

James (Part 2) – Trials / Temptations

Matt Chandler – February 15, 2015

[Video]

Faith...works. This is the message of James. That we, in our own ability, cannot stand in the face of adversity. We could never find the strength to trust without faith because we don't have the capability to see above the trials we meet, to keep our eyes focused on the King while counting the situation we are currently experiencing as joy. Faith...works. This is the essence of James. We don't work to be saved; we work because we *are* saved.

Without faith, without works, we too quickly become that man in the mirror staring at his face but then forgets the way he looks as soon as he turns away. But with faith, with works, we stay steadfast on this journey, progressively sanctified, knowing we'll be perfected once we reach the other side. Faith...works. This is the cry of James, that faith apart from works can never be sustained, that in every day and in every way, we should see this truth proclaimed because it's faith that makes us doers of the Word, not just hearers.

It's faith that keeps us humble, not proud. It's faith that directs our tongues to bless, not to curse. It's faith that causes us to show mercy, not judgment. It's faith that leads us to true religion, not its empty substitute. It's faith that's causing us to preach the good news to every tribe, tongue, and nation with every breath we breathe. It will be faith that causes us to worship our God for all eternity. This is the message of James. Faith...works.

[End of video]

Good morning. If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab them. James, chapter 1, is where we're going to be. While you're turning there, though, just a quick kind of point for us to celebrate together. Troy and Kathy Harris are in here. A year ago yesterday, Kathy was diagnosed with Stage IV cervical cancer.

She wasn't given much of a shot in the fight and endured chemo with dignity and grace, sister. They got the call earlier this week that she is cancer free. We just wanted to praise God and celebrate with you, sister. We love you! Hair is coming back fly. Looking beautiful. We can't just pray when bad things happen. We have to celebrate. Man, I'm looking all over, and all over this place, God has been exceedingly merciful.

With that said, here's my attempt. I plan on attempting the worst Valentine's Day weekend sermon in the history of Christianity. *Boom!* There it is. That's what I'm going to attempt to do. That's my goal. We'll see if I meet this goal. We're in the book of James. James was written by the half-brother of Jesus. Kind of get your mind around that. He is the half-brother of Jesus. We have evidence in the New Testament that James, while Jesus was doing his earthly ministry, thought Jesus was crazy.

He showed up with other family members and tried to grab him, because that's what you do when your brother starts saying he is God. You come, and you grab him. You take him and have him locked up because he thinks he is God in the flesh. You're like, "Man, I grew up with you in Egypt, bro. These magic tricks, they don't... Listen. I'm not buying it!"

Yet right after the death of Jesus Christ, something happens where now all of a sudden James is convinced his half-brother is God in the flesh. He worships him, is the key elder in the establishment of the first Christian church there in Jerusalem, and ultimately is martyred. Being commanded to recant on his claim that his brother is God in the flesh, he refuses and has his skull bashed in.

I mean, just kind of stepping over *here*, if you're not a believer, what do you do with a half-brother of Jesus thinking he is God in the flesh? If you're interested in trying to convince your family members that you're God, how did he do it? Because that would be legit. "I'm God. Do what I say." Here's what you have to do. Are you ready? There are two steps.

Step one is to die brutally and publicly. To literally be slaughtered in a public venue for hundreds and hundreds, if not thousands, of people to see. That's step one. Nail that one. Then what you're going to need to do is three days later, come back to life and have a fish sandwich with your family. If you do those two, then make all the claims of deity you want.

I'm not talking about you were out for 20 minutes, and they brought you back. I'm saying body ripped to shreds. You were dead. You have to get buried. Then three days later, you crawl out of the

dirt and eat some fish with your family. Then we'll be like, "Maybe. Maybe." That's one of the best really kind of apologetic defenses for the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

How do you get your family to believe you're God? Well, you come back from the dead. That's who wrote this book. He wrote it to Christians who were marginalized and pushed to the edges of the first-century world, pursued and persecuted. Let's pick it up in verse 2. James, chapter 1, verse 2.

"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 firstfruits of his creatures."

If I take those verses, I just grab hold of those verses, and I condense them down into a singular sentence we can talk about this morning, here's the sentence. All right? *Trials will come; count them all as joy because God is good.* There's our sentence. I want to try to defend that sentence. I'm taking

these 16 verses. I'm distilling them into a sentence. Trials *will* come. Not *if*. They *will* come. We count it all as joy because God is good. That's my sentence. I'll stand there, anchor there, argue there. I want to set out now to prove it.

