

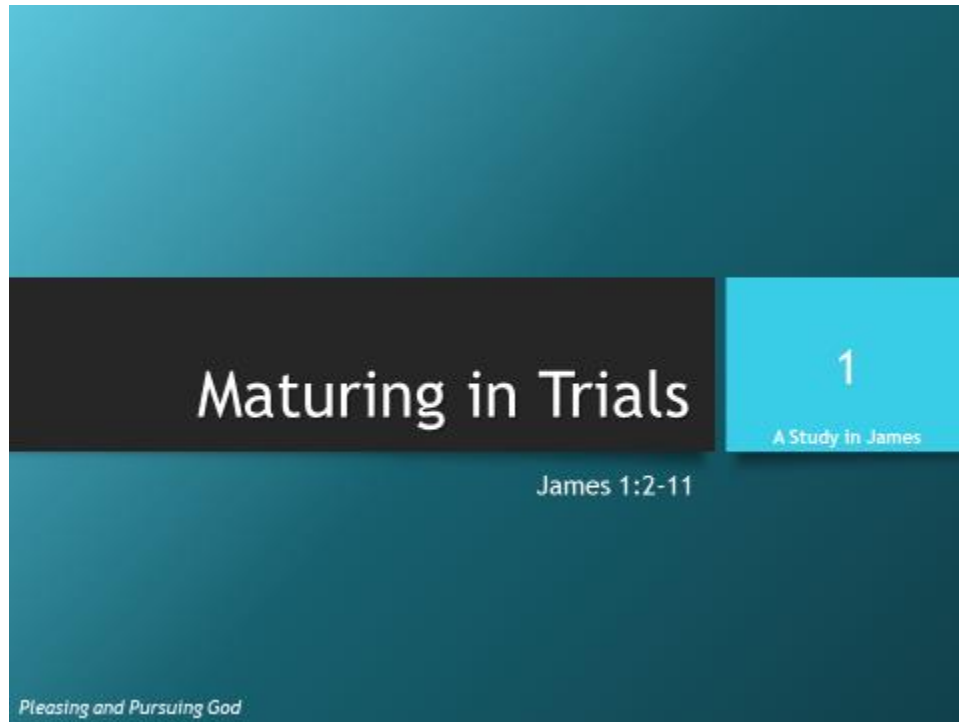
Maturing in Trials

James 1:2-11

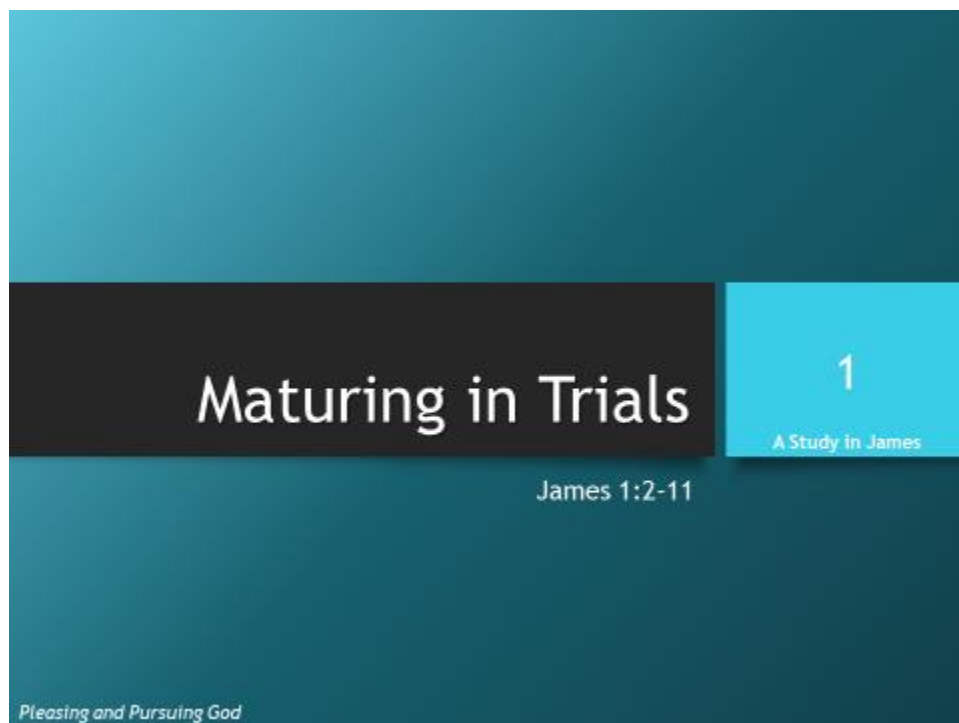
Speaker: Pastor Mark Schindler

May 11, 2014 PM

① [Slide 1. - Title]



① [Slide 2. - Introduction]



Maturity does not come easy. We know we want to have it; and we want to know we have it. But what is it? I think maturity is one of those things where it is easier to recognize its absence than it is its presence. And we generally gain maturity more by experience than through studying about it. Ironically, it is often gained through our own failures. And it is often needed most when we want it least.

We often think of maturity in terms of acting one's age; be it physically or spiritually speaking. At some level, maturity is a measure of one's ability to be responsible and interact with others in a reasonable way. In contrast, a person who is immature is identified by foolish behavior and a lack of consideration and care over what belongs to them or others. Someone who is mature is thought to be faithful, experienced, and wise in way that is made even better when mixed with a generous measure of humility.

