

**SHOW ME: JOY**  
**SHOW ME SERIES - Part 1**  
**Dan Burrell**

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Good morning Life Fellowship. I almost feel like I need to re-introduce myself to you, so I am Dan, one of the teaching pastors here. Last fall if you will remember one of the teaching pastors got Covid and it wasn't me. If you remember also, he got the kind of Covid that wiped him out for several months. And I went through the entire book of Ecclesiastes with the church during that time, which was the first time I had ever taught through that book. So Ben kind of owed us one and he decided he was going to take us all the way through the book of Jonah.

And now we are in a new study which will be the study of the book of James, and he and I will be sharing that over the rest of the summer. And I hope that you are planning on being part of Life Fellowship over the summer. I know that many folks are anxious to get back out on vacation, to travel and do all kinds of things, and certainly we all deserve that after having the year that we had in 2020. But I also want to say that we have plenty of things going on here at Life Fellowship over the summer that we would encourage you to engage in as we begin the process of regathering and regaining our momentum after a very difficult year of the pandemic.

By the way yesterday if you drove by our campus you probably saw some cool activities going on as we had the first of two summer camps for our young people, our Kid Life group. Yesterday I came over for a little while to see what was going on and man, they had games and activities everywhere. You would not have believed this auditorium because it was a Super Hero haven right in here. And we had tons of kids all over the place just having a great time.

We have another one of those camps coming up, so if your kids missed yesterday you will want to make sure and sign them up for the next one. As we mentioned this morning we are going to have a unified 4<sup>th</sup> of July service. It will be a little tighter or closer for everyone on that day but a lot of people will go on vacation that weekend as well, particularly with the 4<sup>th</sup> falling on a Sunday. So we thought we would have just one service and we are going to do a church wide communion. We are still going to use the individual packets at least one more time so that we are still being sensitive about the Covid thing even though many of you, and myself as well, have gotten vaccinated. But for those who haven't we want the extra precaution of using the individual packets for communion. And we will just be kind of celebrating mid-summer and coming back together as a family and having corporate communion together.

That will be two weeks from today. And then three weeks from today on that evening we are going to gather back on the church campus and have a big prayer time. We want to encourage you to come and bring your family and let's just join together asking for God's blessings on the church. So we have that evening planned and then right after that, because I am a country boy and I remember sometimes on Sunday nights we would have a big watermelon feast, we are going to do that. Any of you familiar with those? So I am going to pull the country boy out and I am in charge of gathering the watermelons for us to have out here. As soon as we get done with the prayer time we

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will break out to the parking lot and have a seed spitting contest or something. It is a good way to connect and get to know each other again. So remember that is coming up in three weeks on July 11<sup>th</sup>.

And there are other things that are planned as well, but I just wanted to mention to you that we are ready to go, ready to get back in action. I think many of you have wondered how the church survived for the last year, and we are encouraged and we are blessed. The average church our size dropped twenty to thirty percent over the year and our church has been pretty much consistent with that in everything from attendance and offering.

Maybe you wonder how we are doing financially as a church and the elders were talking about it just last Monday night at our elders meeting. And they actually asked me to kind of keep you informed about that as well. We are getting ready to budget for the next fiscal year which starts on August 1<sup>st</sup> and because of the pandemic and because of various situations that have come over the last year, we are cutting the budget for the first time in a long time. We had to cut about \$300,000 out of our budget. Maybe you wonder where that comes from and it comes from a variety of ways. First of all we reduced expenses because we weren't doing as much and then also we have several staff positions that opened up for a variety of reasons over the last year and we are not filling those. But to be honest with you it is pretty tight right now. Our ability to have confidence in our numbers for next year depends on how we finish the next six weeks, which are the last six weeks of this fiscal year.

Notice we are not passing the offering plates the way we used to do because we have been very dependent on the online giving. And thank you very much for your faithfulness in doing that, by sending in your offerings online which keeps us from having to pay the bank fees. On your way out you will notice we have two brand new boxes that we are going to kind of keep out there all the time and you can always drop your offering in there. Or if you ever have questions, please call the business office.

