

Sermon Notes for April 18, 2010

Sermon Series
Trials in the Christian Life
“Dealing With Our Trials” – Part I
James 1:1-8

Video: On May 27, 2001, Martin & Gracia Burnham, missionaries who had served with New Tribes Missions for 18 years, were kidnapped by the Abu Sayyaf, an Islamic terrorist group, while they were on vacation in the Philippines. After a year in the jungles of the southern Philippines, Martin was killed. Gracia continues to serve Christ in full-time ministry.

Introduction

A. **CONFUSION** About Trials In The Christian Life

1. In 1989, Jewish **Rabbi Harold Kushner**, wrote a book entitled, **“When Bad Things Happen To Good People.”**
 - a. Rabbi Kushner wrote this book as a result of his son, Aaron’s, death
 - b. Aaron was diagnosed with **progeria**, a very rare disease that causes a person to age very rapidly
 1. Aaron’s hair began thinning at 12 months
 2. He never grew taller than a 3 year old
 3. by the time he was 10, Aaron’s body looked like a 60 year old.
 4. when Aaron died, two days after his 14th birthday, he weighed only 25 lbs.
 - c. This is **Rabbi Kushner’s** observation about suffering:

“The conventional explanation, that God sends us the burden because He knows that we are strong enough to handle it, **has it all wrong. Fate, not God, sends us the problem.**”
2. Certain christians do not believe that we should ever suffer at all
 - a. that we should live a “victorious life” all of the time.
 - b. and if we are “truly spiritual,” we should:
 1. never be sick
 2. always be happy
 3. and be wealthy
 - c. Prosperity theologian, **Kenneth Copeland**, once said:

“Tradition has taught that God uses sickness, trials and tribulation to teach us. **This idea, however, is not based on the Word of God.** God HAS NEVER used sickness to discipline His children and keep them in line. **Sickness is of the devil, and God doesn’t need the devil to straighten us out!**”

B. **CONFIRMATION** About Trials In The Christian Life

1. We are going to see today that the **WORD OF GOD DOES TEACH THAT CHRISTIANS GO THROUGH TRIALS.**
2. **AND THAT GOD DOES USE THESE TRIALS TO SANCTIFY HIS CHILDREN.**

- a. we will look today at one of **MANY PASSAGES** that teach us that God allows trials in our lives to change us
- b. today, we will look at, **James 1:1-8**

I. The VALIDITY of Trials

A. WHAT Was James Point?

1. WHO IS JAMES KIDDING?

- a. **Vs. 2** – “**Consider it pure joy**, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.”
 - 1. “Is James saying what I think he is saying?”
 - 2. “It sounds as if we are supposed to be happy when we go through trials.”
 - 3. “What kind of view is this?”
 - 4. Was Gracia Burnham supposed to “be joyful” about the murder of her husband, Martin?
- b. This attitude of James “seems” to make no sense at all.

2. JAMES IS NOT KIDDING ANYONE!

- a. James is speaking to a Christian audience.
- b. And he wanted them to have a spiritual perspective on their trials.

B. WHO Was The Audience?

Vs 2 – “Consider it pure joy, **my brothers**, whenever you face trials of many kinds,”

1. James is speaking to **suffering New Testament Christians**.

- a. More specifically, he is referring to those of “the dispersion” or the “diaspora.”
 - 1. After the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7-8, Jewish Christians in Israel “dispersed” or scattered.
 - 2. In a sense, they went into hiding all over the nation of Israel and other parts of the world.
 - 3. But **BECAUSE** they were “Jewish Christians,” they were rejected both by their fellow Jews as well as the Gentile elite.
 - a. They were robbed of their possessions and hauled into court.
 - b. They essentially had less standing than slaves.
- b. Those “dispersed” became “religious, social and economic pariahs.” (**Kent Hughes**)
- c. It would have been similar to the experience of the Jews during the Holocaust during WWII.

2. James is speaking about **other saints in the Scriptures** who have suffered as well.

- a. **Abraham** was tested **25 years** before he was called to sacrifice his son Isaac.
- b. **Joseph** was tried for **13 years** before he reached the court of Pharaoh.
- c. **Moses** was tried for **80 years** before he led the people of Israel out of Egypt.

