

HIGHLANDS CHURCH

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# Joy in Trials | James 1:2-4 | Thomas Slager

Full Transcript

Unknown Speaker  
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## The False Gospel of Painless Christianity

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- 0:06 I know I joke about New Year's resolutions. I have a friend of mine who every year, he starts out each year with this goal in mind of how many books he's going to read. Does anyone else have this goal this morning, a certain number of books you'd like to read? Like book, that's your goal, book. I want to read one book. I've always been of the understanding like brains are important, but muscles are important. So I, you know, more physical gains is the goal, right? No, I do like to read occasionally. And every year there's normally a couple of books I find myself going back to. Normally in the realm of like church leadership stuff, theology stuff, I don't really like to read for fun necessarily.
- 0:49 I like to intentionally read for things that pertain to my life. So I like reading leadership stuff. There's this one book I go back to quite frequently called Leadership Pain. Leadership Pain. The Classroom for Growth. And the premise of this whole Leadership Pain book is this. Growth requires pain.
- 1:14 Growth requires pain. And I think we know that, right? Like if you have goals in mind of places you'd like to get to financially, like that requires some pain, right? If we're saying yes to this, we're saying no to a lot of other things, and that requires some pain. Saying no to going on a vacation or saying no to going out to eat because you have some goals in mind. Like it requires pain. If you have a goal to run a marathon, like that requires pain. If you're going to grow to that level, that requires all of these little steps in order for us to get there. So we understand the concept of it, right?
- 1:55 Growth requires pain. How many of you, when you, your kids were young, they had growing pains, right? And you can't help but say, sorry, bud, you're growing. I know, but it hurts. Yeah. Growing hurts. If we're going to grow, it requires some pain. And all of that makes sense to us when it's our choice
- 2:24 To subject ourselves to the pain, right? Like I'm willing to put in the pain at the gym if I have these goals in mind. I'm willing. I'm willing to put in some extra miles under my feet if there's a marathon we're trying to run. I'm willing to put in the work and endure the pain if it gets us to financial freedom. I'm willing to endure the pain if it gets us there. I'm willing to endure the pain if it gets us there. But then sometimes God in his kindness and his grace and in his sovereignty subjects us to pain that we weren't ready for for the purpose of growth. And it makes us go, wait a minute.
- 3:06 Wait a minute. Now, I want to grow the ways that I want to grow.

## Reading James 1:2-4 and Prayer

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- 3:14 Biceps and finances, not character. But that's not always what God has in mind. And we're going to look at a passage today, James chapter 1, verses 2 through 4, that's all about pain.

## Understanding the Scattered Church and Real Suffering

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3:33 It's all about pain. Now, I don't know about you, when I came to faith in Jesus, I thought all the pain went away. Has that been your Christian experience? I grew up on apple red happiness theology. Let me tell you what this is. This is a real song. Apple red happiness, popcorn cheerfulness, cinnamon singing inside, peppermint melodies, gumdrop holidays, when you have Christ in your life.

3:59 Now, I've had some days of apple red happiness. And I've experienced popcorn cheerfulness. But there's some days it doesn't feel like peppermint melodies. Doesn't feel like gumdrop holidays. There's no cinnamon singing inside,

4:21

**James 1:1-4**

*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings. 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.*

5:05 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. Let me pray.

5:26 God, while it's my voice that's been heard, we recognize this morning it's your word that's been spoken. And God, this morning, we trust your word as truth. We ask that your word would be the lamp that guides our feet. That your word would be a light unto our path.

5:49 God, this morning, we just recognize, God, pain is inevitable. Trials will come our way. But God, we know that you are greater than any of it.

## Reading James 1:2-4 and Prayer

6:01 Holy Spirit, in humility this morning, we pray that you'd open our eyes to see clearly. See your Jesus clearly, that we'd see our life clearly. Open our ears that we could hear your word, that we could hear your voice. Open our minds that we could know you. Open our hearts that we would respond in faith, in real trust, in real belief.

6:21 God, open our mouths to confess your son Jesus as Lord, to go out into the world to live on mission for your glory.

6:30 God, we thank you for this passage. I pray that we would find hope, that we'd find peace. God, those in the midst of the thick of it this morning would even experience your comfort as they sit together with their church family this morning.