But the next six weeks are going to be pretty crucial as we get ready to finish off this fiscal year and plan the budget for the next fiscal year. Last year I mentioned our situation twice to you and both times we got a couple of really great gifts. As we are budgeting we are not planning on those large gifts that came in, but if they do come in then we are going to be able to do some other things that right now have kind of gone on the chopping block.

The last thing before we hit the book of James is I want to say to all the men *'thank you for your blessing and ministry in this church.'* I just want to say *'Happy Father's Day to all of you.'* (Applause.) At my house we celebrated father's day last Sunday. My daughter and her husband were in town and my son who is getting ready to deploy in the Marines came home for the weekend so we celebrated last Sunday. But I say to all of the men, all the dads in here, all you who are a father in some capacity,

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whether it is biological or adoptive or foster, or even a special uncle or mentor, ‘*thank you for your ministry.*’

I have to tell you guys, that it kind of feels like we are under attack sometimes in the culture does it not? It sometimes is kind of hard being a man because things have shifted in our culture. But I want you to understand something and that is the Bible gives us roles for a purpose. It gives men roles, and women roles that are not greater in value, but they are different in responsibility. And men, the responsibility you have to lead, love, protect and sacrifice does not go unnoticed. It is appreciated in this church. For all you men who helped your wife get these kids to church on Sunday mornings, set the example and are leading the way, I say ‘*God bless you*’ for your character, and for your determination.

And for those of you who are taking younger people under your wing and mentoring them and modeling Christian masculinity as Christian manhood, I want to say ‘*God bless you*’ and please continue on. And if you have a guy in your life who is providing you with those biblical responsibilities I hope today before the sun goes down that you will pick up the phone and call them, send them a note or drop by their house and walk up and give them a slap on the back and say, ‘*Thank you for fulfilling your role in my life and in God’s kingdom.*’ Let’s give all of our dads a good thank you if you would. (*Applause.*) And I would just like to say a word of blessing over you right now.

*Father, I thank you for the men in this church. I thank you for the leaders and the emerging leaders that I see every week in this church. Father, we thank you for the way that you designed creation to give us balance and to give us hope, to give us the protection and the sensitivity that we need in the roles of men and women. Father, thank you for the godly leadership that the men in this church provide in their homes, through our elders, through the responsibilities they have in ministry, and through the examples they set through their character.*

*Father, I pray that you would continue to help us raise our boys up to be godly men that they would learn from the example of Scripture and from the models in this church to be confident in their role without being arrogant in their masculinity. Father, that they will be dedicated to you as servant leaders. And Father, to glorify you with the strength that you have designed intentionally in every man. So Father, we thank you for this day that we set aside to honor our fathers and I pray today will be a blessing for them. Thank you for them. For it is in Christ’s name I pray. Amen.*

All right. We will be in James Chapter 1 this morning. I have been so excited about this as James is one of my favorite books of the Bible. I have taught through it several times, and every time I go through it I take it at different angles. Now I know when some of you heard the title this week, ‘Show Me,’ you were sure that Dan was involved in that one. In case you don’t know it, ‘Show Me’ is the motto of my home state which is the state of Missouri. And it is called the ‘Show Me State.’ It comes from

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a senator back in the 1800's who made the declaration while making a political speech. He said, *'I want you to understand that we don't just take things at face value here in Missouri. We don't just look at things and say, 'We will accept that.' If you are going to convince us you are going to have to 'show us.'* And so Missouri has been from that point forward the *'Show Me State.'*

But that has nothing to do with the book of James. Okay? James, the author of this book gave us a challenge and it is - 'Show me the reality of your faith. Show me that it is really real. Show me the authenticity of your word. Set the example. Model the model. Walk the walk. Show me your faith.' And so for the next several weeks we are going to be looking at various aspects of the book of James.

Now I will be honest with you, we needed a summer series and as Ben and I were talking and this was an obvious choice, my frustration was immediate because I am a nitpicker. I mean I like to just get down into all the details. Ben and I were talking recently on sermon prep and so forth, and I know this will come as a shock to some of you but I am known as the longer preacher of our teaching team. (*Laughter.*) And I bear that with humility and a certain amount of teasing. For me I just like to think of it this way, I can never get to the bottom of the depths of the Word of God and I just feel compelled to share it. (*Laughter.*) So for me it is a very spiritual position that I hold, and I know I am known as being the more verbose pastor.