When you start talking about trials and struggles and difficulties, here's what I love. I've said this a thousand times. I love the griminess of the Bible. I just love it. He doesn't say, "If you experience trials or if you happen to be this small portion of people who are going to go through trials and struggles..." That's not what he does, because that's not the reality we live in. It's not *if*. It is *when*.

When you face trials of various kinds. If you're like, "What does he mean by *trial*? Is he talking about difficult marriages?" Well, that would fit in the category of *various*. See, that's what I love. He just put *various* there. "Are you talking about being sick?" That would be a variety of trial. "What about this difficulty? I have a kid who is acting a fool. He is wild'n out. Would that be there?" That is *various*. Right? It's all there. There is no wiggle room here. If you're enduring a trial, there it is.

Now a couple of things so we can just talk here. Some of you, this conversation will not be some point about things that are coming in the future. You're in it right now, and it's awful. You're tired and exhausted and weary and limping in hoping to hear a sermon about love on Valentine's weekend. Yet here we are going, "No, no, no. Trials will come."

For some of us, this idea of trials is not ethereal. It's right now. Others of us, because it's *if* not *when*, that storm is building somewhere out there in the ocean. The wave is moving closer and closer to us. In fact, the phone could ring this week. It could ring two weeks from now. Our day of trial will come.

If I'm being really honest and really chipper, it's not just the *day* of trial. It's the *days* (plural). You don't just survive one and go, "Man! Glad I got that one behind me. Just Spirit-sprinkled joy for the rest of my life." That's not what happens. It's mountaintops and valleys, is it not? That's what I love about the Bible. The Bible meets us in the world we are in. It's not fantasy.

There's no picture of utopia in the here and now for us. There is one coming, but the Bible is clear you and I are in the space between, the *already* and the *not yet*. Christ has died and ushered in the coming of the kingdom, and it is not yet consummated. It will be consummated at the return of Christ. In the meantime, we're in this space between.

What we see in the Bible is that our world is not sterile. It's grimy. People get sick. They die. They are betrayed. They are wrongly accused. They grow weary. They lose heart. But by the grace of God, others endure. Their legs are strengthened. Their heart is inflamed. They hold fast and have a type of joy that transcends some of the most horrific circumstances imaginable.

As I've gotten older, I've started paying more attention to those whose legs were strengthened in the day of the storm. When you're young, you don't pay attention to that. You like the battle scenes where the mouths of lions are shut, and David cuts off the head of the giant. When you're 20, you loved that stuff because you hadn't bled yet. You hadn't bled. You hadn't put anybody in the ground yet. You haven't gotten close enough yet to the suffering of the world (most of you).

But man, at 40, I'm seeing a brother survives the lion, but he left his arm with the lion. I'm dialed into that story, because that's probably been more my experience than I got away with all my limbs. What I want us to do is just kind of consider trials, suffering, and difficulty here on Valentine's weekend. I think you have to do that. If we're going to... This command sounds a little crazy. **"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds..."**

Not only am I going to endure trials, but the command of God is that I have joy in them! Right? How is that possible? All right. Two things. First there are two ways we need to view trials (those of us who are in Christ), and there are two fights we have to know we're in. How many of you have been in a physical fight before? Like *really*, not in your head. You didn't imagine it. You threw hands. Go ahead and raise your hand. There's no church discipline happening.

You guys have all been in fistfights. Here's what I would do. By the way, some of you who raised your hand really surprised me. I was like, "Really, though?" I'll find you later. If you know you're going to be in a fight, you have a better chance of actually winning that fight. If you know, "This is going to end with us throwing hands," then you have a better shot of winning that fight.

You're going to posture yourself a little bit differently. You're going to be hyper-dialed in to what's going on. "Is that shoulder back? How am I standing?" I'm like, "Yeah!" You don't do that if you know you're going to get in a fight. If you know there's a fight coming, you posture and you set. You have a better chance of not getting yourself knocked out.

