

James (Part 11) – Suffering / Comfort

Matt Chandler – May 17, 2015

If you have your Bibles, would you grab those Bibles? We're going to be in James 5. We're going to look at verses 7-12. We've just kind of walked our way through the book of James, the half-brother of Jesus who believed Jesus was the Son of God and actually ended up being one of the first martyrs of the Christian faith.

I like to point to that as often as possible, just to go, "What do you have to do to convince your half-brother that you're God in the flesh to the point he would give his own life for you?" The answer to that is, "Resurrect from the dead." That's why we look with special care and attention on the words of James. James 5:7-12 is what we're going to look at in our time together with only two weeks left in our study of James.

It seems that all the creativity of man and all the energy we possess all has a kind of hyper-like focus in our day and age, and that hyper-like focus is to eradicate from the face of the earth any need to be patient. We are heaven bent on making sure we don't have to wait for anything...ever. If you think about it... The way it's helpful for me is to think about the world my 6-year-old daughter is growing up in. That's my youngest. She's just about to be 6. She turns 6 on May 29.

When I was her age, we lived in the San Francisco Bay Area, and my parents' families, both of whom were from Missouri... They called it Missoura. They lived around a lake in the sticks of Missoura called Pomme de Terre Lake, and every summer, my father would rent a pop-up camper, put it on the back of our car, and we would drive from San Francisco to Missoura.

Let me tell you what we did in the car. Are you ready? We looked out the window. Then we played I Spy, which is not easy at 70 miles an hour and not easy when you're talking a three-day trip inside the same vehicle. You're just kind of running out of options. Then we would color. Then we would pester my dad until violence entered the equation on, "Are we there yet? Are we there yet?"

We knew we weren't there yet, but what else could we do? We had been in the car for three days. From there we would stare out the window again. Then we would ask if we were there. Then we would color a picture. Then we would play I Spy. Then we would stare out the window. Now, every year, my family takes a 6-hour trek from Dallas up to Missouri, because that's how you say that word. We drive to a family camp at Kanakuk right outside Branson. It's called K-Kauai. My kids love it. It's my favorite thing we do as a family every summer.

Six hours. My 6-year-old watches movies and then can play video games on one of our devices. She doesn't ask if we're there yet. She has the audacity to complain about being bored. Then I become the very thing I swore to God on High I would never become, my father. I turn around, and I try to convince her of how hard I had it. My dad would be like, "We didn't have an air conditioner back in the day. We just had to sleep on the side of the road and hope nobody killed you."

I'm saying to my daughter, "Listen. I stared out the window for three days. You're watching three movies and playing some video games. We're there. Spare me your boredom. I'll show you boredom. Shut the TV." Right? Everything is bent on, "You don't need patience anymore." There's this real ironic thing happening. The more we make the world faster and easier, the more perpetually impatient we actually are.

If you think about it, it's faster than it has ever been. You want movies? Live stream them to any device you have. Here's something that stuck out to me this week just in prepping, getting ready for this. I was grabbing a taquito from Whataburger, and I noticed that Whataburger has two lanes for their drive-through, because fast food just isn't fast enough. We have to speed that mug up just a little bit more.

How do we do that? It only takes from freezer to hot in your hand 2.7 minutes. How do we speed that up? Double lanes. McDonald's has done that. Everything is, "Have to get it now." It has jacked us up. Watch this. How many of you this week... This is a safe place. If you're a guest, this is a safe place for you. Welcome home. How many of you this week have been downloading a document, a picture, something, and then gave up because it wasn't moving fast enough?

Think of how crazy that is. "Oh, man. I've been waiting for like 18 seconds. Never mind. I have no time for this." Right? It's crazy. We're perpetually impatient now. "This isn't fast enough. This isn't happening quickly enough. This is frustrating me." If you compare it with where we've come from, it's crazy. I can remember in my lifetime having conversations at dinner that had no resolution.

