

## Work - Wk 5

### “You Need Meaning For Your Frustrations”

7/25/21

James 1:1-17

#### Introduction

Tim. Pastor. Sup. **Pray.** James 1:1-17.

#### **I want us to start tonight with a little exercise.**

- Pull out something you can write on or type into.
- Take a minute and just think (not write) about your work. All of your work.
- Your job if you work, your school, if you're a stay at home parent, your small business, your side hustle - all of your work, your labors.
- Also, your survival work - cleaning, cooking, mowing the lawn, paying bills, etc.
- I want you to think about the ways you give your energy to serve your family, your friends, your neighbor, our church.
- Now, here's what I want you to write down: **What are your frustrations with your work?**
- Don't just put "it's hard". Why is it hard? Difficult boss, tedious, monotonous, bad hours, underpaid, under-appreciated, boring, not what you want to be doing. **What are the specific frustrations with your work?**

#### **BIG QUESTION FOR TODAY: What do we do with our work frustrations?**

Because we all have them right? We all have ways in our jobs we experience the curse of sin in *Genesis 3* - the thorns and thistles. The Biblical reality that while work itself is a good gift from God, that it's also broken because of the curse of sin - and so it's also difficult, tiring, and at times overwhelmingly frustrating.

***Let me prove it real quick - raise your hand if you've ever been frustrated at some aspect of your work.*** (ME TOO! But you're our pastor....I know!....shocker)

#### **So how do we handle those frustrations? What do we do with them?**

Let's get into James 1 together and see. We're going to be hopping around a bit in James 1 today, so grab a Bible if you haven't yet, and let's get into it.

## Let Them Serve You

### **James 1:1-4**

**1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings. 2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,**

Pause here real quick. Here's James, the half brother of Jesus, writing to Jewish Christians all spread across different nations due to persecution. And he tells them in verse 2 → you're going to have various kinds of trials.

Now, it's important to note here that when James says this he is talking to a group of people actively being targeted by religious and government officials for trying to follow Jesus. The **trials of various kind** that James has in mind are less having to work overtime and more trying not to get killed for worshipping Jesus. Not quite a one-for-one comparison...

But, even in the midst of those extreme - killed for your faith, kicked out of your home - type of trials experienced by the people James is writing to, he gives them a charge. He tells them to **count it all joy.**

**So most certainly if they are called to count it all joy when they face these trials, that the same would be true for us as we experience much lesser trials in the midst of our day to day.**

James continues:

**3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.**

**Alright, watch this - James connects our trials to the testing of our faith.** Specifically the word he uses would be used to describe a testing for genuineness. Let me see if this is real. Let me see if this holds up.

World Champion boxer **Mike Tyson** once famously said about his boxing strategy - **"Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth."**

**Everyone thinks their faith is strong until they get punched in the mouth.** That it's in these moments when we're squeezed, pressed, frustrated, bewildered that the genuineness of our faith is being tested.

**But it's not in vain, it's not for nothing.**

Look at what James says comes as a result... **Steadfastness.**

Being steadfast is the ability to **stand firm in life's difficult situations and circumstances.** It's an internal, Holy Spirit enabled power and strength that can withstand and endure anything that life might bring.

So trials - in whatever form they come in - though painful, though disheartening - can actually accomplish something for our good. They can actually produce a rootedness within us.

Trials are a testing of your faith that can lead to steadfastness which then, look at verse 4: **4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.**

When James says "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" he's talking about the idea of spiritual maturity. Abiding in Christ such that you are rooted and flourishing with God.

In other words → if you keep playing out this equation - trials test your faith which leads to steadfastness, and as this happens more and more it will reach its full conclusion - Christian maturity.

But it's not just that our trials can help us grow as Christians, I would argue from the Bible that our trials are **necessary** in order to grow into mature, fully-formed followers of Jesus. In order to grow we actually need things in our lives that are challenging and difficult and hard and stressful. Your trials and frustrations have a potential that ease and comfort in life do not.

### **Trial is necessary for maturity.**

**"Worldly Examples"**. I mean, we know this right. Take it out of the spiritual world for a second. This principle is found everywhere → it's in adversity, not prosperity, that we grow.

