

April 19, 2026
Wisdom From Above
James 1:1-4
Steadfast in Trials
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We will be taking a break from the Psalms for a few months; we will pick back up in book two at the beginning of August. So, from now until then we will be working through the book of James.

I've been looking forward to this for a while now, I'm pretty excited about this. A few months back, Michael said that he wanted to do James for our break between the Psalms. Which, I thought was a good idea. James is a good book and it's good to do something from the New Testament since we've been in the Old Testament lately.

Then, he said that he thought it would be a good developmental opportunity for me to take the lead on the series, and asked if I'd be willing to do so! So, I will be doing the bulk of the preaching the next few months. I am super thankful for the opportunity to get to do so. So, thank you pastor Michael for the opportunity, and thank you church, for bearing with me! I suppose it's appropriate to start a series like this with a call to endure hardship!

Maybe that's why Michael picked James in the first place!

The big idea that we're going to be looking at in James is the idea of Godly wisdom. Throughout James we see frequent returns to the idea of wisdom; what it is, where it comes from, what it looks like, how it's lived out.

There are two basic ideas that James is teaching us about Godly wisdom that we will need to come back to over and over in this book. First, Godly wisdom has deep theological roots. Not complicated, not academic, not nuanced, but deep. The second lesson is that Godly wisdom is simple and practical. Godly wisdom looks like simple obedience to the will of God.

On both fronts, both in knowing God, and in obeying God, we can tend to use complexity and nuance as a means to avoid simple obedience.

God is sovereign, God is good, God is unchanging, so trust him. Don't make it complicated.

If you believe in God, obey God. If you receive his Word, *do* his Word. Stop hiding behind nuance and caveats and hypotheticals. Don't make it complicated.

And this is why James hits the idea of self-deception. One of the ways that we deceive ourselves is that we make simple things complex, when in reality we just don't want to do what God says. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Godly wisdom is deeply theological. Godly wisdom saturates all of your thoughts and affections and desires with the nature of God, so that everything you know about God effects everything that you think and feel and do. Godly wisdom doesn't put your theology as one part of your body of knowledge, but rather, Godly wisdom puts your theology, what you know about God, as the backdrop for your knowledge of everything else – the foundation of your knowledge of everything else.

And godly wisdom is practical. Wisdom is faith that works. Wisdom is being a doer of the Word.

Why I'm Excited about this Series

I am excited about this series. This book obviously has a lot to say to people in every age and every culture, but I think that this book speaks particularly well to our present moment as a culture.

If I had to diagnose our culture at large two things that come to mind, two things which I think James will speak well to, are *despair* and *directionlessness*. By despair I mean a sense of meaninglessness, purposelessness,

and ultimately a sense of hopelessness, that no matter what I do, there's no guarantee that anything will get better for me, and even if it does, the floor might just drop out at any moment.

And by directionlessness I mean a sense of there being no mainstream leaders to trust, no mainstream institutions to trust, and ultimately no mainstream, normal, life path to trust, no life script to trust.

I saw this idea described recently by saying, "the success machine is broken." I thought that was a great way to sum it up. The success machine is the basic late 20th century American life script. Go to college, work hard, find a nice girl to marry or a nice boy to marry, get a good job, buy a house, rear a few children, work your way up a basically stable career path, and eventually retire comfortably. Essentially every step of that "machine" has been seriously destabilized in the last 20 years in one way or another.

Technological and economic factors make it harder to find and keep a good job, and to buy a house. Social and political factors make it harder to find someone to marry, and to rear children. And then a lot of the advice and counsel that was relevant to a different America just doesn't deal honestly with the facts on the ground.

So, we end up with a culture, especially among those who were in college around and after COVID, that's looking for someone to offer them hope, and to offer them a sense of direction, when almost every public institution spent the back half of the 20teens discrediting themselves.

So, we end up with young men, who spent their formative years being told that they are the problem with the world. "If you'd be more like your sister, then you'd be a good person." Then, it's no wonder that these men turn to online randos to tell them how to be men. They are looking for hope, they are looking for direction, they are looking for a man to tell them how to be a man in a way that doesn't involve pretending to not be a man. They're hungry for someone to tell them that assertiveness, risk, ambition, and hard work are good and godly, and that safety is often more dangerous than danger.

And, on the other side, we end up with a whole generation of young women who have been given no positive vision of a uniquely feminine nobility. The only positive vision for life our world gives women is career and self-advancement. The culture trains boys to be more like women, and women to be more like men.

And so, you end up with the fact of countless godly young women who want to be home to rear their children but who feel like they are somehow a failure if they do, or that they are letting other people down who invested in them. In other words, what the Bible holds up as the primary picture of godly femininity the world has twisted into a second-rate vocation.

So, we end up with a culture dominated by despair and directionlessness, anxiously searching for something, anything to give them hope and direction.

This is precisely what James offers. The Bible as a whole, offers this, but James seems to be uniquely geared towards these twin hungers.

God is unchanging, his Word is unchanging. He is sovereign and he is Lord. He and he alone can and will teach you how to live a life of Godly wisdom in the midst of a chaotic culture.