6:44 God, use this time for your glory. We ask you to use it also for our good. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Apple red happiness, huh? Man, you've probably heard the church joke before. You're either currently in a trial, you're coming out of a trial, or you're about to enter into another trial. And if you've been alive for longer than a day, if you've walked with Jesus for longer than a day, you know that life is full of trials. Life is full of difficulty. Life is full of things. that fit this broad category

James gives us of various but one of the things I love James does before he even gets to choosing joy is he acknowledges that these people are in a trial and I think it would do well for each and every one of us

## Understanding the Scattered Church and Real Suffering

7:40 To acknowledge that when life sucks it sucks and it's okay to say that it's okay to recognize things are not the way they should be it's okay to recognize that right now I'm just in a season of difficulty sometimes we fall victim to this like put a smile on theology that pretends like everything is awesome everything's fine that's what we see on social media is everything's fine it just perpetuates this myth that everything's fine but deep down each and every one of us know like it's not fine this is the way it should be it's not the way it should be it's not the way it should be the way James starts James and we found out last week James is a brother of Jesus this is Jesus's brother writing this letter a servant of God

8:27 And of the Lord Jesus Christ to the 12 tribes in the dispersion we didn't spend a whole lot of time much last week on what this dispersion is what's going on in this dispersion if you'd like to join me Acts chapter 7 we see this story this man named Stephen it's the first martyr the first person who was ever murdered for their faith in Jesus we see in Acts chapter 7 in Acts chapter 7 he's put on trial and he's told to renounce his faith in Jesus he's told to go back on everything he said instead he turns the level like a volume from 10 max and just cranks it even past that and uses this as an opportunity to continue preaching the gospel of Jesus well at the end of Acts chapter 7 he ends up getting stoned not stoned stoned with rocks murdered

9:18

### Acts 7:59-60

*And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*

9:30 Glad you left somebody will cause pain in my email inbox and I will grow I will learn Acts chapter 7 verse 59 and as they were stoning Stephen Stephen called out Lord Jesus receive my spirit and falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice Lord do not hold this sin against them and when he had said this he fell asleep it's a euphemism for he died he died he died he died he died he died he died he died he died he died he died he died he died he died he died he died he died he died chapter 8 verse 1 and Saul approved of his execution who's Saul we know Saul in the New Testament as the apostle Paul that's the guy who had the eye -opening experience he met Jesus on the road to go persecute more Christians he became a persecutor of God's church to like the greatest spokesperson of God's church in the New Testament and Saul approved of his

## The Biblical Permission to Grieve and Acknowledge Pain

10:15

**Acts 8:1**

*And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.*

10:55

**John 11:35**

*Jesus wept.*

11:07 Chapter 11 Jesus's best friend Lazarus dies John chapter 11 verse 35 shortest verse in the Bible you know what it says Jesus wept Jesus wept why because he acknowledged pain he acknowledged trial he acknowledged tragedy

11:30 We can fast forward Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane the night he's arrested and put on trial where do we see him in a garden weeping and sweating blood saying father if there's any other way any other way we can do this if there's any other way the sins of the world can be atoned for please can we go that way why because Jesus acknowledged the pain

11:55 Jesus acknowledged the pain so a little bonus point to your outline before we even get into your outline when we encounter of various kinds here's where it starts acknowledge it acknowledge it i see a counselor once a month because we're all broken and we all need help and we all need people asking us questions that no one else knows how to ask us sometimes and my counselor tells me thomas you've got to stop baptizing stuff in bible verses i am toxically positive

12:27 Toxically positive i paint everything positive if i can if something could be going terrible and i'm like it's not just silver lining look at the good but

12:42 Even Jesus recognizes pain even Jesus weeps even Jesus recognizes trial even God's word teaches us to grieve not as those without hope but to still grieve we encounter trials where does it start acknowledge it acknowledge that something's wrong acknowledge that something hurts acknowledge that something's painful looking forward to revelation chapter 21 where it says

13:06 If you wipe away every tear and that day is coming but that day is not so today Christian we experience

## Defining True Joy Beyond Happiness

13:23 That's where he starts he acknowledges it and then he talks to them how are we going to deal with this how are we going to deal with the pain how are we going to go through these trials various kinds and he begins in verse 2 count it all joy so when step on your feet and more suffering no more pain anymore that day is coming but that day is not now so today Christian we experience pain so

13:23 That's where he starts he acknowledges it and then he talks to them how are we going to deal with this how are we going to deal with the pain how are we going to go through these trials of various kinds and he begins in verse 2 count it all joy so when we experience counter trials when we encounter trials of various kinds where do we start we start with joy we choose joy this

13:48 Doesn't mean we pretend that this is fine this doesn't mean we you know put a smile on this doesn't mean you know apple red happiness this doesn't mean we baptize everything in the bible verse and pretend it's okay

14:08 But it does mean you don't allow god's sovereignty to somehow get lost inside of our pain inside of our suffering inside of the trial count it all joy i love that he starts with that count it it takes some work it takes some work to get there james doesn't say it is joy when you encounter trials that would not be true it's just joyful when you encounter terrible things in life that's not what it says count it all joy count it all joy now real biblical

14:57 Experience with the jewish people we're not just going through in the book of ezeziel we we have the same experience with the church in ezeziel and the church is more of a is more of a a

## God's Promises Enable Us to Choose Joy

15:13

### Proverbs 3:5-6

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.*

15:40 We experience joy because of the character of God. Proverbs chapter 3, verses 5 and 6. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. My Thomas translation says, trust God, not Thomas.