- Military boot camp. Put you through hard things. Trials. Because they have to develop these soldiers and get them ready.
- First year of college or first year of work - disorienting, difficult. Big fish in a small pond to small fish in a big pond. People struggle → but it's how you grow.
- Camping. Lindsay likes to quote this study to me all the time. A few years ago some researchers found one of the best things you can do for your family is take them camping because it creates a bonding experience of temporary hardship.
- Muscles - if you lift weights or you are a runner you know this. How do you get stronger? You lift heavy things. How do you run farther? You strain your aerobic capacity.

This is how we grow....**through adversity.**

### **Do we really believe that how we mature spiritually is different?**

That instead God just sprinkles us with pixie dust and we fly into Christian growth? We want to believe that we can get spiritual maturity without trials and that's not how it works! In fact it's largely the opposite.

**1 Peter 1:6-8 - 6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**

God uses our trials to refine us like a flame does to gold. God uses our trials to sanctify us, grow us, mature us in Him.

So look at what James is trying to show us - **Trials are tests for your faith which can lead to steadfastness which leads to spiritual maturity (which is the goal of all Christians)...SO count it all joy.**

- Getting slandered by a coworker? Count it all joy!
- 50 unread emails in my inbox? Count it all joy!
- Getting yelled at by a sales rep? Getting passed over for a promotion or a raise? Count it all joy!

**Trials are a tool in the sovereign and loving hands of God to bring about our steadfastness and maturity in Him.** (Trial → Test → Steadfastness → Maturity)

### Serve or Destroy

**That's the positive invitation of our trials.** We can count it all joy because it will lead towards a deeper maturity in Christ.

The problem is that it doesn't always go that way. James gives us the opposite of what can happen in the midst of our trials. Rather than being a trial, they become a temptation.

Skip down to v 13 with me, we'll come back to the rest:

**13 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. 14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.**

When you're faced with a trial, James says - you're going to be tempted to begin to blame God. You're going to want to say - "God is tempting me", but let me be clear - **God tests, but He doesn't tempt.**

So when you're faced with a trial that is testing your faith, a trial God means to grow you and stretch your faith and produce steadfastness and maturity within you → James says it's not on God that you're not handling it correctly. It's actually this desire within you, what the Bible calls your sin nature or your flesh, that is luring you away and choosing to respond in sinful ways - gossiping, cutting corners, cheating, belittling, inappropriate venting - whatever it may be.

God is a good God. He's trying to grow us in maturity. It is our sin that is making the trials into temptations.

**Let me show you what I mean:**

**Lindsay - YMCA.** Before moving to Charlotte, Lindsay and I spent a few years in Columbia, SC. And while we were there Lindsay worked at a local YMCA managing all of their youth and kid programming - day care, preschool, summer camp, all of that.

Now, her job during all 3 years was pretty difficult and time consuming, but this was especially true in the summers during summer camp season. She was frequently leaving for work at 4:30 or 5am and coming back sometime around 6pm or 7pm depending on the day. Long hours. On top of that she was overseeing a staff of 18 year old kids who had their own problems, and a camp with 200+ kids who for the most part had very particular parents with strong opinions. **Talk about trial.** It was a lot.

Now her very first day on the job was the very first day of summer camp 2017. And I remember that summer. It hit her like a ton of bricks. She just wasn't ready for it at all. And these trials, when they got matched up with her sin nature, weren't tests that lead to maturity, but instead became temptations that lead to her own unwillingness to believe the gospel for herself, frustration at her staff, bitterness towards parents. All responses that didn't lead her towards Christ or point others towards him. It was a really tough summer.

But when summer of 2018 came around, she was much more ready for it. She had done some of the harder soul work to get with the Lord, to put her trials into perspective, to have a kingdom mindset towards her work, towards her staff, the kids, the parents. And the Lord really used that summer to shape her and grow her in Him.

Now, don't get me wrong - **it wasn't any less difficult.** Still long hours, still frustrating moments and frustrating people - it didn't make the summer itself easier - but having the right mindset actually let the Spirit of God do the work of God in Lindsay's life.

**Same trial → different outcome.**

It's the same equation:

**- Your trial can be a test that leads to steadfastness which leads to maturity.**

- **Your trial can become a temptation that leads to sin which leads to death.**

Trial → Test → Steadfastness → Maturity.

