

Tested Faith is Testifying Faith

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[0 : 00] Are we ready? Okay. Sarah, would you please serve us this morning? 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. 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.

Our Father, we are grateful for who you are. Thank you for your goodness, for your grace, for your greatness, for your grandeur, for your glory.

It's our privilege to be here. We're eager to be part of a gathering like this and to sing songs that remind us of who you are and what you have done for us through the work of our Savior, Jesus.

[1 : 13] Thank you for redeeming sinners like us. Lord Jesus, thank you for going to the cross as we have just sang together. Thank you for saving us.

Father, thank you for adopting us and making us your children and forming us into a people. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for your ongoing work in our hearts to make us more like Jesus.

We're grateful to be here. Would you please help us as we turn our attention now to the preaching of your word? Help me as I continue in worship by opening your word and preaching it to your people.

Thank you for this privilege. Would you please help each of us as we listen to your word and as we hear those things that you have said to us and those things that you have purposed to preserve for us so that we might know you more clearly and follow you more closely.

Would you please help us as we continue in worship by sitting under the preaching of your word? We look to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and we ask that everything that we do and say might honor you and bring you more glory.

[2 : 38] For you are our rock and our redeemer. And so we ask in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. How would your life change if you saw trials not as obstacles but as opportunities?

Think about an athlete. Practice. So important, right? So important to practice. So important to be lifting weights and getting stronger and eating the right things and keeping yourself healthy.

But what really matters? Game day, right? That's when you prove whether what you have been working for and working on and working towards, that's when you prove whether those things are real.

Trials work the same way. They don't just test our faith. Trials reveal what is there. The faith that God has given us.

It's to be tested faith. True faith is always tested faith. And when others see us under pressure, they don't just see us.

[4 : 09] They see the God who is sustaining us. This is what I want us to see today. I would love for us to leave with this thought in our minds.

That we are sustained by God. And that trials are opportunities, not obstacles. Opportunities for our faith to be proven.

So that others are pointed to this God who sustains us. Last week we saw that joyful endurance produces greater Christ likeness.

Becoming more like Jesus. This is a compelling motivation to be steadfast in trial. But James is not done. In today's passage, he offers a second motivation.

A second purpose for our trials. Every trial is a mission field. Tested faith is testifying faith.

[5 : 17] Every trial is a gospel rich opportunity to proclaim God's goodness. Verse 12, which Sarah read for us, works like a bridge between the verses that we looked at last week, 1 through 11, and verses 13 through 18.

Notice again how steadfastness under trial results in a blessing for today and a promise for the future. Here's verse 12 again.

Blessed is the man or woman 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.

God blesses those who endure trials. I don't know about you, but when I'm suffering, I don't feel like I am being very blessed.

But this is what God's word says. It says that when we are steadfast under trial, we are blessed. And so rather than leaning into what we feel in the moment, let's choose to believe what God says is true.

[6 : 49] Those who remain steadfast under trial are blessed. But notice also, the last portion of the verse, James offers a promise about the future, but the promise is conditional.

The crown of life is not a participation award. It is given to those who go through trials of various kinds and continue to love God.

I mentioned this last week, but let me remind you again, because I think it will be helpful for our interpretation of the text before us this week.

Our English word here in James that's translated trials is translating a single Greek word, but it has two different definitions.

The first definition is a trial in the sense of a test, like what Jesus withstood as he went into the wilderness and he was tested, tempted by the devil.

[8 : 05] The second word that can be translated here, it's temptations, sinful desires that are inside of you, or perhaps the object of those sinful desires, the temptation itself.

So we need to be clear about these two words because it's the same word in the original language. And so we need to discern what is it? How does this make sense?

Is it a trial? Or is James talking about a temptation? This may seem like semantics, but I promise these words matter because in verse 13, James addresses something.

Something is stirring, is brewing, circulating within the community of believers. Here's what it is. Someone has failed the test. They have not remained steadfast under trial.

And now that person is blaming God for putting him to the test. Look at verse 13. Let no one say when he is tempted.

[9 : 20] I am being tempted by God. Now remember, same Greek word.

So just this first phrase, we need to make sense of this. Here are our interpretive options. It could be that James is saying, let no one say when he is tested, I am being tested by God.

Except for we know that it's God who brings testing. So that doesn't make sense, right? We have to throw out that first understanding of it. It can't be tested both times.

Here's the second way that you could interpret it. You could say, let no one say when he is tempted, I am being tempted by God.