Here's what I mean by that. It's the very last 10 years of human existence that we've been able to be at dinner with friends and go, "Hey, who was that third baseman for the Dodgers in the 90s?" and actually get an answer to that. See, before the last 10 years, you just had to hope that you one day remembered or that you came across someone who knew the answer. You couldn't just pull something out and in a matter of seconds find the answer. Right? That's brand new. That has never existed before in the history of mankind.

Yet we're perpetually aggravated. How many of you have yelled at a device in the last month? Has anybody yelled at their screen? Doesn't that make you crazy? Think about how crazy that is. When I was trained for this job, theological research and writing, I went to a library, and I had to go to what is called a card catalog, kids. It was arranged via something called the Dewey Decimal System.

Here's what I had to do. If I was going to go do that work some other place, I had to take the book and make copies of pages in the book. There was no PDF. There was no, "Let me email that to myself." I had to make copies of it, and it cost me money. You would never get the book right the first time, so you had to throw away the first seven pages. That cost you 45 cents, which might as well be \$1 million when you're a freshman in college. That's two packages of Ramen noodles, man. That's staying alive.

You had to make those copies, and then you had to go back and do your work in your dorm room or some other place. Everything has gotten faster and easier, and it has only served to frustrate us. We find ourselves lacking patience in a day and age where everything is built for ease and speed and comfort. Shoot, even riding a roller coaster now. For a few extra bucks, you can get a fast pass. You can register and show up and make everybody who has been sweating to death in line for two hours despise you as you just walk up and hop on the roller coaster.

Everything is built for speed. Everything is built for, "You don't have to wait. Let's create another line in the fast food." Any time of creative technological brilliance we have is hyper-focused not on just curing diseases but making us not have to wait. It hasn't been good for our souls. See, the Lord values patience in his children. Not just so we don't yell at our screen or scream at our spouse or snap at our children. When we think of patience, that's almost always the domain in which we're thinking about patience.

We're thinking, "Oh, I lose patience so easily with my spouse. I lost patience so easily with my kids. I lose patience so easily when I'm driving." We think about those kind of surface-level areas where patience is necessary. I do think God cares about those things, and he speaks into those things, but God is serious about patience because persevering faith and gladness in God requires it.

Persevering, glad-hearted faith in God requires patience. I'm going to try to explain that via James 5:7-12. Here's the outline of the text. Be patient; the Lord is coming. Be patient; God is accomplishing something in you. Be patient with each other. Be patient; God's promises are true. Be patient with each other. Seriously. That's the outline. James 5, starting in verse 7.

"Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast.

You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your 'yes' be yes and your 'no' be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation."

The outline of this text and James's argumentation for this group of people who are oppressed externally and conflicted internally is five-fold.

1. *Be patient; the Lord is coming.* For two millennia, the heart of the believer in Christ and the imagination of the believer in Christ are set on the return of Christ and all things being made new. See, for the Christian, history is linear. We are moving toward something, away from something. That thing we're moving toward is the day Christ returns and consummates all he accomplished in his cross and his resurrection. We are moving toward something. We concentrate and get our imagination around this. Our Father is coming to get us.

I was playing in the backyard with Reid and Norah several years ago and throwing the football with Reid. Honestly, I was throwing it *at* him. It just bounced off. He couldn't catch well quite yet. We're tossing the ball in the back, and Norah had snuck off. I lost sight of her. Judge me if you want. It happens. She's alive. We made it. We don't have a pool or anything.

Reid and I are playing, and all of a sudden, I just hear kind of a whimper and a cry for Dad. I came around the side of the house, and she had climbed up our fence. She was looking over our fence. After she got up there she had apparently enjoyed it for five or six minutes, and then thought, "I don't know how to get down."

Stuck on the fence, she began to cry out for me, and she was there until I got to grab her, kiss her, and put her down on the ground. The Christian imagination is, "My Dad is coming. My Dad is coming, and I'm closer." Let me paint for you out of the Scriptures the day we're looking forward to. Revelation 21, starting in verse 1.

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.' And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.'"