Trial → Temptation → Sin → Death.

**In other words - your trials can serve you or they can destroy you.**

Look back at your list, your particular frustrations with your work. You have 2 options:

**You can let your work frustrations destroy you or you can let them serve you.**

A lot of people, their trials and frustrations at work end up **destroying** them:

- They become **disillusioned** and **discouraged**. Because they aren't as effective in their work as they want to be. They aren't making as much difference in the world as they thought they would. They lose heart, and lose ambition. No longer putting my heart into it. No longer trying to develop expertise and skills to do well in your work. It's not worth it and I'm tired and nothing is ever going to change.
- Sometimes people become **entitled**. Because they work so hard for so long and the pain builds up and they begin to think they are entitled to cut corners or do unethical things to make something happen. They become entitled to some type of relief. Their job has been frustrating for too long, people have been ungrateful for too long, and they can't handle it anymore.
- Others try to **just take control and force the issue**. I'm going to make this happen. I will just bully my way through. They become dishonest and unethical. They overwork. They become controlling and overbearing to their employees.
- Some people run from their trials. They just keep **switching jobs** every time they are frustrated, and keep looking for the one job that won't be frustrating, sabotaging connections and relationships and stability in their life as a result.

**Our frustrations can destroy us. OR They can serve us.**

### **Ways We Can Make Our Trials Serve Our Spiritual Maturity**

In fact, if we look at the rest of James 1, James gives us some ways in which trials can serve us. Ways in which we can learn to count it all joy when we face trials because we know God is using them. Ways to not be destroyed by our thorns and thistles, but to view them as tools in the hands of a loving God for our shaping and molding more and more into His image.

Let me show you this. There's 4. 4 ways we make our trials serve us instead of destroy us:

**1) See trials coming.**

**2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,**

When. Not if. When. That's an important detail. Trials are inevitable. Trials are coming. Work is cursed. We live in a fallen, broken world. Trials are going to come.

And it's important not to breeze past this because from my experience our pain is often amplified within our trials and frustrations because we don't see them or expect them to come. We tend to operate as though life - whether that be career or otherwise - is supposed to be trial and trouble free. We believe that if something is hard, then something about it must be wrong. If I were doing it right, it would be easy. If God were really in this, it would be easy.

- My friends are annoying... I need better friends.
- My marriage is difficult... I must have the wrong spouse.
- My kids are going crazy... I need better kids.
- My church isn't meeting my preferences... I need a new church.
- My work is hard...I must have the wrong job.

**"Pick your problems"**. The summer in between my sophomore and junior years of college I worked at a church camp. For about 10 weeks we would have different youth groups from all across the country come and we would do camp for the week, talk about Jesus, all that. And one of my favorite parts of the job was getting to interact with all of these different pastors and youth pastors from all across the country. That's what I wanted to do with my life and so it was a great chance to get to meet them, ask them questions, all of that.

And I remember one of them in particular, we got really close during the week, and I was sharing with him about my desire to plant a church and all of that and I remember him saying something that to this day still sticks with me. I use it to encourage myself when I have gnarly days in ministry or to encourage others who are struggling in their jobs and considering a career change.

He said, **"Tim, every job has problems. Every job is cursed. Ministry is cursed. Being a barber is cursed.** (He went on to list like 4 or 5 different jobs -- all of them cursed. And he finished by saying:) **So when you're choosing a career, pray....and pick your problems."**

Pray and pick your problems. Don't think that that other career field, that other office, that other team, the other person, won't have problems. It's all cursed. You're going to have trials. Pray, pick your problems, and keep going.

## **2) Go to God.**

**5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.**

One of our deepest needs in the midst of our trials is wisdom.

**Wisdom in the Scriptures is defined as a God-given and God-centered discernment regarding the practical issues of life.**

So James encourages us - in your trials, in your uncertainty, ask God for wisdom. God what are you doing here? How are you trying to grow me? How are you trying to mature me? What sort of steadfastness are you producing with me? Is this too much, do I need to get out or are you working on something, doing something with my trials? I need your help.

Listen - God isn't trying to play guessing games or 20 questions with you! God isn't up there playing a game - "I hope they discover it, I hope they get the lesson." He gives generously to all without reproach! Everything Jesus speaks is clear and good. Ask Him for wisdom!