I can remember one of my own hard lessons in maturity. Less than five years out of college I was working at small software company in Cincinnati. I happened to be in a meeting one day with the CEO of the company where it was shared confidentially that one of the sales people was going to be let go. Within hours of hearing this news, I just had to share it with a coworker to convey my importance through this inside knowledge. By the end of the day, the person being let go had heard the news and it was quickly traced back to me. It was a painful lesson in both maturity and humility. But what I learned about the value of trust and confidence in that moment has stuck with me to this day.

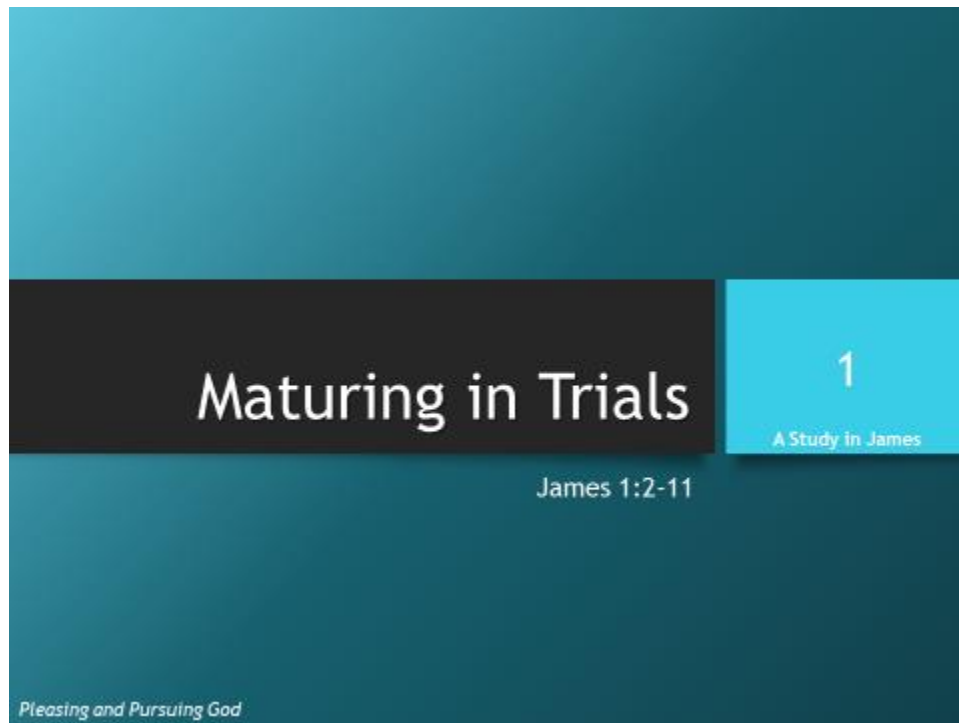
The book of James begins with instructions on maturity. **To be sure the transition from the short introduction to opening instructions is an abrupt one.** There is no formal greeting or thanksgiving prayer. James gets straight to the point. And it is in this abrupt beginning that we have the clues to his purpose. James' readers were Jewish believers who through persecution and severe hardships were being scattered throughout the Roman Empire. And as a result of their dispersion, God fulfilled His plans to spread the Gospel to places it had never been.