This is coming. We are closer now than we were when we walked in. This is where the Christian hope hinges, that he is coming. He will make all things new. Tears, mourning, loss, sadness all vanish. In fact, even in Communion at the end of our service, part of what we're celebrating in the cup is that we are closer to the day where we drink with him face to face, not in some sort of symbolic celebration of union with him, but a face-to-face meeting with the King of Glory.

This is a reality, not a hope. We are closer. You know how time works. It's summer. Didn't we just open presents? I feel like we just broke down our Advent stage. We know how time works. It always shows up faster than we think it's going to. If you think in the future, like the end of this semester, "I

can't wait for this vacation. I'm looking forward..." Listen. To put it in language you might understand as mostly Texans, we will be watching football again soon, sooner than we think.

We're about to get in that weird, nebulous, "Ugh," season. Then *boom*. It'll be here. Look. Our kids are going to be starting school again like tomorrow. It's not, but it is, right? That's just how time works. Right? As a 41-year-old, probably in that apex of activity for me... Probably. I don't know. I'm only 41. I don't know what comes after it. I just know what's before it.

I will tell you this. My life could be described as very long days with very fast years. Days are long. I go to bed tired, and then it's 2020. It's just happening that way. It's flying, and time for us works this way. We will be at this day before we know it. If you're crossing off boxes on a calendar, we're moving toward this day where there are no more tears, no more mourning, no more loss, no more sadness, no more death.

Hold tight. You're almost there. Be patient. We're almost there. Be patient. It won't be long now. Every bit of difficulty, suffering, crawling, weariness, depression, anxiety, lustful perversions will be over on that day. There will be no longer a need to fight and hang in there because God will pull us off the fence. Hang in there. The Lord is coming.

2. *Be patient. God is accomplishing something in you.* Look at the illustration here. **"See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient."** Tying it back into the first point. **"Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand."** I think in our clearer moments, we understand this, but in our more difficult moments it gets difficult for us to see. Let me try to remind.

On this kind of linear line with the coming of Christ and all things being made new, being the end of history as we know it, you and I are on this linear line somewhere back here, converted by the grace of God, being called to be a child of God. He is now sanctifying us, making us more and more and more and more like Jesus. God uses both joys and sorrows to conform us into the image of his Son.

If you're a Christian, difficulty is not punitive. You're not being punished for not having a long enough quiet time. That's not how this works. You are fully loved, fully accepted in Christ if you are a son or daughter of God. That doesn't mean the Lord doesn't have work to do that he desires to do in you.

To put in every day terms, I love my son. He's a 9-year-old boy. I love him. It's hard for me to imagine anything he could do right now to make me not love him, but we have some work to do. Part of that work is rewarding what is good and right, and part of that is disciplining what is wrong. Hebrews 12 says, "The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he scourges all those whom he calls sons." Difficulty for the Christian is not God punishing his children but God shaping and molding his children.

James has already argued this way earlier in the book. If you remember James 1:2-4, it says this. **"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness."** Now, what is steadfastness? It's patience on steroids. **"And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."**

God is accomplishing, producing in you fruits of righteousness. Be patient; the Lord is at work in your struggle. He is at work in your joy. He is at work in your losses. He is at work in your fight. He is at work. Don't lose hope. Be patient. God is accomplishing things. He is building your confidence and breaking your idolatry. Be patient; the Lord is at work. Be patient; the Lord is coming.

3. *Be patient with each other.* Look there in verse 9. **"Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door."** Now we're going from, "Be patient; the Lord is coming. Be patient; the Lord is at work among you." Then he enters into this idea on the ground. Don't grumble about one another. "Gosh, that guy. I can't believe he... I just can't believe..."

His argument is that ultimately, you're receiving the same grace as others. In the same way others get on your nerves, you most definitely get on others' nerves. In fact, I love this. I'm reading C. S. Lewis's book *The Screwtape Letters* with some friends. I love Lewis. *The Screwtape Letters* is one of the most creative of Lewis' works. What Lewis does in *The Screwtape Letters* is he writes the book around a demon named Screwtape who is mentoring a younger demon named Wormwood.