I was explaining this to Ben as I have been preparing for the last month or so to get into this series and I told him that I was so frustrated because we only have a certain number of weeks and only a certain number of minutes per service and I didn't know how I was going to get through all of it. I have like fifty points for every sermon and that immediately makes everyone in the sound room and the technology and worship teams very nervous when I start talking about that. But I said that for me it was like having all these children now that I have studied this book and as I am driving down the road I feel like I have to periodically leave a few on the side of the road and abandon them. And I know I won't be able to teach them all, so I feel like a father who is neglecting his children.

And the staff did not buy it. They simply said, *'Dan, you talk too much.'* But in the end I want you to know that I have left a lot of children by the side of the road this morning. There are a lot of points that I want to share with you about James that I am not going to have time for. But please understand that Sunday sermons were never intended to be the only nutrition, the only study, the only application of Scripture that you get per week. None of us eat just once per week. We can look at each other and be pretty sure of that, right? So what we want to do is prepare a table for you that you can return to like a buffet of Bible knowledge, Bible skills, study interest and Holy Spirit initiative so that you can go back over and over again and help yourself to the richness of God's Word.

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And let me just tell you that James is a rich book, and it is wonderful. Now as we go into it I just want to give you a little bit of background information on James so it will kind of help you with the context. This was dictated by the Holy Spirit and written by James, and 99 percent of Bible scholars believe that the James referenced here is James the half-brother of Jesus. James' story in and of itself is very interesting in that James apparently did not come to follow Christ until after Jesus had died. And when he saw the resurrected Lord, then he believed.

You know the Bible says that a prophet is without honor in his own country, so can you imagine being raised in the same house as Jesus. I mean there has to be some resentment because someone didn't ever get spanked. There had to be a lot of resentment there for a brother who was growing up without a sin nature. There probably was some serious resentment going on with each of the brothers and sisters as well. But we know that at some point James looked at Jesus, now the resurrected Lord and Savior, and said, '*I believe.*' And from that point forward James became a messenger of the power of the gospel.

And by the way, I want to note that James in his declarations never said, '*Listen to me, I am the half-brother of Jesus.*' His credibility was not based on the fact that he had been born into the right family. His credibility was based on the fact that Jesus saved him just like He saves everyone else, that James was a sinner just like anyone else, that he was a rebel just like anyone else, and then the gospel transformed his life.

So let me say this to you, folks, it doesn't matter your background, it doesn't matter whether you grew up on the right side of the tracks or not, it doesn't matter whether you grew up in a Christian home, it doesn't matter if you have a period of your life that you would like to shut the door on and never remember. Because when the gospel gets ahold of you, when Jesus changes your heart, from that moment forward any credibility you have, and every story you have, is based on the foundation of the transforming work of the gospel in your life. Never forget that. Everything becomes equal at the cross. Your past does not matter, your sin does not matter, your breeding does not matter, your family ties do not matter, your education does not matter. But once you meet Jesus everything matters, and it matters not because of you, but because of Him.

And James declared that. So even when he starts in this passage he says, "***Here I am, James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.***" He doesn't say, '*Here I am, James, half-brother of Jesus. James, the son of Mary and Joseph. James, the one who grew up in the same household with Jesus.*' But rather he says: "***Here I am, James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.***" And by the way that word 'servant' is actually a poor translation even in the English Standard Version which we use. Servant would best be translated 'slave.' James was a slave. He wanted everyone to understand that he had given up all his rights, one hundred percent totally to his half-brother, but more importantly, to his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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Man, that ought to preach right there and I could give the invitation and be ready to go. But let me go on. The book of James was written for us but not necessarily to us. Maybe you wonder who it was written to then. Well, it was not written to evangelical Christians living in the United States. So it was not written to us specifically as the audience, but it was written for us knowing that as the inspired Word of God we would be reading it. So who was the immediate audience? It was to the Jews of the diaspora. It was the Jews of Israel, of Judah, of Jerusalem, and of the early church who had trusted Christ as Savior and then with the destruction of the temple under Herod's reign, had been dispersed all around the world.

