last week, one of the things we alluded to fairly heavily was one of the dangers we face in trials is oftentimes we can allow these trials to then dictate our theology rather than our theology dictating our response to the trials. So we can, in the midst of trials, begin to be enticed or tempted to have distorted views of God. "Somehow, maybe God lied. Maybe he has forgotten me. He has abandoned me in this. He has neglected me. Maybe this is something I've done, and God is judging me with this. So God is mad at me right now as a believer.

Maybe God is not as good as I thought he was, because when you think about the horrific pain I've walked through, what kind of good God would allow something like that to happen? So maybe God is not as good as I thought. Maybe God is actually evil. Maybe God is wicked, because if he is so sovereign, why didn't he do something about this?" Our minds can go there if we're not careful.

So what James is going to do starting in verse 13 and following of chapter 1 is he is going to walk us through a number of things. One, he is going to show us why it's actually impossible for God to seek to use trials as an entrapment of evil and sin in our lives. There is no malicious puppeteering that is going on here, where God has this wicked heart toward us. It's impossible for God.

Second, he is going to show us really in reality how the process of sin and evil works in our response to horrible situations that happen. Thirdly, he is going to show us how we should respond biblically. What is the response of the Christian in the midst of suffering and evil that happens to us? So we're going to just dive right in.

In verse 13, James says, "**Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God...'**" Now it's interesting here because the language shifts a bit from where we've been. If you remember from last week, in verses 1 through 12 we talked about one of the things God is doing in trials is he is testing us. He is testing our faith. He is proving our faith to make sure our faith holds, right?

But now all of a sudden the language shifts a bit. We move into this tempting language, kind of that God is tempting us. He is no longer testing us; he is tempting us. It's interesting, though, because in the Greek, the word *tempt* in verse 13 is actually the same root word that is used for *trials* in the Greek in verse 2. They're the same word. Tempting and trials.

Many of you remember Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 10:13 when he says, "**No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.**" Now the word *tempted* there is actually the same Greek word for *trial*. So you could read it, "No trial has seized you except what is common to man. God is faithful. When you are tried, he'll provide a way out so you can stand up under it." So they can be used interchangeably.

Yet in Greek nomenclature, they understand the human mind has the ability to perceive horrible circumstances through two different lenses. On one side, through a positive lens, we can understand the circumstance we're in is indeed a trial that's being used to test my faith. God is working something out here that is good even though I can't see it, it's a good thing, but on dark days we can also view that same circumstance as somehow this is God tempting me toward something that is evil. God has set this whole thing up so I would fall, so I would suffer, and he is finding some sort of joy out of it.

So there are these two different ways to look at it. We learned last week God's intent is not the latter; God's intent through a heart of goodness is to test us, that it might lead us further toward Christ in the midst of a trial rather than running away from him because we view God to be some sort of cosmic puppeteer of evil. So what James says here at the end of verse 13 is, "**...for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.**"

Now we're going to find out in verse 17 exactly who God said he is. God is perfect and he is good and he is holy. So here James says, "No, don't assume in the midst of your trial that this is all God's fault due to some cosmic flaw in his character and somehow God is using this to inflict wickedness on your life." No, he cannot be tempted by evil, nor can God tempt us with evil. Now don't misunderstand what that is not saying. It's not saying God doesn't allow evil.

What a lot of people want to do in trials when it comes to evil is we want to say, "Well, God is good and evil is bad, so God obviously isn't behind this." So we want to get God off the hook somehow. I don't want to do that because the Scriptures don't do that. God doesn't need to get off the hook in our trials. God is completely sovereign in trials. The whole thing does not happen apart from his hand in doing so. Even in the book of Job, we see that. Nothing happens to Job that God doesn't grant permission to. God is completely sovereign.

So I may not understand, though, how this whole enigma works together of God using evil and somehow in his divine plan for good and how that happens, I may not understand how that works, but I'd rather have that tension than detach God's sovereignty from it so I can somehow get him off the hook. I don't know about you, but that leads to more hopelessness and despair, if I know God is not with me in this thing.

The reality is God allows evil. There is a difference between God allowing evil to be used somehow toward his greater purposes and God somehow maliciously intending and purposing evil through a malicious heart that seeks to entrap you and get you to fail. Those are two different things we're dealing with there. The reality is that's what happens to us in the midst of suffering. Our trials lead us to want to start blaming somebody.