That would be an accurate way of translating the verse. But it does seem like James wants to make a little play here on these words.

[10 : 22] And so I think the third way that you could take this is better. You might say this, let no one say when he is tested, I am being tempted by God.

Do you hear the switch? The Christian Standard Bible is helpful here, I think. It says this, no one undergoing a trial should say, I am being tempted by God.

Let's read it again. Verse 13, 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, and then desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death.

In every trial, there is a choice. Give in to temptation, or stand the test.

[11 : 43] Let your sinful desire win, or remain steadfast. Despite what you might read in a bestseller, or what you might hear on a podcast, or learn with a self-help program, your heart really is more sinful than you think.

Ever since Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the garden, every child has been born with a fatal birth defect. It is not the kind of birth defect that you can see.

It is not a birth defect that you can treat with medicine, or a medical procedure. This birth defect is spiritual. We are born bent towards sin.

Look again at verse 14. Each person is tempted, and when he is lured and enticed, by his own desire.

Now, I think we know this, but let me just state it plainly. Any longing for what God forbids arises from within us.

[13 : 05] Our hearts have a magnetic attraction to temptation. We are drawn to it. We are seduced by it. And we are inclined to think, I can handle this.

And self-help programs will tell you, you can handle this. But what we learn is that temptations are stronger than we assume. Because our hearts are more wicked than we want to admit.

Here's the pattern. A trial comes our way. And we are enticed.

We are tempted to sin. The desire to give in and betray the character of Jesus, it burns deep in our hearts. Like a \$10 bill in the pocket of a 12-year-old at the concession stand.

That desire burns down inside of us. And left unchecked, the desire doesn't stay there. Soon the desire gives birth to sin.

[14 : 14] And sin also gives birth to something. Sin, the natural result of the tempted heart, it gives birth to something awful. To death.

Death is the unavoidable outcome. Of sin. Child of God, when you sin, it is not because God didn't give you a choice.

It is not because God didn't give you the power that you need to say no. It is not because the devil made you do it. It is not because of impossible circumstances or really influential friends.

You sin because you are a sinner. Lured and enticed by your own desire.

Now, an objection comes to mind at this point. And maybe you're already thinking it. If God sends trials to make me more like Jesus, and this is supposedly a good thing, it really starts to sound like God is setting me up for failure.

[15 : 26] You feel that objection? It starts to feel like whatever temptation must just have been too strong for me, and therefore it's God's fault when I sin.

James counters. Don't blame your temptation on God. Don't blame your sin on God.

God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself doesn't tempt anyone. Look at verse 16. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers and sisters.

Whenever you see this in your Bible, pay attention. The authors of Scripture, the Spirit are calling, the Holy Spirit is calling to mind something that we are inclined to be deceived about.

Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers and sisters. 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.

[16 : 42] God is untainted by sin. You have no reason to be suspicious of his motives. There is no hint of perversion in the Father of lights.

Nothing shifty, nothing shady, that moves him to trip you up like an unkind child on the playground.

Don't be deceived. Our God is the giver of every good gift, and he brings trials into our lives in order to make us more like Jesus.

And then in verse 18, we get God's second purpose for trials. 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.

physical life originates from our parents. And in addition to physical life, they passed on to us the sinfulness that they received from their parents.

[18 : 07] And this goes all the way back to Adam and Eve. Your heart is bent towards sin, more wicked than you want to admit. But praise God, there is a second birth.

A rebirth. We call this regeneration. This new life originates from God's choice. In other words, you don't believe in order to get the new birth.

You believe because God gives it. our experience of conversion, our salvation by grace alone through faith alone, this is a response to God's choice to give life.

A response to God's choice to make you part of his family, the new family that he is forming by the word of truth, by the gospel.

And God's purpose for this family. What is it? What is the purpose for this family? James says that we, the community, the church, believers, that we together should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

[19 : 26] What does that mean? Well, if you're a gardener or if you're a farmer, the first tomato, the first jalapeno pepper, the first strawberry, it's special.

Why? Why is that first piece of fruit so special? Because it's evidence that there is more fruit that is to come.

It's the promise. There really is a harvest coming. The seeds that you planted, they really have grown. And this is the first piece of fruit. It's not the only piece of fruit.

It's just the first one. But it testifies that there is more yet to come. In the Old Testament, God's people, they took the first fruits and they offered them back to God.

Why would you do that? Like, you worked really hard for this harvest. Why are you giving it back to God? Well, it's a way of saying to God, we believe that everything good comes from you.