- d. **Jesus** suffered **through His life** and especially as He was beaten and crucified
 - e. **Paul** suffered greatly during his life and was eventually **martyred for his faith.**
 - f. The **disciples** all suffered and were ultimately killed or died because of their commitment to Christ.
3. James is speaking to **us**.
- a. James is speaking to us as we struggle and suffer in this physical life.
 - b. James is speaking to those who are currently, at this very moment, going through a hard time
4. James is speaking to **those who believe that it is “unspiritual” to suffer.**
- a. I want to ask those who believe that Christians should never struggle or suffer:
 - 1. What happened to believers in the Bible?
 - a. Did the saints of the Old and New Testament struggle?
 - b. Were they all “so spiritual” that they were unaffected?
 - 2. **I want to challenge those who have such a view to FIND “SUCH PEOPLE” IN THE BIBLE!**
 - a. “Those people who practiced their faith and never suffered.”... **WHERE ARE THEY IN THE BIBLE?**
 What about:
 - 1. Noah
 - 2. Joseph
 - 3. Abraham
 - 4. Moses
 - 5. David
 - 6. Esther
 - 7. Daniel
 - 8. Jeremiah
 - 9. The disciples
 - 10. Paul
 - 11. Jesus
 - 12. **Hebrews 11:36-38 – “Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated--the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.”**
 - b. **WHERE IS THE TEACHING IN THE WORD OF GOD TO SUPPORT SUCH A VIEW?**

- c. **Henry Blackaby** – “It is pretty difficult to find any examples in Scripture of people whom God used mightily **without it costing them something.**”
 - b. I want to address those people who think that you are showing a “lack of faith” by suffering.
- 5. James is speaking **through His Word.**
 - a. **STRUGGLES, TRIALS AND SUFFERING ARE THE NORM FOR THE CHRISTIAN** and we will find out why today.
 - b. I want to say to those preachers who do not believe that Christians should experience trials in the Christian life –
 - 1. You are denying the lives of countless believers all throughout history who have struggled.
 - 2. As well are you denying the very Word of God that teaches that Christians do experience trials.
 - c. After all, **WHAT DOES JESUS HIMSELF SAY?**
John 16:33 - "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. **In this world you will have trouble.** But take heart! I have overcome the world."

II. The VARIETY Of Trials.

A. The RESPONSE To Trials.

- 1. A call to **confusion**?
 - a. It is indeed confusing to try to understand what James is saying.
 - 1. How can trials be considered a joy?
 - 2. The last time that I checked, suffering and trials caused me pain, not joy.
 - b. In fact, I want to do everything that I can to AVOID trials – don’t you?
- 2. A call to **consider.**
Vs. 2 – “**consider** it pure joy.”
 - a. The **definition** of **consider.** (two definitions)
 - 1. **to evaluate**
 - a. to dream
 - b. to think about
 - c. **but more importantly, to consider the trial in the context of what God may be doing in your life**
 - 2. **to be a leader**
 - a. to go before
 - b. to go directly to God
 - b. The **application** of consider.
 - 1. Putting these definitions together, the word consider means that when you experience a trial:
 - a. You are to **CONSIDER AND THINK** about what God could possibly be doing in your life.
 - 1. What could He be teaching you?
 - 2. How does He want this trial to impact your life?

joy. In spite of everything, [God] gave me the conviction of being loved and the certainty that nothing could separate me from Him. It was not happiness or jolliness but a constant flow of the Spirit through me. At no time did He give me the easy confidence that everything would work out as I wanted it on my timetable, but that He was in charge and would give me and my family enough courage for each day.”

2. We can only feel this way if we believe in the sovereignty of God

Confession Of Faith - Of Providence

God, Who created everything, also upholds everything. He directs, regulates and governs every creature, action and thing, from the greatest to the least, by His completely wise and holy providence. He does so in accordance with His infallible foreknowledge and the voluntary, unchangeable purpose of His own will, all to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice goodness and mercy.

3. **Elisabeth Elliott** in her book **Let Me Be A Woman**, records the story of **Gladys Aylward**. She was a woman who was unable to accept the looks God had given her. Ms. Aylward told how when she was a child she had two great sorrows. **One, that while all her friends had beautiful golden hair, hers was black.** The other, while her friends were still growing, she had stopped. **She was about four feet ten inches tall.** She was called to be a missionary. When at last she reached the country to which God had called her to be a missionary, she stood on the wharf in Shanghai and looked around at the people to whom He had called her. **“Every single one of them,” she said, “had black hair. And every one of them had stopped growing when I did.”** She was able to look to God and exclaim, “Lord God, you know what You’re doing!”