We need to understand that these Jews had basically been shipped out, fleeing for their lives, moving to pagan parts of the world like Rome, like Greece, like what is now Iraq and Syria. They were scattered everywhere. And James was writing this letter as a minister of the gospel and a convert of Jesus Christ to his national brothers, the fellow Jews who like he had seen the Messiah and trusted Him as Savior.

Now I think there is something else interesting that I just want to point out here. One of our pastors was talking about this with me this week. There are 62 imperatives, 62 times where James says, '*Do this.*' They are commands, they are directives. So 62 times in the book of James there is a clear '*here is what you are to do.*' And half of them are second person plural. Now maybe you wonder why that is important. Well, excuse me for a moment but I am an old grammar teacher. I used to teach English to high schoolers and talk about a trial and tribulation that was one. And when I was trying to teach second person plural to high schoolers I would say: "*In the South we say y'all.*" I would make it as simple as that.

When James is giving his imperatives in this passage he is saying, '*y'all.*' In other words he is saying, '*all of us together – community - the body of Christ - the called out assembly - the diaspora - the church scattered. All of you listen to this and do this together.*' And James, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was making an important note that we are not to be living lives of isolation but lives of community. That what we do as a called out assembly, what we do as the body of Christ, what we do as a church matters. It leaves a reputation, it exhibits a character, and it offers a better way. And when we understand the responsibility of community, it will help us serve each other, love each other, and grow with each other.

So what James is doing here is he is dealing with the problem of a kind of counterfeit faith where some were saying, '*Oh this is the cool new trend, let me just ride this one for a little while.*' And James was saying, '*No, words are not enough. If this is real, show me. If this is real, you should produce some fruit. If this is real, there ought to be some works. It is the difference between a tree that is barren and a tree that gives fruit. There are some consequences of being a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. Do you know them? And do you do them? You need to ask yourself some tough questions.*'

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Much of Christianity today has been caricatured and even distorted by those who claim the name of Christian, but do not possess a genuine relationship with Christ. I am afraid that in the evangelical church today around the world, and in America in particular, and yes, specifically in Lake Norman, there are far too many people who are quite content saying, *'Yes, I am a person of faith,'* or *'Yes, I am a Christian,'* but when it comes right down to it, it ends with the declaration and there is nothing really real there. There is never any fruit that is produced. And James is calling out those who would say, *'Yeah, I want the benefits of having the label, the identity, I want that feeling of comradery, I want that sense of community.'* And he is saying, *'Don't be deceived – show me! Show me you have what real Christians produce.'*

Scripture references quite frequently throughout the New Testament give this example of people who would slip in and claim the name of Christian, but not be genuine. In one place they are called *'tares'* and in another place Jesus says, *'Watch out for those who perform miracles and cast out demons in my name.'* He calls them *'false prophets,'* sometimes *'false teachers,'* and sometimes *'wolves in the assembly.'* But over and over in Scripture there is a message that says, *'Make sure you don't just swallow everything that someone tells you when they say they are a Christian.'*

By the way I would say this to us; we need to be discerning wherever we go. When you turn on the Christian TV programs you need to be careful about what you are listening to. You need to be careful when you walk into a Lifeway Christian bookstore because not every book that is on the shelf of even a Christian bookstore is worthy of the title 'Christian. There is heresy there every time you go in. Be careful about what you listen to on the radio. Be careful about the podcasts you listen to.

Maybe you are wondering how you can know because it is confusing. You know how you can know it is the real thing? You have to first know the real thing. When you know the real thing it will become obvious what isn't. And when you know the Bible, study the Bible, learn the Bible, read the Bible, memorize the Bible, listen to the Bible, because when you know the Bible you have that compass that you need to be able to discern whether something is false or something is true.