15:57 Trust God. In all your ways, acknowledge him and what's the outcome. He will make straight your paths. Doesn't say he'll fix everything. It does say, he'll show you the way.

16:14

### Romans 8:28

*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

16:34 We can choose joy because he has a plan, not necessarily because the trial didn't fit our plan. Romans chapter 8, verse 28. Another well-known verse you may or may not have heard before. Romans chapter 8, verse 28 says this, and we know that for those who love God, what does it mean to love God? It begins with their relationship with Christ.

16:59 For those who have placed their trust in Jesus, for those who have confessed Jesus Christ as Lord, for those who love God, all things work together for good.

17:11 All things work together for good. For those who are called according to his purpose. You know, that presupposes the situation in itself is not good.

17:22 For God to work something into good means the situation itself to begin with is not good.

17:31 So what are the promises we hold on to that enable us to choose joy? God is a promise keeper. God is sovereign over all things. God has told us when we trust him, he makes straight our paths. God has told us that for those who love him, and you'll need to check your heart this morning, do I love Jesus?

17:52 Because if I love Jesus and I'm in a situation that's not apple, red happiness, popcorn, cheerfulness, if I love Jesus, if Christ is in my life and there's something going around me that's not good, it means God is in it, working it for good.

## Various Kinds of Trials and Temptations to Escape

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18:12 That is what enables us to choose joy. It's not this put a smile on and fake it kind of theology.

18:22 So when you meet trials of various kinds, I love here that he says when, not if. It's like this hidden promise. Count it all joy when you meet trials. It's not a matter of if. We can't dodge hard stuff our whole life. And I know we try to.

18:45 We love our comfort. We love easy. We love to have it. We love to have it. We love to have it. We love to have it. We love to have it. We love to have it. We love to have it. We love to have it. It's not a matter of if. It's not a have it. We love to have it. We love to have it. It's not a matter of if. It's not a matter of if. It's not a matter of if. It's not a matter of if. We But But at some point, we will encounter trials of various kinds, and God calls us here to choose joy.

19:02 When you meet trials of various, I love that category, what might fit the category of various sickness,

19:11 Strife in relationship, foreclosure, difficulty at work, a child not following Jesus the way you'd like them to, financial problems, and so on. and so on. I mean, we could go on and on and on. We could take a moment and stop in our service and say, hey, what trials are you in right now? And each and every one of us would say, this is the trial.

19:44 If we could, for a second, take our fake phony face off and say, this is the hard. This is the rough thing.

19:53 All of us have something going on, and we can choose joy because of who God is.

20:01 We can know he has a plan, even in the midst of our suffering. Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, he goes on, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. I love that. For you know. Do you know that?

## Using Doctrine to Sustain the Heart Through Trials

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20:20 That testing produces endurance? We can look back on our life and see how that's worked. We can look back on all the different lessons. We've learned if growth requires pain, we can see, man, I'm not the man I was 20 years ago. You're not the woman you were five years ago. You can look back on your life and see the goodness of God, even throughout the trial, to see how he's chiseled some edges off of you and helped mold and shape you into the person he's wanted you to be today.