What I want to do is show you from this text what's happening, two ways to rightly think about trials, and then two fights you have to know you're going to get in. No matter how holy you are, you

get up at 4:00 a.m. and float around the room memorizing Scripture, these fights are coming for you. It's good we know they're coming, and it's good we see if we're wearing the right lenses by which we watch trials. With that said, here's how we view trials differently as believers in Christ.

1. *The Christian views trials as a pathway to maturity.* Look at verse 3. "**...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 we take this conversation out of the spiritual world and we just set it into your life experience, how have you matured? How have you grown?

Have you not matured and grown by falling and failing and stumbling? Has growth into maturity for you physically, intellectually, and as a person come because everything has always gone your way and everything you chose to do was spot-on, right, and perfect? No! I don't need you to answer. No! You learned by failing. You learned by scraping your knees. You learned by thinking you're right only to realize you were wrong. That's how all of us have matured.

Do we really believe then that the way we mature spiritually is completely different? Instead, God just sprinkles us with pixie dust, and we just fly. That's all it is. We just believe, pixie dust, and we're off! Well, no. We know that can't be true either. I know some of us wish I would just be quiet about this because we want to believe we can get maturity without trials. We want to believe we can mature without them.

When I come across friends, brothers, sisters, who struggle a bit with anxiety, "Oh my gosh! Trials are coming. That wave out there is freaking me out, Chandler. I don't know why I even came here today. I should have gone to a movie," I send usually this quote from A.W. Tozer. It's one of my favorites.

"The fallow [or the unplanted] field is smug, contented, protected from the shock of the plow and the agitation of the harrow [or being broken up]. Such a field, as it lies year after year, becomes a familiar landmark to the crow and the blue jay. [...] Safe and undisturbed, it sprawls lazily in the sunshine, the picture of sleepy contentment."

Everybody is like, "There we go! Okay! I would like... That sounds... Oh wait. I'm lying lazily in sleepy contentment? Yes, please. Is that your point? Finish there, Pastor. Just pray and get us out of here." But that's not the world we live in.

"But it is paying a terrible price for its tranquility: never does it see the miracle of growth; never does it feel the motions of mounting life nor see the wonders of bursting seed nor the beauty of ripening grain. Fruit it can never know because it is afraid of the plow and the harrow. In direct opposite to this, the cultivated field has yielded itself to the adventure of living. The protecting fence has opened to admit the plow, and the plow has come as plows always come, practical, cruel, business-like and in a hurry.

Peace has been shattered by the shouting farmer and the rattle of machinery. The field has felt the travail of change; it has been upset, turned over, bruised and broken, but its rewards come hard upon its labors. The seed shoots up into the daylight its miracle of life, curious, exploring the new world above it. All over the field the hand of God is at work in the age-old and ever renewed service of creation. New things are born, to grow, mature, and consummate the grand prophecy latent in the seed when it entered the ground."

One of my favorite sentences ever written is, "Nature's wonders follow the plow." We know this, right? We know it. If you're in the middle of the trial, maybe you've forgotten it, but those of us who have been through the dark night of the soul and come out on the other side, we see how it's shaped us, how we interact with our friends, how we walk alongside our wives, the patience we're able to extend, the way we're able to see what is important and what's not important.

It's the plow that shows you that. It's not pixie dust; it's the plow. As anxious as we are about the wave that is coming, my hope is that these lenses will serve as a type of seawall, a break against that wave when it lands. The trial is a path to maturity. But that's not the only lens we need to wear. Look at verse 5.

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." This piece has to be there. The first piece is I'm on a path to being matured by God. Then the second part of the lens is...

2. Trials help me be consciously aware of my need for God. Let me give you just a bit of insight into all of our little insidious hearts. Are you ready? I mean, as if today hadn't been bad enough, we'll just throw this out there too. Okay. If we're playing cards here, I'm throwing my chips in. My bet is this. When everything is going great and everything is like you want it, you don't have your mind and heart set on the Lord at all.

In fact, you think you're doing really well. It's you. You're the one who established the greatness that is today. If everything goes right, you did it. But if everything goes wrong, it's God who did it, and it's not fair. I mean, that's just a little peak into our insidious hearts. If everything is going great, "I don't need God. I have this thing. I'm nailing it!" If everything goes bad, "I can't believe this, God. This is unfair!"