And by the way, let me say this without apology, everybody gets held to this standard - everybody, even Dan Burrell, even Ben Rudolph, even the elders of Life Fellowship Church, even Billy Graham, even Joel Osteen. Every preacher past, every religious sect, denomination, broadcasting station, book author you name, they all need to be evaluated on whether or not they are true based on this standard. That is why it is called the 'Canon,' which means 'measuring device.' It is what the plumber uses to determine whether something is going to flow uphill or downhill. And that is why we call the Bible the 'Canon.' It is closed, it is complete, it is forever secured in heaven and we can judge everything in heaven and on earth as to whether it is true or right or authentic based on this book. That is why we believe in the Bible.

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All right, I am leaving children by the road all over the place. Am I wearing you out yet because I am just getting wound up? I told everyone that since I hadn't preached in four weeks that I am just a little pent up. And then I drank two espressos so we are in for a wild one. Here we go - let's read James Chapter 1.

***“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings:”*** Here we go to the first ‘Show Me’ because he says here is what he wants them to do: ***“Count it all joy, my brothers.”*** By the way that word ‘brothers’ is a gender neutral term in the original and it just means brothers and sisters, everybody who is listening and reading this book. And he wants to ask them this question ‘*Can you show me the joy? Can you show me the joy?*’)

***“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.***

***Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits. Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.***

***Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.”***

So here we have a passage so rich that literally we could preach the entire summer on just these 18 verses. But let me set the table for you and let me challenge you to go back and read, study and examine these verses even deeper in the week to come. Here is what we have. We have James who is speaking to this dispersed church, and he is saying, ‘*Look I know you guys, okay? I am one of you. I was the righteous Jew. I grew up in the culture. I know the environment. I know the skepticism.*’

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And that is true of all of us. In this crowd in this room this morning we have all kinds of personalities, all different kinds of perspectives, and I get that and I understand that it makes pastoring a little challenging at times. We have every type there can be in a congregation. We have people who see the world as a cup half full and others who see the cup as half empty. But the bottom line is this; we can all admit that there are times in life when we are forced to realize that we are looking at half a cup. Whether you think it is half full or half empty, it is still half a cup.

And here is what James is saying. *‘Look, I know you are not at home anymore. I know we have been dispersed. We have lost our capital; we have lost our national identity. And for those of you who are new believers, you are particularly vulnerable because perhaps you have lost community within the body. And for some of you, you feel like fighting, while others of you don’t. Some of you are waiting to see what happens, while others are making plans. But there are some things I want you to nail down. There are some things that you should be demonstrating. There are some things I want you to – show me.’*

And as James gets into this passage he deals with the first one and that is we need tribulations. Things have gone wrong and we all know that happens in life, doesn’t it? Things do go wrong. Betrayals are revealed, sin exists, money runs out, misunderstandings occur, opinions differ, offenses take place, accidents happen, tragedies overtake us, and no amount of money, fame, planning, work, luck, good intentions, character, aspirations or passions can shield us from the fact that in life we are all going to face disappointments. We are going to face setbacks and trials, difficulties and challenges in virtually every aspect of our lives at one point or another.

I look back on my own life and you know when you are young and idealistic and you think about that next big thing that is going to happen whether it is getting your driver’s license, getting a college degree, finding your spouse, having your first child or buying your first house, all these different things that we anticipate with a sense of longing and thinking, *‘Man, if I could just have that then life will be sweet. Man, if I could just attain that I will be set up.’* And then we get those things. Then have you ever noticed that shortly thereafter you kind of find out it is just not what you thought it was going to be. Things don’t always pan out, and obstacles come.

I was thinking back on the course of my life over these completed decades and within months of graduating from college I started my first job. I moved to this beautiful city of West Palm Beach, Florida. I had a relationship that I thought was going to lead to marriage and it absolutely ended. And then my father died a few weeks later. I remember when I finally found the woman I was going to marry. Boy she was beautiful, she was all that I prayed for, and she was the woman of my dreams. But just a couple of years later we would lose a baby, and then another baby, and eventually another baby.