It's been that way since the very garden when sin first entered the picture. Do you remember that scene? Here is the garden. God says to Adam, "You can eat from any tree you want to eat from. Just don't eat from this one tree here in the middle. It's called the *Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil*. From the day you eat of that tree, you will surely die." So the test is in place, but what does man do? What does Adam do? Well, they give in.

The Serpent comes along and entices them to eat it. They eat of it. Sin now enters the picture. God's test is compromised. As soon as the consequences ensue, Adam goes and hides. Remember God approaches him. Do you remember what he does? What is the first thing Adam does? He starts blame-shifting. "Well, it's this woman. She is the one. Had she not been there and eaten that thing and handed it off to me, none of this would have ever happened. It's this woman's fault." But then you can almost see the gears start clicking in his head.

He starts going, "Wait a minute. No, no, no, no, no. It's not the woman's fault. No, it's the woman *you* gave me. It's your fault, God. This whole thing is your fault. Had you not put that dang tree in the garden, none of this would have happened. Was that a setup? You knew I'd fail. You did that on purpose. You're wicked. You gave this woman and you gave this tree, and that's why I'm in the horrible mess I'm in." That's exactly what Adam did, and that's exactly what you and I do. When we get in trials, we want to find a way to blame God and assume malicious intent of evil in him, but that's not what happens.

I remember counseling a guy a while back (it must have been a couple of years ago) who was going through some difficult times at work. What happened was his corporation made some cutbacks. They literally cut the salaries of the workers, and this guy gets his salary cut almost in half. He starts thinking, "Man, how am I going to feed my family? How am I going to take care of this?" Instead of pressing into the Lord and viewing this as a trial God has brought about to do something in him, to win his trust to God, he assumes that trust in himself, that he has to be sufficient for this thing.

So he starts going out, and he does what we do. He starts looking for other jobs. Nothing is out there, and so he decides to take it in his own hands. He goes, "This company cheated me; I'm going to cheat them." He starts finding ways to cheat the company out of money and embezzle. He doesn't get very far before he gets caught, and he gets terminated immediately. Now he has a whole different problem, because now he doesn't have a job at all. So instead of trusting the Lord in this situation, he begins to wrestle within his own mind again.

He concludes, "I'm going to go back to what I did years ago that got me money, and that is selling drugs." So he jumps right back in. He goes and he sells these things. It doesn't take long there before he gets arrested. He gets put in jail. When he got released, I had a chance to sit down and talk with him. It was amazing. He was incredibly bitter toward God, just wrestling, just angry at God. "Why did God do this? This is all God's fault."

I remember going, "How is this God's fault? Walk me through this." "Well, he is this good God. Obviously he let all this stuff happen. He must not care about me. He knew how weak I'd be. He knew I had no other choice. This is what I have to go do. So what kind of wicked God is this?" So he wrestles with that, and he starts blame-shifting. It's the same thing as we saw in the garden.

It's the same thing you and I do, and whatever your circumstances are, plug it in. We all have the danger of going to that same place. We're in the midst of suffering rather than trusting God. We begin to compromise. We begin to turn inward into our own flesh and our own sufficiency, and we begin spiraling downward. Somehow the whole time we are shaking our fist at God saying it's his fault.

So what James does in verses 14 and 15 is he does what he does at every turn in this chapter. He corrects that erroneous thinking we're prone to have. It's almost as if verses 14 and 15 should be in parentheses, where he is saying, "Hey listen. While we're in the midst of talking about how you respond toward God when you're in the midst of trials, let's stop for a moment. Let's clearly define how sin and temptation work so you know who is doing what in this process."

Let me be clear on this. What this is not speaking to is some sort of sin that led to the trial; it is speaking about our responses in the trial. We learned last week there are multiple reasons why trials exist. Some of it oftentimes is our own sin. You and I do foolish things in rebellion to God, and we reap the consequences of them. We bring collateral damage on our own life. That happens. That's part of where trials come from.

Other times, it's the sin of others, people around us whom we love who do foolish things. We get the collateral damage on us, and that ensues into a trial, from what they've done. More times than not, it's from living in a broken and fallen world, the result of a fall where bodies don't work as they should. We have disasters and calamities all around us that lead to living in a broken and a fallen world and the trials that come with it.