I mean, those are our little dark hearts. That's how we operate. This says on this day where trials... We're trying to walk and consider all things joy in this trial we're in. Let us ask for wisdom. "Help me understand this. I don't get this, God." Let him ask for wisdom, and the Lord will respond. Then that leads me to the fights.

Okay, so you have new lenses on. Here we are believers in Christ. We're enduring a trial. We're going, "Okay, I don't quite fully understand it, but here's the deal. I know God is maturing me. He is chiseling me. He is shaping me. He is forming me more and more and more into the image of the Son. I know I'm praying more. I'm clinging to him more. I'm getting what I really need. Not really what I *want* but what I *need*."

See, if I get Christ and lose everything else, I have everything. If I get everything and don't have Christ, I've lost everything. This is not a bad trade. That's where we are. Then the fights come. Look at this next text. It's such a difficult text. **"But let him ask..."** Let him ask for wisdom, consciously hold fast to God. **"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."**

That seems heavy-handed, man! Here's what just happened. I always want to be honest about what's going on in the text. God says, "You're confused? Ask me, but don't doubt. Because if you doubt, you shouldn't expect anything from me. You're a double-minded man." "Oh golly! You just told me if I was doubting to ask. How could you now say if I'm doubting, don't ask?"

What are we supposed to do with that? Did anybody else read that and go, "Dang"? Let's try to explain what's happening here. There are two prayers in this little text. One is, "Grant me wisdom." The other is, "Increase my faith. Kill my doubts." When I'm thinking about this balance between faith and doubt and this great fight we can get in, my mind and heart always go to Mark, chapter 9. Let me put this on the screen. Mark 9, starting in verse 20.

"And they brought the boy to [Jesus]. And when the spirit [the demon] saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, 'How long has this been happening to him?' And [the father] said, 'From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.'"

Listen to Jesus. **"And Jesus said to him, "'If you can"! All things are possible for one who believes."** Verse 24: **"Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, 'I believe.'" What? "Help my unbelief!"** Is there anyone in this room who can't say *amen* to that sentence? "I believe, but help my unbelief! I believe you're good. I believe you're God. I believe you have this, but help me because part of me doesn't." Anyone? Yes!

You could get this tattooed on your forearm. It wouldn't be a waste. "I believe; help my unbelief." The question then is...*Is that enough faith for the mercy and grace of God to work on our behalf?* Let's find out. **"And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, 'You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.'"**

There's no duplicitous battle going on in the universe. No demons ever argue with Jesus, go, "Not today," and then there's this big fight between them. He is like, "Get out." He convulses, and he is out. **"And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, 'He is dead.' But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose."**

Here's the good news. The good news is in that place where we're fighting doubt, this spot where we're like, "I believe. Help my unbelief," this spot where we're going, "I believe, but I'm struggling to hang on to that belief," God steps into that space, and that faith is that mustard seed of faith that puts the Lord to work in our lives. Look at me. I don't know what version of Christianity you've bought into, but there's really only one biblical version of it. Let me catch you up on just a little bit of that.

The little bit of that that you really need to embrace and know is there is not a day coming where you're not going to have to wrestle with your flesh and get to this place where trials will not eventually wear you down to the point of wrestling with doubt...at least at this level. Life has a way

of pounding on you in a Genesis 3 world, and you shouldn't feel guilt or shame about wrestling with doubt.

Jesus healed his son! He cast out the demon. This brother was like, "If you can..." Then Jesus was like, "If I can? I can do anything for someone who believes." "I believe, but help my unbelief. I believe, but I don't believe." "Okay." *Boom!* He healed him. Let that encourage you. You're freakin' moping around about, "Oh, I just struggle." Yeah! Who told you you wouldn't? Where did you get that? Of course you do, but God honors the fight.

The double-minded man is the man who is like, "I'm not going to worry. He is not going to help me." You're not even crying out to God for help because you believe he won't help you. That's the double-minded man, giving lip service to God, pretending to be all put together when you're not. Brother, sister, I've been pleading with you for over a decade. Stop this veneer nonsense.

Why do you think we have Group Connect today? We're trying to put you around people where you can go, "Gosh! I believe, but help my unbelief! This is difficult. I'm losing heart. My grip is weakening. Help me!" What do you feel like your testimony is to be? "Doing great. Nailing it. Yeah, my marriage is a train wreck, but we're fine." The house is on fire behind you like a Denzel Washington movie.