Screwtape is writing letters to Wormwood, teaching him how to deceive and destroy mankind. In chapter 2, what happens is Wormwood's "patient" as it's called in Lewis's work has become a Christian. Screwtape writes to Wormwood, "Do not think you will escape the punishment that is due for letting your patient become a Christian." Then he goes on to help Wormwood understand how to deceive and destroy the joy of this Christian's conversion.

Here's what he says in letter two of *The Screwtape Letters*. This is from Screwtape to Wormwood. "One of our great allies at present is the Church itself. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean the Church as we see her spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners. That, I confess, is a spectacle which makes our boldest tempters uneasy. But fortunately, it is quite invisible to these humans. All your patient [this new Christian] sees is the half-finished, sham Gothic erection on the new building estate [or site]."

He's saying all we can see is the work in progress. We don't see the finished work. To us, it looks broken and a bit ghetto-like and not put together well. It looks like it's falling apart. Screwtape writes to Wormwood, "He is unaware. He is not able to see what we see, the church mighty as an army with banners, able to make us tremble before God's purposes and plans. Rather, he sees the half-built workings of God in the hearts of his people."

Here's how he gets this young Christian to not walk in the joy of the Lord. "When he gets to his pew and looks around him he sees just that selection of his neighbors whom he has hitherto avoided. [...] Provided that any of those neighbors sing out of tune, or have boots that squeak, or double chins, or odd clothes, the patient will quite easily believe that their religion must therefore be somehow ridiculous. [...] Work hard, then, on the disappointment or anticlimax which is certainly coming to the patient during his first few weeks as a churchman."

How can you assure that a Christian will not walk in the joy that God has given to him in the grace of Christ? Let him focus on the weaknesses of the churchmen around him and let him grumble. We know theologically how we should think about each other. Right? If we keep going back to this linear line with our last day being that one where Christ is making all things new, no more mourning, no more tears, no more death, that day, we're moving toward that day.

What's true is on that line, toward that day, none of us is complete. The Lord is still working in each and every one of us. This means we're in varying stages and varying places on that line. God's grace for us stays lavish and extravagant throughout our progressive sanctification. The way I've tried to teach it to you historically is the Lord knew what he was buying on the cross. Since God is an inexhaustible well, his grace for you never runs out.

This is why that line can be really long for some of us, and God never wearies or tires of us failing and struggling, sometimes with elementary things. The steadfast love of the Lord is so strong that in

a lifetime of stumbling and falling, he never goes, "Sheesh, forget it," but continues to lavish upon us extravagant grace. James's argument is, "I would be really careful grumbling about your brother when the Judge, the only one who really has the right to judge, is standing in the doorway and watching."

This text reminded me of the parable Jesus tells about a man who was forgiven much debt and immediately went out to those who owed him and threw them into prison for not being able to pay him the debt they owed him when he had been forgiven so much by the king. If you would dial in to all you have been forgiven of, all God has been gracious to you in, how much mercy has been extended to you, I promise you your self-righteous judgment and grumbling about your brothers would considerably shrink.

The issue is you just think you're so awesome. You can't grasp the mercy that has been extended to you. If you're kind of just normal, everyday church folk, you're probably looking around at morons that make you feel better about where you are. Then you begin to puff out your chest and walk like we should all just be thankful that you're here to save the kingdom of God for us.

James' argument is, "Hey, bro. The real Judge is standing in the door. I'd watch your mouth." To understand the mercy that has been extended to us enables us to extend the mercy to others. Don't grumble. Be patient with your brothers. They're works in progress. Then he goes back, and this is just a rich one.

4. *Be patient; God's promises are true.* Look in verse 10. **"As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful."**

This is intriguing argumentation from James because he reminds people of the one verse, the one book in the Bible most of us try to avoid. Oftentimes, I'm sitting across from people who aren't believers, and one of the kind of cards our modern-day culture plays when they don't want to submit to the living God of the universe is they'll say, "I can't believe you Christians believe the Bible. I can't believe you would put confidence in a 2,000-year-old book."