- 20:54 And we can look back on our life. And because we know that God's been there molding us and shaping us into the people he wants us to be, we can trust that. And the trial we're in now, God is still doing the same. He's still producing endurance. He's still building steadfastness in our life. Think about it like this. My wife and I have four kids. For some of you, that's way too many kids. For others of you, that's like not even enough kids, right? But with each kid, there's this level of like, what did we do? This is insane.
- 21:30 You go from no kids to one kid and you're like, I hope that was the right call.
- 21:36 We're 23. We're both children. Let's have a kid. That makes sense. Then you have another kid and like having one kid, not that big of a deal. Now we got two of them. We've grown. Our capacity has changed. Then you have three kids and you're like, yeah, this is different.
- 21:55 I heard a comedian once say, having a fourth child is like you're drowning in a pool and then someone throws you a baby.
- 22:06 Be encouraged. Have kids, they said. It'll be fun, they said. But you learn and you grow and you endure. Your character changes. Your capacity for things change. Or mom and dad, think about this. The first kid you had, the first time they spiked a fever, full panic. You're freaking out. You're calling everyone you know. What do we do? They have a fever. It's 100 .7.
- 22:36 Panic. Call the doctor. You have your fourth kid. They're 102. You let them sweat it out. They'll be fine.
- 22:46 Now there's a number each of us have is different. So it's all good. You have that call the doctor number and you have that. They're okay. But that comes from experience. That comes from life. That comes from having some extra miles under your feet so you grow in character. You have more stamina. You have more endurance. You're able to be steadfast. That's what this word steadfastness is, is endurance. So when we encounter trials of kinds, endure.
- 23:26 Endure. And I know that's not what we'd prefer. Right? I know me personally, when I find myself in a trial, my preference is distraction. Right? What can I do to get this off my mind?
- 23:49 Healthy distractions. There's real unhealthy distractions. They're distractions nonetheless. Real hard thing going on in your life. No, nothing. A few drinks can't fix. Just going to forget about it for a while.
- 24:09 Real hard thing going on at work. I'm just going to call my girlfriend, have her come over, forget about it for a while.

## Endurance Produces Completeness and Holiness

- 24:16 Real hard thing. Just hit the gym. Forget about it. Go for a run. Forget about it. Distract myself from the trial at hand. That's not what he calls us to. When you encounter trials of various kinds, just distract yourself till it's over.
- 24:31 But that's my first preference is distraction. My second preference is, what's the quickest way out of this trial? That's the way I want to take.

- 24:42 Trials are inevitable. They are what they are. I get it. God uses them to build me, shape me, mold me, help me be the man he wants me to be. But my preference is still out of the trial.
- 24:58 Deliverance. Relationship thing going on and you know they're at fault and they won't own it. But if I just, I'm sorry and apologize, move on. Hopefully that'll fix it.
- 25:09 *God doesn't call us to distraction. God doesn't call us to deliverance. God calls us to endurance.*
- 25:17 And endurance is really, really hard. Especially in our heart. You've heard us use phrases like this before. Doctrine, right understanding of God leads to devotion, right living for God.
- 25:35 Doctrine, theology, who God is, plays a vitally important role in our life for how we live. The Bible in Jeremiah chapter 17 tells me that my heart is wicked and sick and no one can
- 25:53 Heal it. I am capable of feeling some crazy stuff. All of us are. And in those moments where life has gone crazy and I'm feeling crazy in my heart, it is vitally important to use my head to help my heart catch up to what I know to be true.

## Jesus Walks With Us Through the Storm

- 26:13 That God has a perfect plan for my life. That God is working all things for my good. That doesn't negate there's hard things going on. This doesn't put a smile on my face. This doesn't put a smile on my face. This doesn't put a smile on my face. This on my face. This doesn't put a smile on my face. This doesn't put a smile on my face. This doesn't put a smile on my face. This doesn't put a smile on my face. This doesn't put a smile on and sing apple red happiness. That's not what this is. But what it does is bring me to a place of remembering and reminding myself of who God is. That he has a perfect track record of being faithful then.
- 26:37 That he'll continue his perfect track record of being faithful now. We use our heads, theology, what we believe to inform our heart, what we feel, so that we can actually endure.
- 26:55 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds. For you know the testing of your faith produces steadfastness and let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete, lacking and nothing. See, the text supposes that without endurance we are imperfect and each and every one of us is lacking something.
- 27:22 God will use trials. God will use pain. God will use difficulty for the purpose of not our happiness not
- 27:34 Even our physical health but for our holiness God will allow what he needs to allow in order for the rough edges to be chiseled off in order for us to learn and understand who God really is in order for him to show up in those moments even if it's just for him to tell us like hey I'm here and I'm with you I think of the story in the Gospels I can't chapter verse it right now the story where Jesus tells his disciples you get in the boat go to the other side I'll meet you there remember the story middle of the the sea that they're in just erupts Jesus isn't with them erupts into this crazy storm they're all panicking freaking out we're gonna die we're gonna die it's a storm of life a real actual physical