"It's fine. Don't worry about it. What's that? Oh, don't worry about it now. We'll put that out. We're good. We're good! Matt was funny today, wasn't he? He was so funny. I love that guy." Stop! You have to quit pretending. This sermon is going to go longer than it should. Here's the second fight, because some of us are going to really duke it out with doubt, but there's another one we fight with in the midst of trials. Look there in verse 9.

"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."

Okay, here's the second fight. The first fight is *doubt*. "Are you good? Are you here? Will you help?" The second fight is the fight of *comparison*. Last night before the five o'clock service, Michael

Bleecker and I were in my little office back here. We were just talking, getting ready for the services right before we prayed as a group. There was a sociological study that rolled out this week. In fact, most of the major kind of secular media outlets picked it up.

It was a pretty big study on Instagram and its effects on us. Here's the conclusion (not by Christians). The conclusion is Instagram leads to depression. All right? Instagram leads to depression. Here's why. Here's why! If we could just paint the picture like it actually happens, you just finish blowing through a whole season of something on Netflix. You have not gotten out of your pajama pants that day. You crawl into bed, and you grab your phone. You start scrolling through your Instagram account. Here's what you'd find.

Everybody's marriage is awesome, and their kids are incredible. They're just counting money, and they don't struggle. There's no pain, and there's no sorrow. Here you are in your trial. You ate a whole gallon of ice cream watching a series on Netflix. You start to resent them. You start to grow in anger against them. "Really? Me, Lord? I'm enduring this trial? What about them?" In your trial, your insidious, wicked heart will be exposed, and comparison is how it plays itself out.

Just so you know I'm not dogging *you*...I'm dogging *us*. After my diagnosis with brain cancer... It happened around Christmas. I was in a dark place. No cape on me. I was in a dark place. Everything I saw was loss. I couldn't look at my daughters, because I would think, "Oh my gosh! I'm not going to get to walk them down the aisle. I'm not going to get to help them navigate through the travails of being a teenage girl in this depraved day."

I couldn't look at my son, because I thought, "Oh my gosh! I'm not going to be able to encourage him to become the man he..." Everywhere I looked, I just saw loss. It was that time of year where everybody sends you a picture of their family and dog on a card. What Lauren does with those is she puts them all over our mantle, and then she puts them on our Christmas trees.

I was sitting on the couch. Lauren and the kids were gone. I was sitting there just feeling sorry for myself, just really freakin' running through everything I was losing and the fact that really the next two years of my life, they were going to poison me and radiate me, and then I was just going to melt away. Everything that was strong about me and fun about me was gone forever. That's where I was. That's where my heart was. I just don't want to ever bull you. That's where my heart was. It was dark.

I looked up, and on my mantle was a picture of this family. The man in that family is a serial adulterer, a coward, and a fool. I thought...your *pastor* thought, "Really, God? Me? This is happening to me? I've done nothing but serve you. I've done nothing but have my life wrung out for your glory. I've done nothing but make much of your name and your renown, and this clown gets health?"

I'll tell you what, man. The Holy Spirit did not wait long to punch me in the soul. He very quickly stepped in. Luke 15 flooded my mind, and I realized, "I'm like the older brother complaining outside."

The Holy Spirit pressed upon my heart, "So he can't be a victorious story of my salvation and reconciliation? Only you can? Plus, brother, I think you might be elevating your own worth here. You really think my plan is contingent upon you being here? Brother, you're going to go in the ground, come on home to me, and I'm just going to keep moving. I have hinged nothing on you, sweet friend."

It was a really beautiful, awful moment, and I'm grateful to God for it. When we're enduring trials, we become hyper aware of the prettiness of other people's lives, and we begin to resent them. James here via the power of the Holy Spirit is going, "No, no, no, no. No, no. It's all level in the end. Don't believe the Instagram hype.

Everyone endures trials. Everyone struggles. We'll have seasons in which the sky is clear, and we'll have seasons in which it's cloudy. I am leading you into maturity. I am showing you *you* need me." Then in the middle of this, we're going to need some encouragement. The Holy Spirit knows we're going to need that, so verse 13 is here.

"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."

