

DON'T WASTE ALL OF THIS

James 1:2-11

(based on sermon outline by Bryon Yawn)

**Dr. Howard Batson
First Baptist Church
Amarillo, Texas
May 24, 2020**

Bryon Yawn, then pastor of the Community Bible Church in Nashville, Tennessee, tells a story about a friend of his who found herself in a sea of troubles. First, her husband went blind. Then he came down with an incurable disease. She, on top of all of this, had a slight stroke herself that forced her to retire from her secretarial job and become a full time seeing-eye wife. Although they had many friends, they had no children to help take care of them. Being an encourager, one day Byron said, "I want you to know that we're praying for you." "I appreciate that," she replied. "But what are you praying for God to do?" She waited patiently for Byron's reply. He said he struggled a moment for a mature answer. He had never really been confronted with the question being put so bluntly before. After all, when people are suffering you pray for healing if it's God's will, for strength, for special mercy in pain – those sorts of things. And that's what Byron told her. "Thank you," she said. "But please pray for one more request. Pray that I don't waste all this suffering." (Byron Yawn, "How to Get the Most Out of a Trial, *Preaching*, Sept/Oct 2002)

You and I have a fundamental problem. Our problem is that our goal in life, our aim, the thing for which we strive more than anything else is our individual satisfaction – our own happiness in life. We have made happiness our goal.

That's not God's goal for our lives. Happiness is not the ultimate thing that God has in mind for us. His goal for us is to glorify Him. God's will for you and God's goal for me is not our happiness but, rather, His glorification.

When our youngest daughter, Chandler, was three, she loved sherbet. She called it orange ice cream and green ice cream. "Daddy, I ate all my meat. Can I have some ice cream?" And no matter how much I put in her bowl, she always looked up when she's taken her last bite and says, "Daddy, I want just a wittle bit more – just a wittle bit more ice cream." She has always been a good negotiator.

So I learned to play the game – calculate back how much I wanted her to have, gave her a "wittle" bit less than I wanted her to have, realizing that I'm going to have to scoop out "just a wittle bit more, Daddy."

First thing when she woke up – out of the bed – "Daddy, can I have some ice cream?" Literally, she desired sherbet for breakfast, sherbet for lunch, and sherbet for supper. She loved sherbet – covered herself from head to toe in it when she ate it. Sherbet made her happy.

But my goal for Chandler was not her happiness. Oh, I wanted her to be happy, but I was going to make sure that Chandler ate some vegetables and some fruits, too. Just fulfilling her immature desires for happiness was not my focus. It's not what I desired for her. I desired what's best for her.

God doesn't always give us happiness. He doesn't always give us ice cream. His desire for us is not our happiness but, rather, His glorification.

I'm not seeking suffering for myself this morning – I promise you that. And I'm not seeking it for you. But we live in a culture that disdains suffering rather than accepts it. There is, quite frankly, no place for pain in the American version of Christianity.

The preacher on the television tells us that we should be healthy and wealthy. No difficulties or trials should come our way. Her admonition to us is that we should simply rebuke pain, rebuke suffering as if it were something foreign in our lives, something that God's people should not experience. It is something we should simply treat as if it doesn't walk in tandem, stride hand-in-hand with being a man or a woman of God.

Well, that TV preacher, whomever he or she might be, hasn't read a whole lot of James. James wastes no time issuing the command, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you face trials of many kinds."

James gives us three steps to make sure we don't waste the suffering in our lives.

I. Embrace trials.

A. Trials are unavoidable.

I want you to notice that trials are, first of all, unavoidable.

There was an old seminary professor who greeted all incoming freshmen with a hard dose of reality. He would say to each student, "If your life is good, if all is going well, and if all is just as you have planned, you only need to wait. Trials will come.

James doesn't use a conditional clause. He doesn't say, "If trials come...." Rather, it is a temporal clause. It is *when* they come.

Some of you suffer from a very difficult marriage. Your fairy tale dream has turned into a nightmare. You can't even pinpoint when it first happened. Slowly, over time, you grew away from each other. And now, everything you'd hoped for is missing. Everything you'd longed for is gone.

Many of you during the shut down suffer from uncertain job situations. Probably nobody in this room knows how much anxiety and financial pressure you are under.