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Within a week of becoming a pastor for the first time at age 29, when I walked into my office on my first day the business manager came in and said, *'This week you need to expect two lawsuits, we have \$1,500 in the bank, we haven't paid the mortgage for 60 days, and we have a \$21,000 payroll due on Friday.'* Welcome to the ministry! I didn't know any of that coming into the position. When I moved to Charlotte 20 years ago in January 2000 I got to this huge mega church and people were saying, *'Wow what a great opportunity.'* Within 30 days of taking that new great opportunity that was supposedly the apex of someone's ministry, it was revealed that one of my key staff members was having an affair with another staff member, and this was after the church had already been rocked by scandal. And I thought, *'Don't I even get a little bit of a honeymoon this time?'* But no, that was the first thing I had to address.

Within four months of buying not the house I am living in now but the house before that, the market crashed. I had bought the house in July 2008 and remember what happened in September? We eventually lost the house. Finally saved up seven years to get my credit back up, got my next house, moved into it on Saturday, and on Thursday we had a flood in the bathroom that wiped out the bottom floor. Oh yeah, you know what, the bottom line is this, none of us when we hold that little baby in our arms for the first time and look into their sweet little face are thinking about the time they may say, *'I hate you. I wish I was in someone else's family.'* We don't ever think about that but those days are coming, right?

We are going to face trials and we are going to face tribulations, and how we handle them is the reflection of how vibrant God is in our lives. And here is what James said, *'Show me your joy. Show me your joy when they run you out of your house. Show me your joy when your marriage falls apart. Show me your joy when your kid breaks your heart. Show me your joy when your house burns down. Show me your joy when your business fails. Show me your joy when you get Covid. Show me your joy when the doctor gives you a bad report. Show me your joy when life's half cup arrives.'*

Thanks, James, for getting off to a slow start. But the fact is here is what James is saying, *'Those trials, those adversities, those difficulties that we have in life can matter. They can matter.'* No job, no relationship, no jury, no project, no commitment comes in a trial free form. This is the broken world in which we live. But in a sense our ability to maintain the priority of what we are doing in the midst of adversity will grow us and prove things and even complete us in ways that a trial free experience never can.

So let's talk very quickly why trials matter. Here is the first thing and these will also be on our app and you can get them later. Trials force you to evaluate the strength of your own faith. They force you to evaluate the strength of your own faith. When you are going through a tough time that is the time to step back a little bit and say, *'How much do I believe this stuff? How true is the Bible going to be for me right now? How deeply can I lean into God in this moment?'*

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You are not going to do that when everything is going rosy. You are not going to do that when everything is peachy keen. You are never going to do that whenever life is all full. But sometimes when the glass is draining dry and you are panicking and you are worrying and you are stressed now is the time to ask yourself how deep is your faith, how strong is it in this moment.

We have a fig tree up here on the stage, and we looked at a couple of passages when Jason was up here from the New Testament. But you know the Old Testament speaks of the fig tree as well. In Habakkuk Chapter 3 and verses 17 and 18 it says: ***“Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls.*** In other words what happens when the crops dry up? What happens when the fruit is not on the tree when you expect it to be? What happens when you look out in your fields and they are empty?

Here is what Habakkuk the prophet said: ***“Yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.”*** Do you remember what Job said when he lost his children, he lost his flocks, he lost his herds, he lost his home, and he lost everything that was of value to most people? And his wife looked at him and said, *‘Job, just get it over with. Curse God and die. He doesn’t care about you.’* And Job said: *“I was naked when I got here and I will be naked when I leave, but one thing is for sure and I want you to hear me very clearly – the Lord gives and the Lord takes away. And coming from my lips is this declaration – **“bless be the name of the Lord.”**”*

And it is at that moment when you have lost everything, your life is crumbling, your spouse has left, your kids are breaking your heart, the bank account is empty and your health is failing that you can step back and say: *‘I still believe. My strength is in Christ. I will not waver.’* And James was saying to those who had been scattered abroad, *‘Show me your joy in the midst of the trials and learn how deep your faith really is.’*

Here is the second thing – trials prevent pride and entitlement. You know when we look at God with presumption and entitlement, when we treat Him as some kind of sugar daddy and think He is there just to give us our every want, when we become petulant when He doesn’t give us our way like the toddler who crosses his arms and stamps his feet when he doesn’t get the candy at the checkout line, when we treat God in such a way we learn something very deep about our own level of maturity - maybe it is time for us to have an attitude adjustment.