Here's the argumentation as it flows down. We need to see our trials as paths to maturity, and we need to understand the trials make us consciously aware that we need God...the only thing we *actually* really need. Then on top of that, be careful because you're going to have to duke it out with doubt. It's going to be a fight.

It's like a round 12, round 13, "Hang in there and keep swinging" type of fight. If you're not careful, comparison will tag team and jump in there. If you're not careful, you're going to be tempted and drawn, incited by your own flesh to betray God's invitation to maturity and getting what you actually need. That will lead to death. "Hang in there. I have you."

From there, then James does what he must do in this moment, and that's to turn our eyes on to the nature and character of God. Look at verse 16. **"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."** Don't be deceived. Don't be fooled.

You're in the midst of a trial? Don't be deceived. Don't be fooled. Your flesh is going to incite you. You're going to want to believe that God isn't good. You're going to wrestle with comparison and doubt. Don't be deceived. Don't be tricked. Then he moves on with this beautiful reminder. Everything good and perfect has come down from the Father of lights.

One of the greatest anchors for your soul in the trials that come regardless of the intensity of those trials is the greater your knowledge of the goodness and grace of God on your life, especially in the world of just common grace, the more likely you are to praise him in the storm. What do I mean by the gifts of common grace?

How many of you have hurt your back, come down with the flu, and been really unable to get out of bed for a day or two? Has anybody had all of your energy sapped by an illness or an injury? Okay. Getting up and moving around and having energy is a gift from God. That's a good thing. That means it's come down from the Father of lights. Physical strength. That's a gift from the Lord. I mean, it's so easy because there's so much of it.

My guess is you're going to eat lunch and dinner today in a way that most of the world will not. We don't think about it that way. We just think it's lunch time. Let's just go eat something that in most parts of the world would be seen as an epic feast fit only for holidays because of its great cost. For us, it's just something we threw in the Crockpot. That's a blessing. It came down from the Father of lights.

Do you have any friends? That came down from the Father of lights. Have you found a wife or a husband? That came down from the Father of lights. You're like, "Well, you don't know my spouse."

Trust me. Came down from the Father of lights. It might be a path to maturity. It might be you needing consciously to know you need God, but it's a gift from God on high.

Do you need me to keep going? Do you have any money in your pocket? It came down from the Father of lights. Can you see, smell, hear? It came down from the Father of lights. Do you want to meet people who can't? They're in our church. Everything good has come down from above, the Father of lights.

The other thing we see in what we just read is there's no variation, no change in him. I preach this all the time during Communion. Let me do it now. God knew what he was buying on the cross. He knew what he was getting with you! He is not changing his mind. He is not watching you screw up now and huddling up. "Hey, did we write anything in the Bible about having to keep these guys once we got them? Is there a return policy? No return policy. Are you sure? Spirit, that's in the Bible? Ah, me!"

No! He knew all of your failings, all of your shortcomings. He has imparted future grace. Listen. Look right at me. If you think you disgust God, let me talk to you. All the disgust God has for you was poured out in the brutal death of Jesus Christ on that cross. It was disgusting, all right. Look to the cross. It's grimy and bloody and agony and sorrow and loss. But all of his disgust toward you, Christian, is gone.

You feel wonky and unstable? You feel like you're constantly tossed about? Does that bother God? Look to the cross. He absorbed it all. The reason Paul can so clearly say in Romans 8, "**There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**" is the debt has been paid in full. As I so often tell you, please get over yourself. Are you serious? "I'm so terrible." Yeah! Look to the cross. You're that terrible.

But now all that was due for that disgusting, terrible stuff has been handled. It's been done. There's no shadow of turning. There's no variation. He is not looking at you today and going, "Man, I wish I wouldn't have done that!" Then I love this. Let's keep going here. We only have so many minutes. Verse 18: "**Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.**"

This is where things get staggering. If you're like, "Oh, I probably disgust him. I fall short. I can't believe I wrestle with doubt," here's how James ends this whole idea of the day of trial. In our fight of doubt, in our fight with comparison, James wants to remind us of this: *God chose you.*

This was God's idea. It was of his own will that he called you to himself. God looking out on the horizon of human history said, "I'm going to make that one a part of my family. I'm going to call him my own. I'm going to bring her into my own family, and I'm going to bestow upon them all the riches of my glory." He chose you. Rest.