Some of you suffer from the longing, the desire, the insatiable desire to be a father or to be a mother. Despite the testing, despite the expenses, despite all the anxiety and the stress, God has

not gifted you with a baby – at least not yet. There is not a day – yea, not an hour, yea, not even a moment that goes by that you don't think about that. That hurts. That's a trial.

Others of you have just been diagnosed with a disease by your physician. Your body is aging. And the young among us don't understand that our bodies just wear out. As one man told me when I asked him how he was doing, "Half of my body parts don't work, and what does work, hurts!"

Some of you, even now, are waiting for test results – waiting for the doctor to outline the treatment in hope of a cure.

Some of you suffer from disobedient children who are running their own way, living their own lives. Some of you have been hurt by a dear friend – crushed, crestfallen, brokenhearted. Something is not right between you and your very best friend.

Yes, some of you have been at a grave side, and you have bid farewell to someone you love more than anybody else on the entire earth. And nobody loved you like he loved you or she loved you. Now he's gone – now she's gone – and, well, life is just empty. Some of you suffer from the sting of death.

Or the Covid-19 crisis has caused your life to be turned upside down and inside out.

I'm telling you: If you're not there, you will be. I don't desire it for you. I don't desire it for me. But James doesn't say "if." He says "when."

Trials are unavoidable.

B. Trials are unexpected.

James says "when you face trials" or "you encounter trials" (v. 2). The word translated encounter means "to fall down around" or "to fall into." It's the same word used in Luke 10:30 to describe the man who was surprised and overtaken by the thieves on his way to Jericho. Our trials are like commandos who swoop down on us out of nowhere.

In fact, the unexpected nature of the trial also comes in the word trial itself. The Greek word for "trial" gives us the English word "pirate." Like pirates, trials ambush the unsuspecting believer.

C. Trials are unpredictable in nature.

There are various trials. Your trial might be physical trials. Or emotional trials. They might be a personal experience. They might be the experience of someone else in your family. It's that time when you say, "I never thought – I never thought this would happen to me."

The word "various" could be translated "multi-colored." It's the same word used to refer to Joseph's many-colored coat in the Septuagint. A trial comes to match every color of one's personality. **Joel Gregory has said that trials have people's zip codes and thumb prints on them. What may shake the foundation of one person's life may not even touch another. God asked only Abraham, not Joseph or Moses, to sacrifice his son. Jesus asked only the rich**

young ruler to sell everything, not Nicodemus. He had a trial match to test the faith of each person. But no trials were exactly alike. (Joel Gregory, *James January Bible Study: Faith Works*)

When trials come, it's wave after wave – is it not? Shakespeare said “When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions.”

Everything happens at once.

First of all I say this morning to embrace trials as God's instrument of change.

Suffering really can change us, can it not? How much differently do you see life when you're in the midst of a piercing pain? How differently do you evaluate everyone and everything around you when you're in the midst of searing soreness?

When you are around people who have never experienced much suffering, it shows, doesn't it? Not that you wish it for them, but their naiveté, their innocence, their arrogance, their greenness – it shows all over them.

I hold in my hand two rocks. One rock is rough and sharp. It has stout edges and severe angles. The other rock is smooth and round, more pleasant to hold. This rock has been pounded by the river – day after day and year after year. And that pounding by the tumultuous water has smoothed the rough edges from this stone.

The difference shows. It shows in my life and it shows in your life when we've not experienced pain. Sometimes without suffering we're left as judgmental, arrogant, know-it-all, black and white prophets of perfection. And after suffering and after pain, we're gentle, loving, understanding, and actually more Christ-like in our demeanor.

Don't seek suffering. But you must embrace suffering.

There was an article about a young mother and father who both carried an extremely rare genetic disorder known as Zellweger's Syndrome. The syndrome results in severe birth defects of newborns. It minimizes their quality of life, as well as their life expectancy. The chances of an individual having the gene are 1 in 160. The odds of two individuals meeting and having a child with the disorder are around 1 in 100,000.

This family beat the dreadful odds and gave birth to a child possessing the syndrome. The child died. After the loss of their baby, the couple took certain necessary medical steps to prevent the same outcome in additional children. These procedures pushed the odds of a recurrence of this disorder to 1 in 200,000. Astonishingly, at the time the article was written, despite the measures taken to prevent it, they were pregnant with their second child carrying the rare malady.