We should not miss the essential link that James makes between his central theme of faith in Christ with Christian maturity in our passage this morning. James boldly places trials and testing at the start of his letter knowing the tremendous difficulties and challenges these believers were facing. Questions, doubts, and struggles are a natural reaction to life's difficulties. Nobody wants to go through pain and suffering.

But James addresses their trials immediately and starts off reminding them that faith should change the way believers understand and respond to trials. Faith is not something we should have only when life is good. Mature faith does not wither and die when life gets hard. Instead it is strengthened and grows deeper. And if James' words were an encouragement to those it was originally written to, than it should also be an encouragement to us as we face testing of our own.

[opening prayer]

① [Slide 3. James 1:2-8]



Please open your bibles to James Chapter 1 and verse 2. Let us turn our hearts toward God as we read His word to us this morning. Follow along as I read.

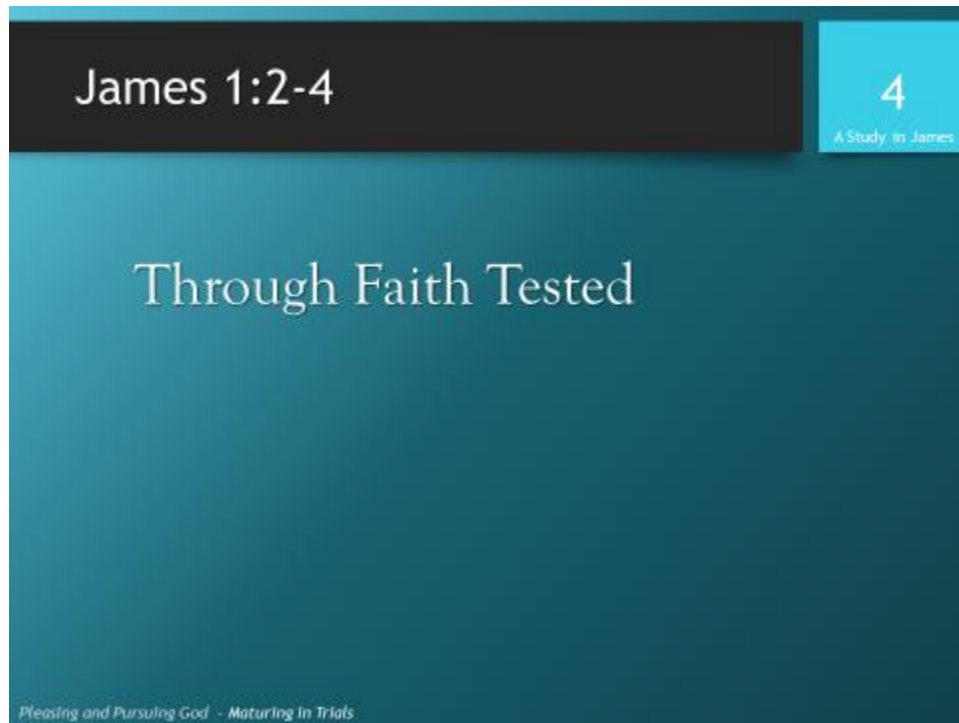
“2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. 6 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. 7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. 9 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, 10 and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. 11 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.”

Our passage this morning flows through three imperatives or commands by which we can face trials and suffering with a maturing faith. James is answering the questions we all want to ask. How do we deal with life’s troubles, especially when they are undeserved or unexpected? How do we make sense of what often appears to be arbitrary and painful circumstances? What does God expect of His people as they struggle to have faith in the middle of life’s stormy seas? These are honest questions that run through our minds as we struggle between doubts and faith.