Several years ago (in fact it was six years ago, almost seven years ago), my family and I were headed up to Possum Kingdom. Whoever named that place? I'd just love to be in the meeting. I have a lot of meetings. How does that get through? If there was a group of people who sat around and went, "What should we call this lake and the area around it?" "Well, there are a lot of possums. How about Possum Kingdom?" Does no one have veto power? What kind of clout does this brother have that he can throw out "Possum Kingdom" and it stick?

We're heading up to Possum Kingdom. A friend had a lake house up there she was letting us use. It was Audrey and Lauren and little baby Reid and my in-laws, Mimi and **Poppy (39:14)**. We're all heading out. About a day earlier, we noticed Audrey's leg was turning red and starting to swell a little bit. We didn't know quite what it was. We had iced it and given her some ibuprofen. We stopped at RaceTrac right over here to get some gas.

As I'm filling up the gas, Mimi (a grandparent, who should know better) walks over, looks at Audrey's leg, and puts her hand on it. She was like, "That's hot!" You could see Audrey was having a little boil that started to form there. **Linda (39:41)** said, "As soon as we get there, we need to take her to the hospital. That's a boil. They're going to need to lance that" in front of my 6-year-old. To which Audrey goes, "What's lancing?" To which Mimi seriously said, "They're just going to have to cut it open a little bit."

For the next three hours driving to Possum Kingdom, I'm hearing through tears and in agony, "I don't want them to cut my leg! I don't want them to cut my leg! I don't want them to cut my leg! I don't want them...!" I can't get Coldplay loud enough. "I don't want them to cut my leg! I don't want them to cut my leg!" Then what am I supposed to say? I can't be a liar. I'm like, "Well, we don't know they're going to cut your leg." Man, 6-year-olds can't be reasoned with. "But could they?" "I mean, it's a possibility." "I don't want them to cut my leg! I don't want them...!"

Then we get there. We go to the hospital in Possum Kingdom. We walk in there. It was in Graham, I think. The doctor looks at it. Bless this guy's heart. He thinks he is speaking code. He is like, "Yeah, it's a boil. We're probably going to have to lance it." If we were at DEFCON 10 (which doesn't exist), we just went full-on nuclear. Now she knows, "They're about to cut my leg open," and she is freaking. If you have kids, I mean, arched back, turning red, head spinning around, pea soup crazy.

Then they call the nurse in. I was like, "Yeah, I have a mother-in-law." He just nodded at me. I was just so kidding. She was here last night when I told this story too, so we're good. The nurse tries to hold my 6-year-old down, and that did nothing but amplify it even more. If you have a kid, you can feel it. She is freaking out, and I'm trying not to cry. It becomes apparent that this sweet, little country nurse is no match for my daughter.

I had to put my knee on that bed, lay my chest across my daughter's stomach, put my forearm into her chest, and shove her down and pin her there as she screamed and cried while they stuck a needle into her leg to numb it and then cut it open. I'm getting all teary, trying to go, "It's going to be all right. It's going to be okay, baby. I promise you it will be over in just a second. It will be over in just a second. Will you hurry? It will be over in just a second." They wrapped it. She has a great looking skinny leg.

What's happening in this text is we see, of his own will, he called us. He does not change his mind about us. Many of us today are being pinned down by our loving Father as he cuts out what will kill us if he does not. That is not cruel; that is loving. There was a cell in my body that day that went, "This is a great way to start a vacation." No, it broke my heart, but it had to happen. Many of us are just like, "I don't want you to cut my leg! I don't want you to cut my leg! I don't want you to cut my leg!" The only way to get you healthy is to cut your leg.

This past week on Wednesday, we had Dr. Rick Rigsby come in and speak to our staff. We had all 130 from all our campuses come and meet for Restore at the Highland Village Campus. Rick Rigsby is a long-time professor at Texas A&M University. His classes were very hard to get into, and he is an expert on civil rights and the history of the black church. What I wanted him to do to increase our ethnic IQ among our staff is come in and tell us the formation of the black church and its role in the Civil Rights Movement on into today.

Rigsby came in, and for like four or five hours just lined it out for us. One of the things he said is, early on in the black church, they were not educated. Illiterate. They would grab hold of these kind of central truths. There wasn't a lot of depth, but there was a lot of rhythm. They would just start to kick around and engage with one another over a single truth that held them together. That single truth they rallied around for decades.