That's somewhat un-researched and foolish to say, so if you want to believe that, at least do the hard work of digging around so you don't sound like a fool to someone who knows. If what God

wants me to do with his book is win friends and influence people, then I need the book of Job to go somewhere. It would be really helpful if Peter wasn't such an idiot in the New Testament.

You know what you can do to help me, Father? Let's not slaughter the Canaanites, because that one keeps coming back up a lot. Here's what happens in the book of Job. Keep in mind that James is trying to encourage people with the book of Job, Job as a book of encouragement. The Bible tells us that God is on his throne, and the angels are presenting themselves to God. The Accuser walks in. The Devil is the Accuser. He walks in, and God asks the Accuser what he has been up to.

Always pay attention when God asks questions, because God doesn't need to know anything. He asks the Accuser what he has been up to. He's like, "Looking at the sons of man." God says, "Have you considered my servant Job?" The Accuser goes, "Of course he praises you. Of course he loves you. You've given him all good things. He has many children. He is extremely wealthy. You've done nothing but bless him. Of course he praises you, but if you let me take all you have given him, he'll curse your name." God says, "Okay."

What? We read it in a very succinct, condensed... Maybe hours, maybe days. Job loses everything. All seven of his children die. All of his wealth vanishes. The only thing he's left with is his wife, and that's not a good thing. We'll talk more about that in a second. What happens when all is gone, all seven children are dead, all his wealth has vanished? The Bible says Job tears his clothes, gets in sackcloth and ashes, and says, "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I will return. The Lord has given. The Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Then the scene switches. We're back in heaven, and God is on his throne. The angels are presenting themselves. The Accuser walks in again. God goes, "Hey, hold up for a second. Shh. Do you hear that? I think our boy Job down there is singing 'Oceans' to me. I love that song. Remember that time you said he was going to curse me? Spirit, get down there and lead him without borders. Walking on water...do that. What's up, Accuser?"

This is all a paraphrase. If you try to find this right now, it's going to be... Right? Job still loses everything and praises him. The Accuser says, "It's because he has his health. If you let me take his health, he will curse your name," and God again says, "Okay, but don't kill him." Now, a couple of things I always love about the early of chapter of Job are, first, that the Accuser is constantly asking permission (I love that) and that God, even when he grants permission, gives parameters.

It doesn't sound like the dualism that Hollywood always presents us with, does it? It's like the Accuser is like, "Hey, do you mind if I...?" God says, "Okay, but here are the parameters." He's a dog on a leash. That's what we see about the Accuser. The Bible tells us that from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet, Job breaks out in boils.

His wife says upon this... See, he's in the sackcloth and ashes. He has a clay pot. He's scraping his skin, and his wife says, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die, you fool." "Thanks, baby. I was thinking what I could really use right now is you nagging me as I sit here and scrape my sores with clay." Do you see what I'm saying? "Give me the dog. Take the woman. The dog will at least be friendly."

Ultimately, here, this is meant to encourage the believers James is writing to. How? Because the believers in James knew the last five chapters of Job. They knew God meets Job in this brokenness. He heals Job. He restores to Job all that has been taken, and we see the compassion and love of God made manifest in difficult days and moronic friends that are present in Job's life.

They can look back upon centuries if not millennia of God's faithfulness to the prophets and to Job, the one who has suffered more than anyone in this room. I know we have loss in this room. We have struggle in this room. We have difficulty in this room, but I don't know one of you who has lost seven children and ended up homeless and dying of a disease.

That's why Job is the illustration because no one has a trump card over Job, not until Jesus, who takes on the sins of the world. He says, "Consider Job." He points to Job as a picture of God's mercy and compassion. "Hang in there. God's promises are true." Listen. God has never betrayed you. He has never failed you.