James gives three instructions for believers who are experiencing trials. We see each of these with words “Count” in verse 2, “Let” in verse 5, and “Let” again in verse 9. His first instruction is to count it all joy. In other words, we are to understand and believe that God is sovereign in our trials and is using them to produce a mature faith. His second is to ask for wisdom. We are to

see where we lack understanding and ask God to make us wise through the trial. Third, we are to keep a humble perspective. That is, when we reflect on the larger perspective of eternity and the greatness of Christ our problems will look small. These three principles will help us walk with a mature and steadfast faith as we encounter life's inevitable struggles.

① [Slide 4. Through Faith Tested]



James first instruction to believers in the midst of suffering and persecution is found in verses 2 through 4. James writes, *“2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”* So James first principle is that maturing in trials happens through faith tested.

If James were communicating these first two verses to us today I think he would probably say something like this. “Hey, this is James, serving God and our Savior Jesus Christ. You know when you are going through suffering and you feel like your life is totally out of your control. Well just think of it as pure joy my dear friends, even when you are being slammed and overwhelmed with life's problems.”

Now let me ask, how would you react if someone wrote that in a letter to you? I would want to go, “Seriously, that's how you want to start encouraging me.” We could understand James writing to these believers with a few words to hang in there. Or possibly some good words of encouragement to be strong, endure, and not get discouraged. That's what I would say. But regarding their trials as joy? Come on James, where is the compassion? Was he being inconsiderate of the kind of persecution these people are going through? Many of them are losing everything because of their new faith. But before we dismiss James' point, let us consider why this is exactly what they needed to hear.

The principle James puts before his readers is that Christians should strive for an understanding of God's sovereignty that believes suffering and trials produce a mature faith; a kind of faith that is strong and complete. When through faith, we desire God's glory more than anything else, we will indeed regard our trials with pure joy. You see, James' abrupt opening here is meant to shake them up and get their attention. He was willing to speak directly and remind them that God was at work to make them mature and complete. This was the truth they needed to hear.

I am reminded of Hebrews 11 that tells us faith is having confident hope and conviction in something we can't see. Trials are not easy. They test our faith. They put us in a position of having to choose to see difficulty and pain as something it does not immediately appear or feel to be.

We can't see how things will turn out. We can't see God's bigger picture and His plan for our lives. But trials are part of God's upside down kingdom, where an affliction is turned into a blessing and mourning is turned into joy. When we believe this, we will have faith to trust that He is strengthening and perfecting us for His own purposes.

The process of testing our faith causes us to trust more. We become more steadfast, as James puts it. It is a process of spiritual growth that builds up and matures us. As we think about our trials as God's kindness to us, we develop a spiritually mature way of thinking about our trials. Each trial serves to make us stronger and more mature. Just as an athlete endures the pain of training to accomplish a goal of being better, so the Christian looks past the trial, in faith and with a confidence and conviction that God is ultimately up to something good.

① [Slide 5. Through Wisdom Requested]

James 1:5-8

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A Study in James

Through Faith Tested

Through Wisdom Requested

Pleasing and Pursuing God - Maturing in Trials

So we have maturing in trials through faith tested. And then we have maturing in trials through wisdom requested. Let's look at the next principle in this passage. Let's start with verse 5. *"5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. 6 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. 7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."*

It is also important to note that James' words here are not a trite encouragement to praise the Lord even when you don't feel like it. Nor is he saying that we should simply smile through the pain and put on a happy face. He's not saying we should put on a façade and pretend like nothing is wrong. Mature faith does not minimize or diminish the struggle and pain. But maturity comes when through eyes of faith we gain a perspective that gladly knows God is at work in our trials. Through faith we see past what is negative and apply trials to our lives as something good and for God's glory.

James next point seems to anticipate our next question. Even if I know this to be true how do I live out my faith when my flesh struggles with fear and doubt? Put another way, how do we practically apply this truth when our minds are focused on the feelings and emotions that arise through trials? Let's be honest and admit that it's not easy to hold fast to faith when the storms of life are crashing down upon us.