What is going on here? James is not speaking to whatever sin it was that got you into this trial. In fact, he is speaking to a group of persecuted Christians who were just being persecuted at the hands of others. He is not dealing with what got you into this mess; he is dealing with the responses we have toward God once we're in the trial. So that's the perspective we're coming from.

James says in verse 14 and following, "Let me explain in terms of your response why you tend to go even further downward in your spiral when trials happen." He says in verse 14, **"But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."**

Now again, same as it was in the garden. It's not as if God put the tree in the garden to get Adam to fall. He put the tree into the garden to get Adam to trust, to believe God is who he said he was and his promises are worthy. So what happens, though, is here comes along the Serpent. He deceives Eve, and they begin to then from their own desire become enticed toward it. They take of it. Then the test now is compromised.

Man fell because he was enticed and he was lured. Now this is very much hunting-and-fishing language here, but understand, in Adam's trial in the garden, same as in ours, an enemy comes along and in the midst of it seeks to deceive us. When you're in the midst of a trial, you have an enemy who comes along who wants to whisper in your ear, "Listen, your world is falling apart right now. You know why? It's because God has forsaken you."

You have an enemy who wants to whisper in your ear, going, "God is not as loving as you thought he was, is he? God said to do this, but the reason God said that is because he knows if you did, you'll be like him. So therefore..." You just see how the Enemy works. As some of you are walking through some horrific trials, you have an enemy speaking lies into your life right now to try to cut the legs off what God wants for you in the midst of this trial.

The same thing happened to Adam, but notice, where did the downward spiral actually come from? Be careful when you always resort to, "The Devil made me do it." Notice what James says. How did this whole thing happen? **"...he is lured and enticed by his own desire."** For you and me, it doesn't take much as sinful human beings to want to run after that which is counterfeit to what God wants. The Enemy knows that and will use that.

That's why James says in verse 16, **"Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers."** "Don't be deceived. Don't listen to the lies of the Enemy in the midst of the trial. He'll try to seek to convince you that God is out to harm you, God has set this whole thing up just so you could see his wickedness in your life. Don't believe those lies. Don't be deceived. Don't be like your forefathers, who in the midst of trials, instead of clinging to Christ distrusted him, ran further away from him, blaming him like he was some master puppeteer of evil seeking to bring upon pain and compromise in their lives."

No, James says in verse 17, "If that's your struggle, then what you need again is some good, old-fashioned Theology 101 here on the nature of God so when you're in the midst of trials, you know clearly who your heavenly Father is, what he is capable of, and what he is not capable of." Look at this in verse 17. **"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above..."**

Now stop right there. In chapter 1, what do you think the good gift is that comes down from above in context of what we've been talking about? It's trials. The good gift that comes from above in context here is trials. Again, this is God's economy, not ours. None of us in here would ever say trials are a good thing. "I love them. Bring them on." Nobody thinks that way, but in God's economy, James says it's a good gift that comes from above. Again, this is Theology 101, because here is the theology behind it: God only does what God is.

Because God is good, he can only give what is good. God can only give out of his own nature, and he is 100 percent good, so it's impossible for him to give something out of evil intent, even if sometimes the gift he gives is wrapped in harsh packages. The reality is God is good. Notice who else God is in the rest of this verse about his character. **"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."**

Do you remember in the book of Genesis what lights were? The greater light, the lesser light, one to govern the day, one to govern the night, the lights in the expanse of the sky? They're stars, right? The sun, the moon, the stars. What James is going to tell us here is those lights you see up in the sky have something in common with the very one who made them. Do stars ever move? No. They're fixed. They're permanent in the sky, right?

In old maritime navigation, we'd use them as our guidance system, our navigational points. We can be out in the middle of the ocean, look up, see the stars, and based upon where they are know where north, south, east, and west are. We can know what season we're in. Why? Because they're in the same place at the same time every year. You can bank on it. They're there.

So what James says here is those stars happen to be indicative of the very one who made them. In his goodness to his children, just like those stars, God never changes in his dealings toward you. He is fixed. His character has no variation in it. He is good all the time. Never shifts. God will always and forever be good. There is no evil that dwells in him. He cannot be tempted with evil, nor can he tempt us with evil. When we run toward evil in the midst of our trials, that is our own sin, our own flesh that has enticed us and lured us away from God's promises.