I'm not saying you haven't endured difficulty. I'm not saying you have not experienced sorrow. I'm not saying there aren't horrible, broken things in the world. I'm saying that in this last day on this linear line, the old will pass away, and the new will come, and we will see how all things fit to the glory of God.

Augustine, who was a bishop in Hippo in northern Africa, explained our lives as having our faces scrunched against a stained glass window. If your face was jammed into a stained glass window, all you would see is broken glass and edges. It would look like there had been some kind of terrible accident, but as you pull back away from stained glass windows, they can be incredible.

Augustine said that we, being finite and not infinite, see the world with our faces up against the glass. God, being eternal, sees how all the jagged pieces fit together into something beautiful. Hang in there. Be patient. God's promises are true. We see it probably most clearly in the life of Joseph who is sold into slavery by his brothers. He ends up working himself out of slavery into running Potiphar's house.

Apparently, our man Joseph is a looker because Potiphar's wife is pursuing him and trying to seduce him. Joseph sticks to honoring the Lord and honoring Potiphar and even says to the woman, "It ain't happening." Again, that's a paraphrase. If you're Googling, "It ain't happening Joseph," it's probably not going to pull up on your Bible app. Then finally, Joseph finds himself in the house. She corners him and grabs him.

He fights her off, and he leaves his coat behind. She falsely accuses him of sexual assault, and Joseph ends up back in prison. From there, he interprets some dreams. To one of the king's counselors, he says, "Remember me when you get out of here. The Lord has shown me that you're going to get out. Remember me when you get out." The guy got out and forgot about Joseph, so he stayed in the dungeon.

Years later, through some sweet acts of mercy, he ascends to one of the highest positions in Egypt, almost on the throne of Egypt itself, second in command, really close to the Pharaoh. Those brothers who sold him into slavery show up in desperate need of help as Israel was experiencing a horrific famine. People were dying, and it looked like God's promised people were about to be wiped off of the earth.

Here's what Joseph says to his brothers in Genesis 50:20. **"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."** Be patient; God's promises are true. The Bible does not promise you and I will not promise you a life of ease, a life without tears. I will promise you God's promises are true. He will hold you. He will not let into your life what he will not sustain and hold you together in.

We can imagine. We have fears. "Oh my gosh, if this was happening, I just don't think I could do it." The reason you don't think you could do it is God hasn't entered that into your world. Once that enters into your world, he'll bolster you and hold you together. Do you know how I know that? I've gotten to walk into that room about 600 times in the last 20 years.

People I had just talked to earlier in the week, people who were scheduled to come over to our house for dinner, heck, people in my own family, plans that were set... Then the telephone rang, and the brokenness of this world invaded, and God was present, and he held together, and he sustained and in really beautiful ways even injected (we'll talk more about this next week) some joy into the difficulty. Be patient; God's promises are true. Lastly, he circles back around.

5. *Be patient with each other...seriously.* He's just so serious about what this does in the life of a community. He circles back around to being patient with one another again but with a nuance. Earlier it was about grumbling. This is going to be more about the culture of a community of faith that is patiently awaiting the return of Jesus.

"But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your 'yes' be yes and your 'no' be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation."

When James says, "Do not swear an oath," he's prohibiting invoking the name of God as a type of weight on your "yes" or your "no." He's saying, "Don't do that."

What he's doing right now is James is going contrary to the Levitical law where we see in Leviticus the need and the necessity for oath and what happens if a man breaks his oath. They restrict prohibitions and punishments for those who made oaths and broke those oaths by using the name of the Lord as their bolstering of their word. James is saying, "No, no, no. Christ has fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law." We now live under the law of liberty, under the law of love. We covered that earlier in James 1.

As those who have experience grace and mercy, those who have experienced the loving kindness of God, the sacrificial love of God in Christ, we are those who live self-blessed lives, loving and encouraging and saying, "Yes," as often as we can to our brothers and sisters. We let our "no" be our "no," and we let our "yes" be our "yes."