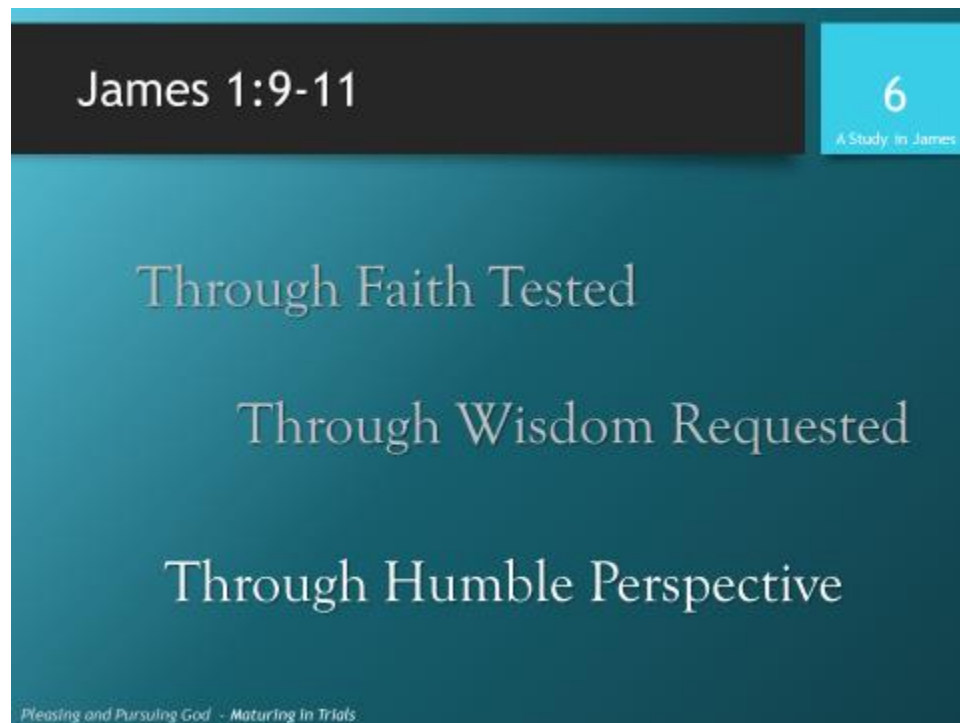
Notice the connection between verse 4 and 5 with the word "lack". Verse 4 reminds us that trials come as a means to help us mature by gaining the fullness of faith we lack. James then continues in verse 5 by reminding us to ask for the wisdom that we lack. It should be clear to us that the answers to dealing with life's struggles do not lie within us. But what we lack, God will graciously give to complete and strengthen us in our trials. In the context of dealing with trials, God will generously give us wisdom; no matter how many times we ask Him. Each and every time we must go to God in prayer and ask Him to give us the wisdom to apply the truth and knowledge of His care over our lives so that we may fully trust Him.

But we must also note here that James gives a caveat. When we ask for wisdom we must ask in faith. We must ask with conviction and belief that God will answer. Prayer is not like taking an aspirin that will do its work of numbing the pain whether we believe it will or not. Nor is prayer like a candy machine by which we put in our prayer token so that God will dispense a blessing to take the trial away. A prayer of faith is offered with confidence that God both hears us and answers us according to His purposes and plans.

The danger here is that when we pray in doubt, we do not have confidence in God to do what we have asked. Moreover, our hope is not anchored in the solid rock of God's promises. Consequently, we will be tossed about by the waves; being carried wherever the winds and tide may take us. Such a person James says is double-minded. They swing back and forth between belief and doubt like a pendulum; hoping against hope. And out of their lack of faith in God and His promises they will receive nothing. Their trials will overwhelm them and they will fall into discouragement and despair.

But to the one who asks in faith, God promises to generously give wisdom. God is our loving Father who waits for us to ask that He may lavishly give what we lack. He desires for us to be mature and grow. He seeks His own glory through our lives and He will give us wisdom that we may see Him in the midst of our trials. We can be sure that God the Father, who gladly gave us Christ, to be for us what we lacked in our greatest moment of need, will surely give us wisdom when we need to walk faithfully through life's trials.