It was nearly more than the family could take. They struggled to understand, as Christians, why God would allow such exquisite pain, not once, but twice. Remarkably, facing the

inevitable reality ahead, the mother said, “If God would ask me to suffer this significantly, I think He has something significant He wants me to do with it through me, if only in my heart.”

How could she say that? She learned to embrace pain as God’s instrument of change.

II. Endure trials.

Several years ago there was a popular song that had the catchy refrain, “Don’t worry. Be happy.” It was a pleasant tune, but the philosophy was bad. Sometimes there is nothing to be happy about.

We must understand that God uses trials to complete God’s purpose in our lives. He says in James 1:3, “Know that the testing of your faith produces endurance.”

We don’t know who we really are until we face a trial. God reveals who we really are when we face the trials before us. Our true character remains after the tribulation blows away the chaff.

Peter says the same thing. “So that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which, though perishable, is tested by fire may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:7). Just like the goldsmith heats gold ore in order to skim away the dross, so God permits testing times in a believer’s life.

Job said it in Job 23:10 when he said, “When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”

You can build a ship all day. But as long as it is in dry dock, it’s not proved seaworthy. It must face the winds. It must face the sea. Likewise, you know nothing about a raw recruit on the battlefield until he has faced the enemy’s fire.

So, too, your faith and my faith must be proved on the battlefield of life.

Notice – the testing of our faith produces steadfastness (1:3). The Christian gospel is not the gospel of the good start but, rather, of the good finish. Jesus warns us in the Parable of the Sower about the seed that falls on rocky ground. It springs up all at once, but it only takes a little sun to wilt away what seemed to be flourishing faith. Or the seed is sown among the thorns and, growing side by side, the thorns choke out, overgrow the good grain.

Anybody can start the Christian pilgrimage. But the question is who can finish it?

God made Abraham wait twenty-five years before giving him the son that He’d promised him. Joseph was thirteen years between the pit and the prison before he reached the palace. Moses was eighty years of age before he discovered God’s crowning purpose for his life. In each instance, faith through trials displayed active patience. You cannot buy synthetic maturity.

Pain is a visitor coming to your door when you least expect it, just like unexpected company. When that doorbell rings and you’re unprepared, it’s not a welcomed knock. The dogs are barking.

The kids are half naked. Toys are strewn all over the floor. You just got out of the shower – no make up on. And that’s just the time – the unexpected knock.

One day you’re going to hear the knock at your door. You’re going to hear the ring of the doorbell. And it’s going to be suffering. It’s going to be trial. It’s going to be death. It’s going to be divorce. It’s going to be hardship. Knocking at your door. Unexpected. Unwelcome. You’re unprepared. You’re caught off guard. Your hair is wet. Your house is unkempt. And a pandemic pounds at your door.

And there you are, face to face with a trial that refuses to wait or stand outside. He is coming in to dwell with you.

III. Evaluate trials.

I don’t want to make God too human-like, though scripture itself calls Him our Father. I don’t want to pretend that God has all the feelings and emotions that we have, although scripture often depicts God that way. It’s not an inappropriate thing to do.

One preacher tells a story about another minister who had no arms. He was born with nothing from his shoulders down. No arms. He said that one day he had to learn to put on his clothes for himself. He said his mother had always dressed him, and he’d gotten to be a pretty big boy. She fed him, she dressed him, she fed him, she dressed him. One day she put his clothes in the middle of the floor and said, “Dress yourself.”

He said, “I can’t dress myself, I don’t have....”

She said, “You’ll have to dress yourself,” and stormed out of the room and shut the door.

He said that he kicked and he screamed and he kicked and he screamed. He yelled, “You don’t love me anymore!” Finally, he realized that if he were going to get any clothes on, he’d have to get his own clothes on. And after literally hours of struggling, he got some clothes on. He said, “It wasn’t until later that I knew my mother was in the next room crying.” (Fred Craddock, *Craddock Stories*, p. 97)

I don’t think God ever takes any joy in the trials that come our way. He’s not a cosmic killjoy who takes pleasure in our pain. Rather, He uses the fire of our life to purify us, to make us righteous so that we might be willing and even worthy to glorify Him.

C. S. Lewis once said, “We are not necessarily doubting that God will do the best for us; we are wondering how painful the best will turn out to be.” (Quoted in Jan Karon, *A Light in the Window*, p. 240)

I pray God’s best for your life is not any more painful than it has to be. And when the pain comes, please – oh, please – don’t waste all of this.