We have no need to swear by the name of God because God has created a community that lives by the law of liberty. "If I can serve you, I'm going to. If I can't, I'm not going to make up some stuff. I'm just going to say, 'Brother, I can't for where I am right now, but I love you. Let me try to get you help somewhere else.'"

When you preach a message like this... There have been a lot of difficult things that probably strike at many of our anxieties and fears. We've prayed for people with cancer today. We watched the Anderson video, which is a parent's worst nightmare.

Here, we've had a whole sermon filled with needing to be patient because the Lord is going to come, needing to be patient, believing God has accomplished something, needing to be patient with one another, needing to be patient because the Lord's promises are true, needing to be patient because God is creating a community of faith that doesn't just live in this last day but is in process right now.

Here's what I know. For some of us, we're just going to write some of these things down. We're going to kind of categorize it, and one day we'll revisit it and go, "Man, that was great." Six weeks, eight weeks, ten weeks, two months from now, we'll be like, "Gosh, I'm really struggling. Wait, I think Chandler said something in May. Let me see. Oh, wait. Yeah, here it is. Here are my notes. Ahh, that's right. The Lord is coming."

For others of us, we dragged ourselves in here today. For others of us, this isn't some idea we'll need to consider in the future; this is a helpful word from God right now. See, some of us have come in here, and it has been a hell of a week. What I mean by that is it has been a torment-filled, from the depths of hell type of wrestle.

For some of us, that's with depression. For others of us, that's sexual perversion. For others of us, that's drugs and alcohol. For others of us still, that's doubt. For others of us still... We've dragged ourselves in here, not being confident in how long we're going to be able to hang in there. For you this morning, is not today an objective evidence of the grace of God being for you, being merciful toward you?

Is not this text falling on this weekend with you being here, coming off what you're coming off of yet another mercy of God on your life? Is God not right now stepping into your space and saying, "I'm coming. Hang in there." Is God not right now going, "No, no, no. I'm at work. Hang in there. You have not been betrayed. I'm accomplishing something in you that will bring worship into your heart in times to come. Hang in there. Hold tight. Don't give up."

Is he not in some ways for many of us going, "Why do you grumble all the time? Do I grumble about you? Don't you fail me far more than they fail you? Do you not see the hypocrisy in your own self-righteous heart? I'm at the door, bro. I'm watching this. I, who extend such mercy to you, extend

such grace to you, am watching you refuse to do so to others who have not sinned against you like you have sinned against me."

For others of us, it's just to be reminded that his promises are true. What a gracious God we serve. To meet us on a day like today, to sow seeds that will bear fruit in the future when it is our turn, because nobody gets out of a Genesis 3 world unscathed. For those who are children of God, he holds us fast and to the end. The last couple of lines in the book of Jude say, "To him who is able to keep you from stumbling be all glory and honor and praise." Let's pray.

Father, for my brothers and sisters who crawl in here today, who limp in here today, who with great difficulty are enduring, I pray you would encourage their hearts, even in this moment as we begin to take the cup and the bread and rejoice in your sacrifice for us.

As we put our hope in what you have accomplished and guaranteed us you will accomplish, that our hearts might be strengthened, that you might grant us the gift of persevering faith that is wrought in the virtue of patience that you call us to develop. This is thicker than losing our patience with our laptop or our phone or traffic. God, establish a work in us that even makes those things lighter. You're gracious and good. We love you. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

We end our services the same way, rejoicing and remembering the broken body and shed blood of Christ. We provide Communion primarily for our covenant members. If you are a guest this morning who is a believer in Christ in good standing with the church you're visiting us from, I want to invite you to partake in the Lord's Supper with us, but I would like to ask this.

If you're not a Christian, if you have not come to that place in your life where you have confessed and repented of your sins, then will you abstain from the elements? A couple of things. First, these aren't going to make you lucky, and they're not going to solve any of life's problems. In fact, the Bible actually teaches opposite. It teaches that if you look at this as a type of magic lucky charm, then really bad things might happen.