📌 [Slide 6. Through Humble Perspective]



The last principle of maturing in trials is found beginning at verse 9. We mature in trials through faith tested. We mature in trials through wisdom requested. And we mature in trials through humble perspective. Follow along again as we read verses 9 through 11. *“9 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, 10 and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. 11 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.”*

James uses an illustration of two extremes to focus our attention on what really matters. Whether we are poor or rich is not important. The material things of this life should not be our focus. The poor should not make material prosperity an idol any more than the wealthy. The kingdom of God is not about material gain. Nor should we view the treasures of this world as something we can hold on to. This world is a temporary place and all that is in it will fade away. Let those of modest means boast of what they have in Christ. For in Christ they have gained everything and have been exalted through Him.

But neither should the rich man put his hope in material things. Material wealth does not save, nor does it satisfy. It is as temporary for the wealthy as it is for the poor. Rather, the rich man should consider how quickly possessions will pass away when this life ends. Nor is he is not to

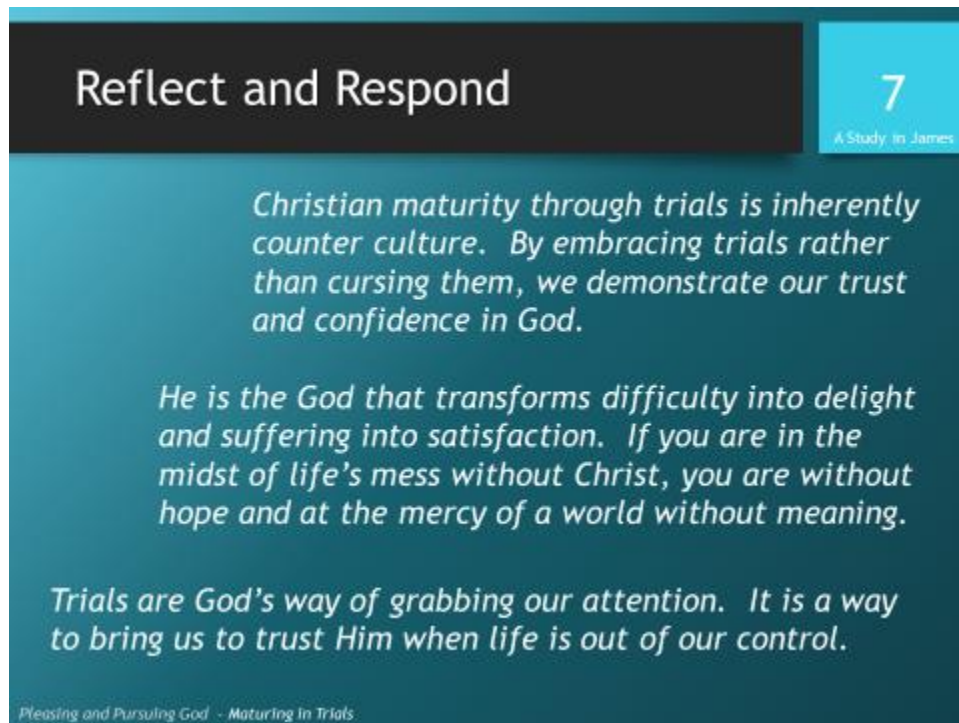
take pride in possessions as if they somehow make a difference in who he is before God. He must consider that his wealth is nothing in Christ and be humbled before God. Wealth and status matter nothing to God nor earn any favor. Let the wealthy pursue riches and they will perish. Let the wealthy pursue Christ and they will live.

To mature in trials we must have this humble perspective. When difficulties are thrust upon us we can quickly and easily focus on ourselves. Whether it is loss of possessions, loss of health, or loss of position and status, we focus our attention on something we think we deserve or belongs to us. James reminds us that this life and its pursuits are temporary. What we deserve is God's wrath. Anything beyond that is an undeserved blessing. When we see our trials in light of this temporary world and God's eternal mercy toward us we should be humbled.