This is a great chance for us to serve each other as believers and seek the Lord together. In Community Group this week - Hey fam, I'm really struggling with this specific trial and frustration at my job. I'm asking the Lord for wisdom but it just feels cloudy. Will you pray for me? Can we pray together and seek the Lord for a vision of what He's doing here?

Go to God. I need your wisdom, Lord! He gives wisdom...**generously**.

### **3) Kill your comparison.**

**9 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, 10 and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. 11 For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.**

Let the lowly boast in his exaltation - what does that mean? That he's raised with Christ. That in the Kingdom of God the lowly have value, meaning, worth significance.

Let the rich boast in his humiliation - that his life is a vapor, that he's a sinner in need of a Savior. And while his job, status, money, title might elevate him that at the foot of the cross he's a beggar in need of salvation.

**In other words, the gospel levels the playing field.** But what can happen in our sinful tendencies is that not only do we live through our work trials, but we then start to compare our work trials.

Because what happens?

- It's a Tuesday. You wake up way early. Committed to heading into the office to get a start on the day. You're interrupted by an email you didn't want. You realize you're late on a



deadline. Your boss swoops in to chew you out about missing said deadline. You work through the boring and monotonous. You don't get invited to lunch with the coworkers. You want to leave at 5 because you've got dinner with friends before group time but you get pulled into a meeting at 4:30 that lasts until 6:45. You rush to CG, scarf down some Mcdonalds on the way and then you're in group and some guy is complaining because he asked for 8 weeks of vacation time with his new promotion and they only gave him 6.

And if our trials weren't bad enough on their own - we compare and contrast. And instead of asking - what is God trying to do in me through these trials, we start looking around, which either puffs us up with pride or destroys us with self-loathing. **Neither allows our trials to serve us.**

So we must kill our comparison. Their race is their race. Their lot is their lot. Their trials are their trials. We're teammates. Stop the comparative suffering.

**Let me push a little bit here - we have a problem in our culture with wanting to be the one who suffers the most.** We want to be the biggest victim. It's like a version of pride or self-soothing where we have to believe we have it the worst. Everyone else's life is allowed to be hard as long as they understand our life is the hardest.

- Your job is probably not the hardest job in the entire world and even if it is it doesn't matter. It doesn't negate the difficulty of the other person's job. In fact, if you're always playing this game, it elevates your suffering and makes it harder for you to see what God is going, but it also doesn't serve your brother or sister in Christ well because it subtly negates their suffering as being less important. Instead of feeling the need to one up their story with your own trial, lead with patience, prayer, encouragement for them.
- Parents - can I talk to us for a minute? I love you. WE ARE SO BAD AT THIS. Listen - your kid is difficult. SO IS MINE. Now, your kid might factually be more difficult to parent than mine. They might not sleep as well, they might not eat as well, they might be the most rebellious kid that has ever walked the face of the earth. BUT IT IS HARD FOR ALL OF US SO STOP COMPARING. ALSO, that single person in your group, the married couple without kids....THEIR LIFE IS HARD TOO. Parents don't have exclusive rights to trials.

We're in this together. Comparative suffering, comparing our trials doesn't help our trials serve us.

#### **4) Look ahead to the crown of life.**

Let's go back to verse 12:

**12 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.**

There is a reward to come at the end of our trials and tribulations. **The commands of God are always rooted in the promises of God.**

So James tells us the promise of what's to come - for those who stand firm, for those who remain steadfast under trial - they will receive the crown of life. This crown is not a ruler's crown but a victor's crown. It was a reference to a wreath they would put on the heads of athletes after they won a race or a sporting event.

Paul mentions this same crown in 1 Corinthians 9 where he talks about living a self-controlled life to receive the prize, the imperishable wreath. Or 2 Timothy 4:7 where he writes near the end of his life that he has fought the good fight, finished the race, kept the faith - and that in light of that there is a crown of righteousness waiting for him.

One of the biggest ways trials, particularly those that come from being a follower of Jesus, seek to destroy us is by getting us to throw in the towel. This is too much. This is too hard. This is too painful. It's not worth it. Sanctification, Christian maturity is not worth it. If it's not going to be easy, I don't want it at all.