James says, "No matter what happens to you, whatever may come your way, no matter how horrific or painful it may happen to be, the one thing you can absolutely hang your hat on is God is good and perfect in his dealings with you." You have to anchor your hope in that. God didn't bring this trial on your life to lead you into sin and to wreck your life. God allowed this trial in your life so you could get more of him. He can only give what is good.

Well, in verse 18, speaking of good gifts, James says, "Let me give you Exhibit A. Let me give you a story of what God has given that is good." The example he is going to use is you and me. He says in verse 18, "**Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.**" This is very much labor and delivery room-type language right here. In verses 14 and 15, he just told us it was our sin that gave birth to death. Now in verse 18, God is compared to a loving mother who gives birth to life, new life in his creation.

Now at first glance, this kind of looks like he is talking about just God's creation of us as human beings, the life and the breath he has given us. That is certainly a good gift, certainly a good gift that is coming down from above, yes, but I think in context here what he is talking about is he is actually speaking of God's salvific work in the life of a Christian to redeem.

In his sovereign will, he predestined me. He called me forth to himself in faith. He opened my heart in response to the truth of the gospel. He has brought forth life within me, that like a newborn babe I am born again in Christ. He says, "The same God who gave life to you on the cross is the same God who is seeking to give life to you in this trial. He is birthing something in this you can't see."

So when trials come your way, James says, "Don't let your first response be faulting God, where you shift all the blame to him as some puppeteer of evil in your life. No, you know better than that. Why? Because you know in verses 17 and 18 who God is. He is good and he is perfect. You know from verses 1 through 12 ultimately what he is doing. He is accomplishing something in this for his divine purposes for his glory and for your good."

Therefore, in verse 19, when trials come, "**...let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger...**" Meaning don't be so quick to get mad at God when you're in the midst of a trial. Why? Because verse 20 says, "**...for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**" James says, "You need to know in the midst of a trial what God is seeking to do is produce righteousness in your life. That's what he is after. So if at the end of this trial or in the midst of this trial your response is anger at God and shaking your fist at him, then it's only evidence that you don't understand him."

You don't understand his divine nature, his character, or his purposes like you should. Instead of just blowing up at God and concluding that he is evil, do a better job of listening to what God might be trying to tell you in the midst of this trial, in the midst of this suffering, something that is pointing you toward the hope and sufficiency that is in Christ, not your circumstance."

Now we talked about this last week, but you and I know well that is much easier said than done. Just like Adam in the garden, we're always looking to blame somebody. So what James is going to do in verses 21 and following is he is going to talk about how that attitude of joy and that attitude of perceiving this trial with joy gets shaped over the long haul and how the promises of God in your Bible are going to play out.

What he is going to do in verses 21 and following is he is going to talk about the importance of God's Word in the midst of trials, the importance of his wisdom, his counsel, his Scriptures in the midst of trials. He is going to show you three movements here. He is going to show you how you need to approach the Word of God in a trial, how you need to sit under the Word of God in a trial, and how you need to walk away, now having the Word of God in this trial.

He says in verse 21 how you approach and how you sit under. "**Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.**" He says the first thing you need to do in approaching the Word of God or the wisdom of God here in the midst of a trial is you need to get rid of any contaminated idea that assumes you know what God is doing here.

You need to get rid of any contaminated idea or prejudgments that would say, "This is malicious. God is evil. This is unfair." You need to get rid of all those attitudes and actions. Set them aside. Then when you

sit under the instruction to hear, to listen, you do so with meekness. Now that *meekness* is not a weak word. It's a word that was applied to Jesus Christ. It means with humility, to sit humbly.

It's you sitting under the instruction of God in humility saying, "God, this is painful. I don't know what is going on right now. I don't know what you're seeking to do, but I know you're good. I know ultimately you're going to take this incredible pain I'm walking through, and you want me to sit and listen right now. So God, I'm going to sit and I'm going to listen. I'm going to hear your instruction and what your Holy Spirit is trying to teach me through this suffering and through the counsel of your Word."

When you do that in that humility, you receive the Word of God implanted. In fact, the same promises you were grafted into as a Christian are the same promises that will hold you in the midst of this trial. You receive them, and you are anchored by them. So you approach God and his wisdom and his Word by removing those hindrances and sitting under in humility.