A humble perspective exalts in trials, in that God would consider us worthy to be tested. If the lowly brother is to be exalted in his position, let him see testing as a worthy pursuit of God's glory. If the wealthy brother is tempted to desire riches rather than Christ, let him be humbled at his shallow pursuit of earthly treasures. Whatever our position in life or whatever trials and suffering we face, we are to find our identity in Christ. All the riches and comforts of this world are nothing compared to what we have in Christ.

As we go through suffering and trials our perspective must be focused on Christ. When we look at what is happening from a material or physical point of view, we miss the greater and more important picture of what God is doing to shape us according to our identity in Christ. Nothing could be more important. Trials play an important role in shifting our desires from this world to the kingdom of Christ. They change our hearts to yearn more for heaven and less for earthly treasures. It is this change of perspective that is a part of the process of maturing and growing in Christ. And it is vital that we understand and interpret life's challenges with a perspective that helps us to embrace them gladly for the glory of our Father.

① [Slide 7. - Reflect and Respond]



Reflect and Respond

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A Study in James

Christian maturity through trials is inherently counter culture. By embracing trials rather than cursing them, we demonstrate our trust and confidence in God.

He is the God that transforms difficulty into delight and suffering into satisfaction. If you are in the midst of life's mess without Christ, you are without hope and at the mercy of a world without meaning.

Trials are God's way of grabbing our attention. It is a way to bring us to trust Him when life is out of our control.

Pleasing and Pursuing God - Maturing in Trials

So let's pull this all together as we conclude our study this morning. James encourages us to encounter trials in a way that acknowledges God's purposes in them. Our strength to deal with trials is based on the strength of our belief that God is up to something good. We mature through trials by the testing of our faith. Just as metal is strengthened by the blacksmith's hammer, so we are strengthened and refined through suffering. We can endure trials with grace and joy when we recognize that it is the master's hand shaping our lives.

We mature through trials by asking for wisdom. How often we simply do not take the time to pray for wisdom to help us through trials. John Piper is quoted as saying, "One of the great uses of Twitter and Facebook will be to prove at the Last Day that prayerlessness was not from lack of time." There is no trial too small that will not be helped in the midst of prayer. And there is no prayer too small that will not help in the midst of trials.

And finally, we mature through trials by having a humble perspective. Life is full of ups and downs. But we are helped through trials when we remember that our lives are not our own. They belong to Christ. And all that we need and should truly desire is found in Him. Let us glory in our trials that we may reflect the goodness and greatness of God the Father. Let our hearts be humbled as we reflect upon his mercy and grace to us. Let us gladly accept trials as God's mercies to us that we may grow in the likeness of our Lord and Savior.

This morning you may be facing trials as a believer. Let me encourage you that Christ has given you His word in this text this morning that you may make sense of life's difficulties. He will aid you and support you. He will comfort and guide you. He has surrounded you with brothers and sisters in the body of Christ, to help and encourage you. And should we forget, our trials are an opportunity to demonstrate Christ to others. **Christian maturity through trials is inherently**

counter culture. By embracing trials rather than cursing them, we demonstrate our trust and confidence in God. And we reflect Christ to unbelievers around us as we live out the Gospel in a powerful and visible way.

There may be others here this morning that are facing trials without Christ and want to know more about what they have heard this morning. I appeal to you, consider what Christ can do. He can transform your trials from something discouraging and overwhelming to something that has purpose and good. He is the God that transforms difficulty into delight and suffering into satisfaction. If you are in the midst of life's mess without Christ, you are without hope and at the mercy of a world without meaning. Perhaps this morning you have felt God working on your heart. If you would like to hear more about how Christ can help you please reach out to someone this morning. There are many here who would love to open God's word and help you.

Let me close with the words from the hymn "It is Well With My Soul."

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.

Brothers and sisters, trials are God's way of grabbing our attention. It is a way to bring us to trust Him when life is out of our control. It is a way of getting us to acknowledge our dependence upon Him for wisdom and guidance when life is uncertain. And it is a way of getting us to our knees in humble submission as he transforms our wants and desires to His. So that, in the midst of trials we can say with maturity and confidence, that it is well with our soul.

Let's close in prayer.

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