When I'm faced with test or temptation...it's so much easier to throw in the towel. Cut the corner, etc.

But James encourages us - there's a victor's crown ahead. The crown of life is waiting.

And then don't miss the end → **Which God has promised to those who love Him.**

Hold fast in the midst of trials, yes. Absolutely. But know this → That in the midst of the trials God also holds on to you! It's a promise to all who love God. Even with a love that seems flickering, even with a love that seems like it's barely holding on and barely enough.

This is what we are promised in **Hebrews 10:**

**23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering,** [Why? Because we are faithful? Cause we will do it? NO!] **for He who promised is faithful.**

Jesus is faithful to the end. He will keep us. He will hold us. So we look forward by the power of the Holy Spirit, safe and secure and held fast in the arms of Christ, to the crown of life. Asking the question - God what are you doing in these trials to prepare me for eternity with You?

- **See trials coming.**
- **Go to God for wisdom.**
- **Kill your comparative suffering.**
- **Look ahead to the crown of life.**

## Gospel Conclusion

**I want to end with vs 16-17.** James just got done telling us that God is using our trials to mature us and grow us as followers of Him. Count it all joy, don't let it destroy you.

But then he ends with something extremely challenging and yet beautiful.

**16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 17 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.**

James takes it one more step. He doesn't just say that trials happen. He doesn't just say that God uses trials to mature us. **He actually says trials are a gift from God.**

**Harper's first dentist trip.** A few months ago when Harper turned one, we noticed there were some grey spots forming on her top front teeth. So Lindsay, because she's the tough parent, took her to the dentist to get her first teeth check up and cleaning and all of that.

Now, I don't know if you've been to the dentist with a one year old but they make you sit in the chair, and your kid sits facing you and then you have to force them to tilt their head backwards so the dentist can look at and clean their teeth.

So as Lindsay tells the story - they get to the dentist, sit down in the chair, gets Harper to lean backward and next thing Harper knows somebody is messing with her teeth. This is a traumatic thing for me as an adult, I can't imagine what it's like for a one year old. So for the next 30 minutes (ok it was actually 10min but you know how it goes) Lindsay said Harper is just a mess. She's wailing and wailing and wailing. Looking at Lindsay with this look that just screams - **"You have the power to do something, you're my mom, why aren't you doing anything?"**

And Lindsay said she was just screaming every chance she could get - **"MOMMA. MOMMA. MOMMA. MOMMA."**

And what Harper doesn't understand is that this is necessary for her well being, it is for her good. She needs strong and healthy teeth. And though it is painful now it is helping her grow.

How many of us are in the dentist chair of our work trials and frustrations. And we're screaming - **"FATHER. FATHER. FATHER. FATHER. You have the power to do something, you're my God, why aren't you doing anything."**

**We don't realize that the very trials and frustrations and pinch points we are trying to flee from or get God to take away are the very things He is trying to use to shape us and mold us more and more into the image of Christ.**

Do not be deceived. Every good and perfect - including the trials God uses for His glory and our good - are a perfect gift. Why? Because God is a good God. And He's more committed to our holiness than our temporary happiness.

Just this morning, I was reading, and the author was talking about ministry success. And it hit me like a ton of bricks. It's not just applicable to ministry, you can apply it to any work, career, vocation. He said this:

**Jared Wilson - "What if [God's] plan for you is not success but drawing you so near to Him in your dependence, your disappointment, and your devastation that you become more like Christ? The truth is that the Lord may not be committed to *our* success. But here's the promise in this: He *is* committed to *His*. And because of that, He is committed to us becoming more like His Son."**

**So look back at your list.**

**These frustrations that you wrote down - that if it was up to you would go away in an instant - are the very things that God intends to use to grow you.**

So instead of asking - how do I remove these frustrations, instead we ask → **How could God be using these frustrations and trials at my job to actually grow me as His child?**

Two really helpful questions to ask the Lord in the midst of the trials and frustrations. Write these down and spend time this week with the Lord and in group asking these questions:

- 1) What are you trying to kill in me?**
- 2) What are you trying to grow in me?**

**GOSPEL → Because this is what God does - He uses frustration, pain, and trial to bring beauty.** And nowhere is this more evident than at the cross. (more stuff on this here)

**Gospel close into communion.**

**Pray.**