- 28:28 Storm and out on the horizon between the crests and valleys of these waves they see with what they think is a ghost it's not a ghost it's Jesus going for a stroll in a tumultuous sea now
- 28:47 I'm reading that story and studying that story and all I can think of why would Jesus send them out into a storm knowing that they'd be in a storm knowing that they'd be full panic full freak out mode why would God do such a thing and I think it's just so he could show up just
- 29:07 So he could show up just so he could show him like hey don't forget I'm the Lord of everything even in the trial you're in even in the storm you're in doesn't mean the storm's not real doesn't mean the storm's not there but it does mean that Jesus can walk right across them when
- 29:28 We encounter trials of various kinds we choose joy when we encounter trials of various kinds we endure and just like in that story in the Gospels when we encounter trials of various kinds we look to Jesus we look to Jesus why Jesus John chapter 16 verse 33 Jesus makes a promise first he says this in this world you will have tribulations in this world you will have trials of various kinds you can try to dodge them as long as you want but eventually you can't you will have troubles but Jesus says take take it easy you will have tribulations you will have trials of various kinds you can try to dodge them as long as you want but you will have tribulations for I it easy you will have tribulations you will have trials of various kinds you can try to dodge

30:08

**Psalm 23:4**

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

## Looking to Jesus: The One Who Overcame

- 30:25 You're with me your rod and your staff they come from me friends we will walk through storms we will walk through valleys but the one who has overcome the world the one who promises trouble and tribulation but also the one who's overcome the world that's the one who walks with us through it so
- 30:45 I don't know what your trial is this morning i don't know what the sorrow is maybe you're joyfully and celebrating the fact that you're just coming out of one maybe you find yourself this morning you're just smack dab in the middle of the thick of it or maybe you're just entering into a season where you know like man this is not going to be fun when
- 31:13 We encounter those trials we choose joy why because the one who overcomes trials walks with us we choose joy when we encounter trials of various kinds we endure i know your preference like mine is to distract myself from it i know your preference like mine is to just fast track and be delivered out of it but he says let steadfastness have its full effect endure buckle down buckle down god is working if it's not good yet then he's not done yet he's still working when we encounter trials we endure and then thirdly and finally friends when we encounter trials we look to Jesus Hebrews chapter 12 verses 1 and 2 say this therefore since we're surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely let us run with endurance endurance how do we build endurance how do we

build steadfastness trial upon trial upon trial we learn we grow with endurance

- 32:32 Run the race that is set before us fixing our eyes on jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith who for the joy that was set before him get this he endured the cross he despised the cross he despised the cross he despised the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of god friends in our trial would we look to the one who endured a trial for you and for me would
- 32:59 We fix our eyes on christ knowing that he is good would we fix our eyes on christ knowing that he's kind would we fix our eyes on christ knowing that he's merciful would we fix our eyes on christ knowing that he is sovereign over all things amen let me pray for us father god thank you that you are sovereign over all things god
- 33:28 I pray that we would not ever as christians misrepresent some fake phony put a smile on theology jesus you wept you mourned you were grieved you were angered you encountered trials and you called them that you called them out as trials god would you help us do the same as we are in pain as we are in seasons of suffering even in the midst of suffering as we are in pain as we are in suffering as we are in a season of persecution a season of health or a season of financial stress and strain relational issues god whatever it might be would you just help us this morning acknowledge it
- 34:06 Help us see the pain but god help us choose joy not to put a band -aid on it not to fake it not to put a smile on we choose joy because you are good you have a plan and you're sovereign over all things god you have a purpose you are sovereign over all things god you have a purpose you are sovereign over all things god you have a purpose you are sovereign over all things god you have a purpose track are sovereign over all things god you have a purpose you are sovereign over all things god you have a purpose track record of keeping your promises so this morning as a church we come before you just declaring our trust in you god

## **The Three Responses to Trials: Acknowledge, Endure, Look to Jesus**

- 34:33 Give us the courage give us the tenacity give us the ability to be steadfast to endure the trials that we're in for the purpose of character for the purpose of growth for the purpose of becoming the people you've called us to be that we might bring you more glory and god in the trials that we face today in the trials that we know we'll face tomorrow help us fix our eyes on you because you endured a cross for us you went on trial for us that we might be in right relationship with you god
- 35:08 That's why we gather this morning that's why we celebrate thanking you for the gift of your son jesus may he be glorified forever and ever and ever amen it is well with my soul friends that does not mean we neglect the pain it doesn't mean we turn the blind eye to it it doesn't mean we just throw a smile on it's so well with our soul because we know jesus we know who he is we know what he's capable of so
- 35:40 Whatever various trial you find yourself in this morning friends would each and every one of us look to him would we choose joy would we endure it knowing that god has a good and perfect plan that works for our good and also for his glory amen our prayer team is down front if you're in a trial and could use

some prayer they would love to minister to you and that way this morning don't forget service isn't over till you love somebody so love somebody well in here before you go out there and then go out into the world and live on mission for the glory of christ in christ alone we love you guys god bless you we'll see you next week bye