This is for the believer to rejoice in what God has accomplished for them. If you're not a believer, you have been invited to the table, but until you confess and repent, you cannot sit down at it. Our earnest hope is that you would confess your sins, believe upon Jesus Christ, and join us at this table of celebration. I wanted to give you a few moments as we hand out the elements to consider the Word of God this morning, consider what the Lord might be saying to us.

The way we do that is I'm just going to put a couple of questions on the screen behind me. Those are for you to just think about and confess. This is meant to lead you into a heart state before the Lord where you've really considered what the Word of God says and have confessed the things you need to confess and asked the Lord for mercy where you need mercy. Then I'll come back out, and we'll celebrate together the broken body and shed blood of Christ. Let me give you just a couple of minutes to consider the Word of the Lord.

We come to the Table this morning in our fight against indwelling sin. We have bents. We have struggles. We have things that pull us toward what we know is unrighteous. We come to the Table acknowledging this is a fight we're all in and that grace has paid our bill in full. This Table is a reminder that the Lord has us and will sustain us and will hold us fast.

We celebrate that on the night Jesus was arrested, he took the bread and broke it and said, "This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." After the meal, he took the cup. Again, the cup is one of those things that points us toward the future. Not only does he say that in the cup, "This is the blood of the new covenant," but in Matthew 26, he says he will not drink the cup with us again until glory.

On that linear line, there is this day coming where we drink with Jesus face to face. We're closer. We're a week closer than the last time we gathered. We're an hour and 10 minutes closer right now than we were when we came in this room. We've moved more and more closely to that day where he makes all things new. This isn't just a hope-filled cup, but it is a consummated reality cup. He says, "You're going to be prone to forget this, so as often as you gather, take the cup and drink it."

I want to end our service today by giving you an opportunity to respond. Let me tell you what that might look like. I'm going to pray in just a second, and there are going to be some men and women. While I'm praying, they're going to come stand up here. Here's what I know. There are those of us who, like I've said, this weekend, this message has kind of hit in some spots where you feel a little stuck or jammed up or like you're barely hanging in there.

Will you let us help? In fact, let me be so bold as to say this. Please don't be the person who says, "I don't want to bother anyone with my difficulties. I don't want anyone else to have to bear that." The very nature of the gospel is that we bear one another's burdens. In fact, there isn't anything in this

room but broken people. If you're like, "I don't want to be a burden to anyone," the very nature of your existence and my existence is burdensome.

God gives us one another to carry that burden. In fact, the way the gospel is most visibly seen is broken people bearing one another's brokenness. I love you. Get over yourself, please. Will you let us pray for you and encourage you? Just come up and grab us. Nobody's mouth is going to drop open. You don't have a story that is going to make us go, "Oh my gosh. I can't believe it. No, you can't be at home here."

We've had felons on staff. Not in the children's area. Everybody breathe out. They're not rocking your children right now, okay? You're safe. We've seen the depths of depravity in this place and found Christ to be stronger. Let us serve you. Let us walk alongside of you. That's one way we respond. We come and get prayer. We confess and ask for help.

The second way is we just sing to the Lord. We're going to talk about that next week. We get to sing and make much of the Lord, but I do want to warn you this. Everyone will respond to the Word of God. To have no response is to harden your heart toward the truths of God. That's a dangerous place to be. That's why it's such a miserable thing to have your feet in two different worlds.

To be a half-hearted Christian is the most exhausting, pitiful existence one can have because you can't be happy in the world, but you can't be happy in Christ either. You've literally jammed yourself up. This morning would be a great time to just sell out and push your chips all in and wholeheartedly follow Christ. You will not find comfort anywhere else, not long-lasting comfort. Let me pray for us, and let's respond. Let's sing. Let's pray. Let's just not do nothing. Don't forget about YoungLives. They're needing \$9,000. I want to see that knocked out substantially this morning.

Father, we love you. Thank you for how you meet us where we are, how you minister to us where we are. It's for your beautiful name we pray. Amen.