It is a good parent that looks at junior who is pitching the fit at the Target checkout line and says, *‘Not only no, but because of this attitude right here it is a double no today, son.’* That is the good parent. Why? It is because they need to understand that their relationship with their authority and their relationship with stuff is not an entitlement. And there are times I believe when God wants us to wake up and remember this – He is still God and we are not. And if we got that to which we are truly entitled at

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this moment we would already be in hell. Every good and every perfect gift comes from Him. And all of us tend to drop back into immaturity if we are not careful and we take for granted the wonderful gift that God has designed.

This is why Paul came to accept his own thorn in the flesh in II Corinthians Chapter 12. He said he had prayed three times to get rid of the thorn in his flesh and it was still there. And he said he finally decided that this thorn was God's gift to him, to keep him from exalting myself. When we get to the point where we think that we deserve more than we are getting that may be a danger sign and maybe God is saying to us, *'Now show me your joy in the midst of loss. Show me the joy in the midst of adversity. Show me the joy in your humility at this point.'*

The third thing is this – trials keep us dependent on God and not the world and its stuff. Trials keep us dependent on God and not the world and its stuff. You know I think one of the good lessons from Covid is a lot of us got things turned upside down in our lives, everything from health to finances, to our businesses, to being able to fellowship as a body. A lot of us had plans we had made for 2020 and they disappeared as we went through an international pandemic. During this trial it has caused us to remember that we need to keep our eyes on the Lord and not the world, not the government, not our businesses, not our house, not our bank account, and not our health. All of these other things in the world and all its stuff can go away really quickly, but God is still here.

The fourth thing is this – trials remind us where to direct our hope and focus. We see from this passage of James we read this morning that there is a shift of moving away from trials and tribulations toward talking about that which is to come. There will be that day when we get the crown of life, that day when those good and precious gifts come from God. We look to the future and the bottom line is this – we are not residents here, we are pilgrims. We are not developers, we are transients. We are only here for a time and the older we get the more we realize how short it is. But the best is yet to come. And our hope and our focus ought not to be on the waiting line, but rather what comes ahead.

I took my grandkids to Tweetsie Railroad a few weeks ago. It is the corniest amusement park in the whole state of North Carolina and I like going there. No, I lied, I don't like going there, but my grandkids sure do like going there. And what my grandkids like I like. My wife was so excited she got us up an hour early. I will tell you that I did not appreciate being in a hotel room for an extra hour with three wide awake grandkids because it was really wild in there.

We get to Tweetsie Railroad and we got in line 30 minutes early and they only had two windows open. Two windows, and you know I am Type A, right? Everywhere I go I tell people how to run their business in my head. *'You need more checkout lines. You need this or you need that.'* I am doing that in my head all the time wherever I go. They had two windows open so we stand in that line, we stand in that line, we stand in that line and I am getting so aggravated, and the kids are running around. I am obnoxious

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so I am like, *'Can you believe this? Is this how you run an amusement park?'* But the bottom line was do you know how long I thought about how long I had to stand in line outside once I got inside? It was zero. Then it was all about the kids and getting on the rides and cotton candy and funnel cakes and so on.

We are going to look back sometime on this life, this waiting room that we are in, this line before we get into eternity, and the trouble and the aggravation that this fallen world has created won't matter when we get into the presence of God, when we walk in through those gates, when we are in the eternal place that God has prepared for those who love Him, when we get to that moment none of that is going to matter. We are going to wonder why we had such a bad attitude while we were in line, because this will be so great we are going to forget about what we left behind.

Trials reveal what we love most and best. Let me ask you what do you love first, what do you love best, what do you love most? The trials will help you ascertain that. Trials will help you to value God's priorities and gifts. And by the way the greatest example of this is Jesus because remember what Hebrews Chapter 12 and verse 2 says: ***"Looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."*** Jesus' priority was to fulfill His mission for our redemption. And He put all the pain, all the trials, all the tribulations, all the difficulties aside for you and me. And we ought to do the same for Him.