In verse 22, how are we to walk away once we have received his counsel, whatever it may be? How do we walk away from that so we're not just folks who heard what God had to say, and then it went in one ear and out the other? I'm really no different, or worse yet, I'm more bitter at God. How do I walk away in such a way that I am transformed? He says in verse 22, **"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."**

This becomes an interesting verse, especially if you were to snap it on to the halfway point of verse 19. Listen to how those verses would sound combined. This is just counsel that is coming to you. "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear. However, make sure you're a doer of the word, and not just a hearer only, thus deceiving yourselves." James says one of the ways you're going to make it through a trial, you're going to endure through a trial, is by coming to the Word of God.

But the only way we know you're reading the word of God right, the only way we know you're listening to the counsel of God right is by the Spirit's power you begin to walk away from that trial different, more like Christ than when the trial first came. That's how you know you're allowing God to really use this trial and use his Word to mature you and to transform your life.

Here is the problem, and this I see all too often. I've seen it in my own life at times, and I certainly see it from this vantage point in our church. There will be a number of people who are not walking with God as they should, and then the wheels of life fall off. This happens every single day in this church. Somebody will come in. Again, they don't tell us when things are going wrong at a one or a two. They'll tell us at about an eight or a nine.

They're not walking with God. The wheels fall off, and almost every time, what do you think their response is? "Man, I just need to get stuff right. I need to get back in church." I hear that all the time. I hear it from my family all the time. When the wheels fall off, "I need to get back in church right now. I need to get right with God. I need to get back in that Bible. Man, I need to start praying more. I need to quit looking at those things on the Internet."

It's all these things, and they're all good and well, but whatever they may be, if you listen or you watch closely, what's really going on behind the heart in that is it's not a patient, steadfast, clinging to the wisdom and the counsel of God, seeking to have their lives submitted and conformed to the will of God through those things. What's really going on there is some legalistic version of treating God like a rabbit's foot. By the way, it never lasts. Maybe they'll go a day. Maybe they'll go a week. Maybe they'll stick with you a month.

Then what happens? Because the trial doesn't go away then they'll drift right back into hating God again. It happens over and over. See, folks, the problem here with those kinds of motivations is most people in the midst of a trial who just want to run to the church or run to God's Word or run to what they can cut out, when they come on those temporal reasons, they're simply running to those things so the trial will go away, not so they'll get more of God out of it, not so they'll be transformed. They're no different than the seed that falls in the thorny weeds that grow up and gets choked out.

They'll listen to God, they'll hear the Word of God for a moment, but when their trial doesn't go away like they want God to make it go away, then they're done listening to God. What happens there is they deceive themselves. Let me ask you a question. What if the trial never goes away? Is Jesus still sufficient for you? Because here's the deal. I know some of you in here have been walking with depression for years. I know some of you folks who have been walking through chronic illness for years. I know some of you folks who have just gone through loss after loss after loss. It's painful, and it doesn't seem like it's ending.

I'll be the first one in line to believe we serve an almighty, all-powerful God who can just say the word and it be done. He can lift the affliction. I know God has the power to do that. I've seen too many lives delivered to not believe that. The reality is it's not always the case. Most people I counsel who are going through trials will believe God as long as this is just a season, and, "Once God gets me through this season, then I am okay on my own." The problem is if it doesn't go away, if this season turns into a life, is God still sufficient? Is he still good for you? Is he still holy for you?

For most people, he is not. It is just treating him like a rabbit's foot, like rubbing a genie's lamp to get what I want until this goes away. That's a miscalculation. In fact, the word *deceive* there is a mathematical term that means to miscalculate, meaning because you came and listened to God or you went to church on a

Sunday in the midst of your problem and you heard from God that day, you just thought everything would go away.

James says that is a miscalculation of God's purposes in trials. It's not so you just get through them; it's so you would get more of him. He is the end in your trial, not the trial ending. There is a difference. In verses 23 and 24, he says, "Let me give you an illustration of what this process looks like." He says, **"For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer..."** That's the guy we just got done talking about. **"...he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like."**

Now there are two ways to look at this passage. One is to take it in its general sense, which is true. Being a hearer and not a doer is a person who just looks at himself in a mirror, turns away, has short-term memory, and forgets. In its general sense, it is the guy we just talked about. He looks to God for a moment. When he doesn't get what he wants, he walks away and forgets. He is not a doer; it's just in one ear and out the other. That's essentially what this verse is saying.