- b. Pure Joy Is The View That Despite My Struggles, Trials And Suffering, **GOD IS SOVEREIGN AND HE LOVES ME!**

B. The REALITY Of Trials.

Vs. 2 – “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, **whenever** you face trials of many kinds.”

1. For many Christians, they think that **THEY** will be different:
 - a. I don’t “want to” go through trials.

- b. I don't "need to" go through trials.
- 2. Notice that the word is not "if" but **when** you face trials.
 - a. You can't mistake the word.
 - b. The Greek word is: **hotan**
 - 1. when
 - 2. as soon as
 - 3. as long as
 - c. **IT IS A GIVEN THAT CHRISTIANS WILL GO THROUGH TRIALS!**
 - 1. **Hebrews 12:7-8** – "Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? **If you are not disciplined** (and everyone undergoes discipline), **then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.**"
 - 2. C.S. Lewis – "The real problem is not why some pious, humble, believing people suffer, but why some do not."

C. The RAINBOW Of Trials.

Vs. 2 – "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you **face trials of many kinds.**"

- 1. The Greek word for many kinds is the Greek word **poikolos** from where we get the word **polka dot**.
- 2. In other words, not only will we undergo many trials, but we will undergo **many different "kinds" of trials** –
 - a. "many dots" of different sizes
 - b. financial
 - c. relational
 - d. physical
 - e. spiritual
- 3. **Hasn't that been your experience?** Have you only struggled in one area of your life? I have struggled IN EACH AND EVERY ONE OF THESE AREAS.
 - a. I have had **relational** problems.
 - b. I have had **physical** problems (sleep problems for almost 2 ½ years)
 - c. I have had **emotional** problems
 - d. I have had **spiritual** problems

III. The VERACITY Of Trials.

A. The NECESSITY Of Trials.

- 1. Our **knowledge** of trials.

Vs. 3 – "because we **know** that the **testing** of our faith develops perseverance."

- a. The word **know**

- 1. The Greek - **ginosko**

- a. It is a word that means to perceive, to learn, to understand.
- b. It suggests that as believers, we come to understand early in our Christian lives that God is doing a work in our lives and that He uses these trials to change us.

- c. But the word also speaks of a man being intimate with a woman.
 1. Meaning that as Christians God is intimately involved in our lives.
 2. And that as you “know” your spouse and their moods, so you “know” when God is doing a work in your life – you “expect” it.
 2. We should “**know**” that a sovereign God is always involved in the lives of His children.
- b. The word **testing**
- Vs. 3** – “Because you know that the **testing of your faith** develops perseverance.”
1. **One** – it was a Greek word relating to **sterling coinage**.
 - a. to assess the purity of coins
 - b. Why must a coin be pure?
 1. What is today’s quarter really worth?
 2. Israel – 100 coins to make a penny
 3. Fort Knox – at one time our true financial stability.
 - a. Currently housing some 147.3 million ounces of gold
 - b. at almost 1200.00 per oz.
 4. This gold must be absolutely pure if it is to be worth 1200.00 an ounce.
 2. **Two** – it was a word referring to **ancient pottery**.
 - a. Meaning that the pottery had gone through the furnace,
 - b. And that it had not cracked and thus was approved to be used.
2. Our **need** of trials.
- Vs. 3** – “Because you know that the testing of your faith **develops perseverance**.”
- a. Trials **create** in us.
 1. The word “develop” in the Greek means to achieve, perform, work out and bring about.
 2. **The word “develop” suggests that something will be “produced” or “developed” that was not there in the beginning.**
 - a. we do not have **patience**, so God puts us in situations to create patience (**the school**)
 - b. we do not have **humility** so God puts us in situations to create humility (**K: 2nd grade teacher**)
 - b. Trials **change** us.
 1. The word perseverance is the attitude or view of life that these trials are directed to produce.
 2. What perseverance is **not**:

- a. It is not a stoic attitude that sits under the trial because it should endure it.
- b. It is not a repetition of Bible verses that have taught us to learn endurance through trials by repeating.
- 3. What perseverance is:
 - a. **PERSEVERANCE IS DEALING WITH THE TOTALITY OF YOUR PERSONALITY AND ALL OF THAT ENERGY AND BEING ABLE TO HARNESS IT WHILE YOU ARE ENDURING THE TRIAL.**
 - b. It is not a passive attitude but an active one.
 - 1. R.C.H. Lenski – brave patience; remaining under
 - 2. Perseverance is seen in a strong, able, powerful thoroughbred horse being led around the paddock because it had previously been broken.
 - a. The horse is the same powerful horse.
 - b. Its power is simply being able to be used productively.
 - c. **THE HORSE DOES NOT CHANGE ITS POWER OR ITS PERSONALITY!**

B. The NOBILITY Of Trials.

- 1. Trials change us; they make us more like Christ and less like ourselves: they cause us to die to self and live for Christ.
- 2. **EVERYTHING IN OUR LIFE THAT WILL EVENTUALLY BE USED MUST BE CHANGED OR CONFORMED.**
 - a. Biologists recognize a principle at work among plants and animals. This natural wonder is called **“the adversity principle.”** As strange as it seems, habitual well-being is not advantageous to a species.
 - b. In 1991, in southern Arizona, “for two years, Scientists sequestered themselves in an artificial environment called *Biosphere 2*. Inside their self-sustaining community, the Biospherians created a number of mini-environments, including a desert, rain forest, even an ocean. Nearly every weather condition could be simulated except one, wind. Over time, the effects of their windless environment became apparent. **A number of acacia trees bent over and trunks grew weak and could not hold up their own weight.**”
 - c. No one who **competes as an athlete** simply walks on to the court or field and becomes proficient.
 - 1. Hours and hours of practice are needed to become a good athlete.
 - 2. Professional golfers – “it looks so easy.”
 - d. **This sermon**
 - 1. Hours of study and work
 - 2. Practice to “make it look effortless.”
- 3. What condition were you in when you came to Christ?
 - a. Were you dedicated to Christ? NO – you were consumed with self!

- b. What did you know of His Word – NOTHING.
- c. What was your idea of serving others?
- d. **ILLUSTRATION OF THE POTTER AND THE CLAY.**

IV. The VICTORY Of Trials.

A. The PROCESS Of Trials.

Vs. 4 – “Perseverance must **finish its work** so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

1. Our **allowance** of trials.

- a. In some versions, notice what verse 4 says, “**Let** perseverance finish its work.”
 - 1. The word let means to:
 - a. have
 - b. to wear
 - c. **to hold in the hand**
 - d. to possess a thing
 - 2. Instead of fighting trials, christians need to understand that trials have a purpose in our lives; christians need to “own” these trials
- b. It all depends on how much you believe that God is involved in your life.
 - 1. The words “finish its work” suggests that you and I are a “spiritual project” of God.
 - 2. Don’t fight Him, let Him do His work!
 - 3. **Phil 1:6** – “being confident of this, that **He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**”

2. The **aim** of trials.

- a. God has a purpose in these trials.
- b. One of the most fascinating events in nature is the emergence of the **Cecropia moth** from its cocoon, an event that occurs only with much struggle on the part of the moth to free itself. There is a story of a man who witnessed a Cecropia moth struggling to get free from its cocoon. In an effort to help, and not realizing the necessity of the struggle, the viewer snipped the shell of the cocoon with his knife. Soon the moth came out with its wings all crimped and shriveled. As the man watched, the wings remained weak. The moth, which in a few moments would have stretched those wings to fly, was now doomed to crawling out its brief life in frustration of ever being the beautiful creature God created it to be.

What the man in the story did not realize was that the struggle to emerge from the cocoon was an **essential part of developing the muscle system of the moth’s body and pushing the body fluids out into the wings to expand them.** By unwisely seeking to cut short the moth’s struggle, the man had actually crippled the moth and doomed its existence.