Illiterate. No exegetical skills. No understanding of biblical theology at the high level. But here's what they knew: "If God is for us, who could be against us? If God is for us, justice will come. If God is for us, this will be okay. If God is for us, we'll make it through. If God is for us, we will endure." They would get together, and for hours quietly and then loudly, they would celebrate, "God is for us!"

That's all we're saying today. Trials will come. Consider it all joy. God is good. He is for you. I'm not saying your trial is not awful. I'm a pastor. I will give you awful upon awful. But you haven't been betrayed. I would argue that it's not punitive. You can scream and cry and shake your fist at the heavens. I would argue that if you are in him, if you are a believer in Christ, there is the removing of something that might hurt you for the gift of something that will bring nothing but ever-increasing joy. That's not a bad trade. It might be a painful one but not a bad one.

Why don't we do this? Why don't you just bow your head, close your eyes? I just want to talk to you for a second or two here as we end. If you're in here today and you're saying, "Man, I'm in the midst of that trial, Matt, and I hear what you're saying about God being for us. I hear what you're saying about the battle of doubt. I hear what you say about maturity and about comparison. But if I'm honest, Chandler, the kind of honest that God already knows about, man, I'm in the fight with doubt. I don't know how much longer I can go. I'm *really* struggling with doubt here."

If that's you, would you just raise your hand where you are? Just go, "Man, I'm struggling." You don't have to be ashamed. You can get that hand high. Everybody's hand will eventually go up on this one. "I'm really wrestling, really struggling here in doubt, confused, perplexed." All right. Why don't you put your hands down? So many.

If you're in here, and you're going, "No, no, no. It's not really doubt. But man, you start talking about comparison, Chandler, and I'm with you because I have a growing disdain for this perceived cheerfulness all over. I'm confused that I'm enduring this, and so many people I know seem to have everything going their way." If you're going, "No, no, no. My deal is comparison," will you raise your

hand right now? You're going, "My fight is comparison. I just don't get why everyone else seems to have it together, and my stuff seems to be on fire." All right. Put your hands down.

If you raised your hand on either one of those, look up at me. I said at the beginning here that I was going to attempt to do the most un-Valentine's Day weekend sermon in the history of Christianity. I might have now seen your hands failed, because could it be that the hundreds and hundreds of you who raised your hands around doubt or comparison just got a gentle kiss from the King of the universe?

In just speaking out of my flesh, is it wise or good to preach this sermon on Valentine's Day weekend? We were packed out last night on Valentine's Day! Is that the Valentine's message? "Hey, life is going to suck. It will be all right." Is that what we want to hear on Valentine's Day? No, it's not. Could it be that in God's sovereign design, he wanted to meet you here today and go, "I know you're doubting"? Listen to him. "I'm for you. Keep fighting. I haven't abandoned you."

Could it be that it's just like God to step into your fight with comparison and go, "No, no, no. They're not as pretty as they look, and you're not as ugly as you look. I have you"? How merciful and romantic is God? On this weekend in this space, he meets us here. It's certainly not a good earthly idea, right? You want to grow a big church? Do something about love. Give everybody a rose when they come in. Don't talk about brokenness and suffering on a weekend where we're supposed to celebrate love. Is this not the type of love our hearts are really hungry for?

Not kind of the hollow type of emotive cupid love that leaves us broken and longing but the type of eternal undergird, hold you together, never leave and forsake you, divorce is no option because he cannot betray himself kind of love. What a gift from God to meet you where you are. Let's pray together as a family, and then we want to end today... Not dismiss, but we want to end today celebrating the Lord's Supper together.

Father, thank you for these men and women, their courage to raise their hand and go, "Man, I'm in the fight right now. My eyes are a bit bloodied. My mouth hurts. My hands are failing." But thank you, Lord, for encouraging us today, for meeting us where we are. I pray you would strengthen the hearts of these men and women. I don't know their trials. Some of them it's physical. Some of it's relational. Some of it's even eternal, emotional, and yet you meet us where we are.

For those of us the phone will ring later this week, later this month, later this year, later next year, I pray you would drop these things deep into our hearts so on that day the wave comes in, it serves as a seawall, a wave break, where we stand firm in the day of trouble. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

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