Another, more detailed meaning of this verse comes from some specific terms James uses in this verse. The word *man* in verse 23 is not the typical word *man* that is used in the Greek, *anthropos*, which means mankind, a man or a woman, or a person. When a person looks at himself in the mirror and then they walk away and forget who they are, that would be *anthropos*. Instead, he uses the word *aner*, which is the literal word for male. Not a female; a male. It's how a male looks at himself in the mirror.

Now I don't know if this is where James is going, so don't bank your theology on this interpretation, but if this is what James is saying, this is hilarious. What is the difference in the way a female looks in a mirror and a male looks in a mirror? You husbands out there, you understand this is an incredible process in the morning, where literally the woman will get out her tackle box. She opens it up, and she starts pulling out all these surgical instruments I've never even seen before. I think you can amputate an arm with that, but you're going to put it in your eye, I guess.

Then she doesn't just look at a mirror, right? She gets two millimeters from the mirror. She is opening up the orbital cavity and removes the eye, puts some paint, some primer around there, puts it back in. This whole thing is amazing. You young dudes who aren't married yet, this is shock and awe when you get married. This process is shock and awe.

I've heard one pastor say it this way, and I think this is right. Most women enter into the bathroom as a caterpillar, and they come out as a monarch. So when a woman comes to the mirror, she comes for

change. She comes for transformation. That's how she comes. Now some of you are going, "Now you don't know my husband. You don't even know. It's reversed in this home."

Recovery is on Thursday nights. You can go find some help there, all right? How does a guy, though, typically look in the mirror? Some of you I can tell how a guy looks in the mirror. I'm looking at you right now. You got in this morning. You wake up. You look in the mirror. You scratch your head a little bit. You're like, "Eh, not bad," and walk out. That's a guy, typically.

Now again, I don't know if this is what James is getting at. I know he'd know, though. First Corinthians 9 tells us he was married, so certainly he has some insight there. If so, James is literally saying (and I think you still can infer this from the text) when you're sitting under the wisdom and the Word of God in a trial, you come to the counsel of God like a woman would come to the mirror: for transformation.

You don't come like a dude would, where you simply just glance, listen to what God has to say, give it a head nod, walk out, and you're no different than when you came in. In fact, in some ways you're worse because you're just more bitter at God because he didn't get you out of this thing like you thought he would.

So James says in verse 25, "No, this is how you come." **"But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing."** It's interesting. In verses 23 and 24, you have the word *looks*, and in verse 25 you have the word *looks*. Now you wouldn't know it in your Bible, but in the Greek, those are two different words with two different meanings.

The word *look* in verses 23 and 24 means to gaze or to glance quickly and then turn away. That's what that word means. The word *looks* used in verse 25 is the same word used for Mary Magdalene when she ran to the tomb to look into it to see where Jesus' body was. It means to peer forward, to study intently. Mary was looking at every crack and crevice. Where did that body go? She is studying.

In the same way, James says when you come to the Word of God, that's how you approach his instruction. Not flippantly, where you look at it, glance away, and go, "Whatever." When you're in the midst of a trial, you peer forward in humility. "God, what are you trying to show me right now? I'm here. I'm all ears. I not only want to hear it, but I want to do it. I want to give my life up for this."

Notice what James calls the Bible there, by the way. He doesn't call it *the Word*. He doesn't call it *the Bible* or *the Scriptures*. He calls it *the perfect law of liberty*. It's the gospel. Remember, James is writing to a Jewish audience who put their faith in Christ and were well aware, though, of the law of God and their

inability to keep it. James knew very well what it meant to be free, what it meant to be free in Christ, to be delivered from sin, Satan, and death.

Here it's used in the context of trials. When you come to the Word of God, you're coming to the very source that has the ability to set you free even in the midst of a trial where you feel you can never escape and maybe will never physically escape from it, but can set your heart free in the midst of it. It's the perfect law of liberty. It will unchain your soul, and it's beautiful.

So do you see why verses 19-25 are there? Simply to say when you find yourself afflicted by a trial or in trials, your response is not to lash out in anger toward God, but to seek to learn from him. You do so humbly, by submitting yourself under his instruction. You sit meekly and teachable, and you walk away from that transformed and obedient to the things of God. Remember, one of the main issues of trials is to test your faith, to prove it to make sure it's not just lip service, but it actually is maturing and sanctifying over the years. Right?