Trials prepare us for future battles and service. When we get through the little things in life the bigger things get easier. When we survive the inconveniences, the tribulations become doable. II Corinthians Chapter 12 and verse 10 says: ***"For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."*** Why are you strong? Is it because of you and your character? No, it is because Christ lives within us.

The last thing is this – trials turn us into better friends and partners. There are going to be others that you can encourage and minister to who are going through testing. Trials turn us into better friends and partners to those who are being tested. The fact is the difficulty you experience today could become a point of encouragement for someone else around the corner or down the road in another year. You lost a baby; someone in your life may lose a baby. You survived it and you can journey with the next person. You had marriage difficulties but you powered through it, and you did the right thing, you heal, you forgive and you restore. Remember this, it will be a blessing to you for enduring that but at some point in the future you may take another young man or another young woman and you are going to put your arm around them and you are going to say, *'Hey, let me tell you something. You can get through this. And it can be good again. In fact it can be better.'*

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II Corinthians Chapter 1 and verses 3 through 6 says this: ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, 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. For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.”***

Let me ask you this – who around you needs for you to put their arm around them and say, ‘*You can make it? You can survive this. Let me show you God working in you and through you and around you.*’ I am getting ready to dump six kids off the side of the road right now. (*Laughter.*) I really hate this, but I need to go to my four final principles and then we are done.

Number one – it is unrealistic to think that you will not be tested thoroughly in life in a variety of ways; therefore prepare yourself for it. It is simply unrealistic for any of us to think that we are not going to experience trials, tribulations, difficulties, setbacks, broken relationships, betrayal or disappointment. So prepare yourself for it. Gird up your loins and get ready for the battle because the battle is worth winning.

Number two – trials are indicators of an opportunity for God to refine and purify us in our sanctification journey. I don’t have time to go through it, I wish I did, but if you look back in verse 3 it says: ***“For you know that the testing of our faith produces steadfastness.”*** And you know when that steadfastness has its full effect here is what it says in verse 4: ***“And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”*** Those words there are not talking about being without sin, but it simply means is that you are going to be well rounded, that you are going to be mature, that you are going to have skills and knowledge and information and experience that will give you the perspective to hang in there, to endure.

The longer you are married the less likely you are to have a divorce; did you know that? Do you know what the number one reason people who are married for fifty years or more have stayed together say, according to their own testimony? It wasn’t because of a good therapist, it wasn’t because of flowers on Thursdays, it wasn’t because they always said, ‘*I’m sorry first.*’ The number one reason people who have been married for fifty years or more stayed married according to them is – ‘*they just decided to stay married.*’ That is profound, isn’t it? But actually that is biblical. It is that perseverance thing. It is that endurance thing. It is that thing that allows you to weld together, to tough it out, to learn, to grow, to forgive and to be forgiven, and to knit your hearts together through these shared experiences. And folks, the hardest things in your life can be the greatest trophies for joy in the future if you will give them to God. Show me your joy!

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God gives us tools to help us find joy in the midst of adversity. And He lists them. I wanted to go through all of these this morning but He will give you patience, He will give you consistency, He will give you maturity, He will give you balance, He will give you wisdom, He will give you confidence, He will give you faith, He will give you humility, He will give you endurance and at the very end He will give you eternal life. And it is yours. The battle is worth fighting because the victory has already been won.

The last thing is this – living with joy is a testimony of our confidence in the Word of God. Living with joy is a testimony of our confidence in the Word of God. It is a testimony of your confidence in God whether you are serving with joy, or whether you are suffering with joy, or whether you are searching but searching with a confidence in the joy that comes with knowing God has the answer, or whether you are simply standing waiting on the Lord with joy. Understand this, when you live with joy it is not because you are an optimist. When you are living with biblical joy it is not because you are rich and have lots of resources, or because you are educated, or smarter than the average bear. When you live with joy based on your unflinching devotion to the Word of God, your unwavering confidence in the God of the Word, when you see life as transitory, not permanent, when you see this world as not worth grasping, when you lay your hope ahead and don't waste it on today, then you show the world your joy.

**Show me your joy!**

*The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.*