[20 : 37] And we believe that because you have given us this first fruit, that you will also be faithful to give us the full harvest. first fruits. How does James use this idea of first fruits?

When God rebirthed us, he made us his first fruits. We are special to him, chosen, set apart, meant to show the world what it looks like to be part of God's family.

And just like first fruits in a garden show that more fruit is coming, our new lives in Christ show that God is doing something big.

He's doing something big. Something in the world, something in creation. Our lives are first fruits. We give evidence of what he is doing and will do with all of the rest of creation.

Trials don't just test our faith. Trials give us opportunities to testify about our faith.

[22 : 00] To tell others that our hope is not in security. Our hope is not in money, in family, in political power, in careers, in health, in career, in retirement savings.

Our hope is not in those things. Our hope is in God and in his promises for our future. We are God's first fruits.

And our endurance through testing means that the best is yet to come. We are evidence of what God will do for all creation.

And this is why Paul can write, for I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will one day be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

[23 : 28] For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

It is in this hope that we are saved. Friend, I wonder if you have this hope.

I wonder if you are looking forward to receiving the crown of life. Remember, it is for those who love God. Do you love God?

I'm not asking if you say that you love God or that you sing about loving God or even that you sing about God loving us.

I'm asking, do you love God? And if you say yes, then here's a follow-up question. Do you love him with all your heart and with all your soul and strength and mind?

[24 : 45] We all fall short of this. Sin entered the world through one man's disobedience and as a result, our hearts are bent towards sin.

sin. But here is the good news of the gospel. Through one man's obedience, through Jesus' life and death and resurrection, many are made righteous.

those who remain steadfast under trial and persevere in loving God are promised the crown of life and you can get in on this promise this morning.

You can get in on this promise by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. Call upon the name of the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.

Brothers and sisters, trials are painful and they seem so unfair. Sometimes we fail the test and we give in to temptation and we betray the beautiful character of Jesus.

[26 : 12] and then we blame God for putting us in a difficult circumstance as if being on a mission field was ever supposed to be easy.

What if we ask God for wisdom to see trials not as obstacles but as opportunities? Our friends, our family, neighbors, colleagues, they are watching.

They are noticing how we respond to the bad things that happen in our lives. Will you crumble under that test or will you remain steadfast and continue to love God?

They're watching us. Trials are not an interruption to missional opportunities. every trial is a mission field.

Steadfastness through trials testifies that God really is good, that he really is worthy of trust, that he is faithful, and that he will fulfill his promise, that his kingdom will come, and that our savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, will make all things new.

[27 : 41] Child of God, every good and perfect gift comes from your father of lights. In Christ, you have everything you need for life and godliness.

righteousness. The letter from James reminds us that true faith is tested faith.

Steadfastness through suffering results in the delightful gift of becoming wiser with Jesus. Jesus. This wisdom shapes us in humble confidence and gentle reasonableness, merciful goodness, and peaceable kindness.

Every word we speak, every choice we make, every trial we endure is an opportunity to show our faith in action, an opportunity to testify of our father's goodness, to offer hope and healing through the word of truth, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Think back to the athlete. Practice is important, but it's game day that reveals what's inside. Every trial is like our game day.

[29 : 11] It's a mission field. And when we remain steadfast, the world doesn't just see us. They see who sustains us.

So remember, tested faith is testifying faith. And every trial is a mission field, and God is using your endurance to show his goodness to the world by God's grace.

Let's be doers of the word, not hearers only. Let's pray. Father, thank you for answering our prayer.

Holy Spirit, thank you for being faithful. Thank you for giving us clarity and understanding this particular portion of scripture.

And as we perhaps understand it just a little better maybe than we did before we came this morning, would you please help us to believe and obey what your word tells us is true?

[30 : 33] We confess far more often than we care to admit. we give in to trials and they become temptations.

And we confess that it is not your fault but ours, that the sinfulness that lurks and lingers inside rises up and is drawn and enticed and attracted to this sin.

Father, we plead the blood of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and we receive forgiveness again and again, and we remember that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ, and we look forward to that day when we receive the crown of life, when we will also be made new, and there will be no sinful desire inside of us anymore.

What a day that will be. until then, would you help us as we engage the mission field of trial and suffering and adversity and persecution, would you help us to remain steadfast?

We commit ourselves to you. it is because of your great love that we are not overcome. Thank you for what you have done, are doing, and will do.

[32 : 18] In the name of the Lord Jesus, we pray. Amen. you