How do you know? How do you know this trial has transformed you? Verses 26 and 27. **"If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless."** Now it's interesting he chooses the word *religion* there. It's a word that is rarely used in your New Testament but literally means what you and I would probably think it means in this context today. It's these external, ceremonial traditions you would have.

James says, "To the person who has this kind of outward appearance of spirituality, this outward, ceremonial display of what your faith may be... Maybe it's your profession of faith. Maybe it's how you outwardly express it. Maybe some of y'all are just slapping a fish on your car or putting a cross around your neck. It's your visibility at church on Sunday. Whatever it may be, this outward appearance.

If that's your claim through all these expressions, that you love God but yet in the midst of a trial you can't bridle your tongue, meaning in context all you're going to do is blaspheme God and you're going to yell and fault God, then if that's how you truly feel, then whatever religious appearance you're giving off is worthless because it's just outward signs with no inward transformation. It's worthless. It's empty religion."

He says, however, here is how you know how your faith is really being transformed in this trial. Verse 27: **"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."** Let me ask you a question. What is the difference between the guy in verse 27 and the guy in verse 26? They both go through the same trial.

One is a hearer who walks away unchanged, in one ear and out the other. The other allows himself by the Spirit's power to be transformed in the midst of this trial under the counsel of God and walks away different. Not only walks away different, not only inwardly is righteousness being developed within this individual through this trial and through the counsel of God, but outwardly he is now going and being a ministering agent to others who are suffering in their trials. That's what transformation looks like.

It's amazing. It's such a weird, cryptic ending to chapter 1. He talks about these trials, and then...*bam!*...orphans and widows. What? But think about it. How did chapter 1 start? It started with a group of men and women who were suffering in persecution, walking through trials, and wondering, "Has God forgotten about me?" Then they get a theology of suffering down, understanding who God is and what he is trying to accomplish in them.

By the end of the chapter, how are these same persecuted, suffering Christians different now? They're going out and they're ministering to other people who are suffering in many ways worse than they were. Orphans and widows, two of the most helpless, defenseless groups of people in your Bible. They're going out and they're ministering to them. One of the purposes of trials is to wean you off you and to wean you on to Christ and to go and give away that testimony of what Christ has done in you and use that to minister to others.

Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 1: **"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who..."** What does God do? **"...comforts us in all our affliction..."** Why? **"...so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."**

I met a guy in California one time. I was up speaking at a camp. He had just lost his newborn baby to SIDS and was devastated. When we were up, we were talking about it. This was a couple of months after. He had been processing it. He was going now and he was ministering to other families who had lost children as well. I said, "Man, how has this been for you being able to do that?"

He opens up to 2 Corinthians 1. Do you know what he had on 2 Corinthians 1? He had the handprint of his baby who had died. They hospital did a handprint on 2 Corinthians 1. He said, "God's purpose in this is that I would find the healing Christ provides and then I would go and I would give it away to others who need it so desperately in their situations."

That's the heart of trials. That's when you know you're not a hero; you're a doer. You're being transformed by the Spirit's power. May *he* get the glory from it. That's the heart behind this. Next week we'll talk about the hope we can have in the midst of trials. Let's pray.

Father, we are incredibly grateful that you have given us this text. We don't have to just be tossed by the winds and the waves of whatever trial may come our way. Even though we don't understand the trial, even though we don't understand the pain, we don't understand the enigma of what you're doing in it, we do know you are good. There is no variation in your goodness. You are always and forever good, today, tomorrow, and the days that will come. You never change.

So Father, I pray for your protection over this group in this room, for your saints, that when we find ourselves in trials (and it is *when* not *if*), when we're there, that God, you would guard our hearts and protect us from the lies of the Enemy who would seek to come in to steal, kill, and destroy what you want to do. Will you protect us from viewing you as this puppeteer of evil and somehow discrediting your holiness?

God, use this trial to anchor us into the wisdom and the counsel of your Word, the promises you've given so our sufficiency wouldn't be in our own selves, that it would be in your Son, Jesus Christ, and that through this thing, by your Spirit's power, you would transform us so all the more we could magnify the beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ in our weakness and in our suffering for your glory, for our good, and for the hope of the world. It's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.