B. The PRODUCT Of Trials.

Vs. 4b – “that you may be **mature, complete, not lacking anything.**”

1. mature

- a. The Greek word is **telios**, a word meaning **finished**, brought to an end.
- b. Spiritually “grown-up”
- c. Being a “grown up,” you become a useful member of society.
- d. Illustration:
 1. A scholar is telios when he is able to teach others.
 2. A mother is telios when she is ready and able to bear and raise a child.
 3. **I have spent the last 33 years becoming telios:**
 - a. 7 years in Columbia, SC
 - b. 10 years in a Miss. small town
 - c. **SO THAT I COULD BE PREPARED TO SERVE
HERE!**

2. complete

- a. The word is **without blemish.**
- b. For, christians cannot serve God faithfully with a life full of sin.
- c. A dentist will melt a gold ingot to make a filling.
 1. The ingot will “look” pure until it is put in the crucible and a Bunsen burner is turned on underneath it.
 2. As the gold melts, dirt or dross will collect at the top of the surface.
 3. It is my opinion that no believer will even be able to serve Christ until he has “gone through the fire”
 - a. fellow Seminary student – “Jim, have you gone through the fire?”
 - b. I saw him later to tell him that “I had gone through the fire.”

3. not lacking anything.

- a. Trials are used by God to **expose our weakest areas.**
- b. After exposing us, God fills those voids to use us.
- c. **Chamique Holdsclaw** came to UT as an All-American H.S. player.
 1. She had never lost a game. She had won a championship in every year she played competitive basketball.
 2. Perhaps she assumed that she had no real weaknesses on the basketball court.
 3. Until she met **Coach Pat Summit**, who found flaws in her game.
 - a. She wasn’t as aggressive as she needed to be.
 - b. Her defense wasn’t strong.
 - c. She didn’t attack the goal.
 4. How would Coach Summit make Chamique Holdsclaw into the greatest woman player in the world - by putting her in situations that exposed her weaknesses.

V. The VARIABLE In Trials.

A. Our COMFORT In Trials.

1. God's call to **come**.

Vs. 5– “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

a. When a trial comes, God “**expects**” us to be confused.

1. **If a trial did not cause us some discomfort and confusion, it would not be a trial.**

2. Confusion does not represent a lack of faith. Instead, it means that we are merely human.

b. But God does not want us to “stay confused.” He wants us to come to Him.

2. God's call to **comprehend**.

a. Our need in the trial is “wisdom.”

1. What wisdom is **not**:

a. Wisdom is not education.

b. Wisdom is not theology.

c. Wisdom is not sitting down and reading all of the verses in the Bible on trials or reading books about how other Christians endured their trials.

2. What wisdom **is**:

a. Wisdom, defined biblically, is “practical wisdom for any given moment.”

b. In other words, we are called to cry out to God asking:

1. **“What is going on?”**

2. **“What are you attempting to teach me?”**

3. **“What do I need to learn?”**

b. most of us have an idea what God intends to teach us when we first experience a trial.

3. God's call to **certainty**.

Vs. 5 – “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”

a. He will not rebuke you in your coming and asking Him about the trial.

1. KJV – “upbraideth not”

2. NIV – “without finding fault”

3. He will not reject you because of:

a. your sin

b. your stupid questions

c. your fear and panic

b. He will answer you.

1. The word generously means liberally.

2. frankly; sincerely; totally

B. Our CONFUSION In Trials.

Vs. 6-8 – “But when he asks, **he must believe and not doubt**, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.”

1. To make his point even more powerful, James says that you should not doubt that God will give you wisdom.
2. When you as a Christian, go through these trials:
 - a. You are called to come boldly, seeking wisdom from God to make sense of the trial.
 - b. But don't doubt that He will tell you why, lest you miss the blessing of the trial.**

Conclusion:

1. Trials are difficult. Otherwise they would not be a trial.
2. But according to our text, they are a part of the ministry of God in our lives to change us.
3. We must learn several lessons from our trials.
 - a. If you are going through trials, it shows that God is working in your life to change you.
 - b. If God is working in your life, then it shows that God is there.
 - c. Don't miss the blessings of your trials by boldly seeking His face to see what He desires to teach you.

Oswald Sanders in Spiritual Leadership:

*When God wants to drill a man
And thrill a man
And skill a man,
When God wants to mold a man
To play the noblest part;
When He yearns with all His heart
To create so great and bold a man
That all the world shall be amazed,
Watch His methods, watch His ways!
How He ruthlessly perfects
Whom He royally elects!
How He hammers him and hurts him,
And with mighty blows converts him
Into trial shapes of clay which
Only God understands;
While his tortured heart is crying
And he lifts beseeching hands!
How He bends but never breaks
When his good He undertakes;
How He uses whom He chooses
And with every purpose fuses him;
By every act induces him
To try His splendor out –
God knows what He's about!*