We are in an inflection point, it remains to be seen just how significant this moment is, but big or small, we are at a cultural and national inflection point. The old order is passing away, but it isn't dead yet. The new order is emerging, but it isn't established yet. This is not the first period of cultural upheaval, and it will not be the last.

James was written in *the* greatest cultural inflection point in history. The resurrection and ascension of Christ had initiated a new order of things in the cosmos, but the Temple in Jerusalem hadn't yet been destroyed. James was written to a people who had grown up under the Jewish system. All of their cultural assumptions, all of their life scripts, reinforced for generations had been built up on this Temple and Law system. And yet, they were a part of a new and emerging order, like James says, they were the first fruits of this new reality of the church of Christ. And yet, the apostles were still laying the foundations. They were forced out of one cultural home while they were still building the next. How then do we live?

Godly wisdom learns to see the unchanging God in and under all the changes in history, and to obey him in all that his Word commands.

Intro to James 1:1-4

There is a lot to cover today, so let's go ahead and jump into this week's text. Pray with me as we do so.

[PRAY]

James lays out his main principles in chapter one, so we will spend a good bit of time picking through those more slowly, then chapter two through part of five is those principles applied to various common situations and different questions that might come up. Then chapter five has some concluding ideas to wrap it all up.

In this passage, chapter one, verses one through four, James introduces himself and the audience, then in verses two through four lays out his first principle.

Look at verse one. **¹James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.**

This is a pretty terse greeting. This greeting is a good preview of what we're going to get from James here. He's not trying to be expansive, he's trying to be straight to the point. Compare this with some of Paul's greetings, where he'll pack four or five gospel principles into the first verse of his letter. It's good to be expansive at times, like Paul, and it's good to be simple at times, like James.

Three things I want to point out. Who is this from? Who is this to? And what is the occasion? Why is he sending this letter?

So first, the who is both the most obvious, and the most complicated. It's from James, that's plain, but who is James?

The problem is that there are a few people named James in the New Testament, and this James doesn't give us any more particular information to nail down exactly which James he is. There's only one Paul, there's only one Peter, but there's two or three James's that could be the author, and a handful of other James's thrown in on top. James was a very common name. It came from 'Jacob,' so there were a lot of little boys named after the great patriarch.

Two factors help us narrow down our search. First, this James would have to be famous enough in the church that he could write a letter signed with just his name, and assume that everyone knew who he was. Second, he would have to be someone with the kind of authority to write a letter that is received not just as good pastoral counsel, but as Scripture. So, we need a James with that kind of fame, and that kind of authority.

One candidate would be James the son of Zebedee. This is the James who was one of the 12 apostles, and one of the three, alongside his brother John and Peter, that Jesus often singled out to have special privileges during Jesus' ministry, such as witnessing the transfiguration, and praying with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

It probably isn't him though, because he was martyred early on, in chapter 12 of the book of Acts. Now, it's possible that he could have written this letter between the stoning of Stephen, when the church first scattered from Jerusalem, and his death, but I don't think that's the case. One reason that I don't think that is the case is because I think he would have needed to identify himself further at that point. I think there was at least one other James who would have been just as famous, so he would have had to say, "James, the son of Zebedee," or something like that.

I think the most likely candidate is the James that we see through the book of Acts and some of Paul's letters, who appears to be something like the first senior pastor of the church at Jerusalem. Whenever this James is mentioned, he is just referred to as "James." In Acts 15 this James presides over the Jerusalem council that decides the circumcision issue, in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul mentions that this James, along with Peter, and himself, got a special post-resurrection visit from Jesus, and in Acts 21 when Paul goes to Jerusalem, he specifically visits with "James and all the elders."

So, it's likely that the James who wrote this letter is the James who is the senior pastor at the church in Jerusalem.

That accounts for the same question, but what about the authority? In Galatians 1:19 Paul describes this James as an apostle and the Lord's brother.

So, if Paul is saying that this James is one of the twelve, that answers the authority question. But the problem is that of the twelve, two are named James, and we know the names of both of their father's. Neither of which is Joseph. There is James the son of Zebedee, and James the son of Alphaeus.

In the New Testament, apostle can be taken narrowly or broadly. Narrowly it means the twelve and Paul; the apostles commissioned and appointed by Christ himself with universal jurisdiction.

In the broad sense it means something like a missionary. Commissioned and appointed by a local church with a specific task. Barnabas was commissioned by Antioch in this sense.

I don't think that it makes sense for James to be an apostle in the broader sense since 1), then he wouldn't have the authority to write Scripture, and 2), then he wouldn't be in Jerusalem. Apostle means 'sent,' and if you're 'sent' you kind of need to be sent somewhere.

So, he's likely an apostle in the narrow sense, one of the twelve, and a brother of the Lord in the broader sense. In Jewish use, brother can also have a narrow or broad sense. Hebrew doesn't have a word for cousin, so pretty much any male relative can be referred to as a 'brother' in Hebrew. Lot is called Abraham's brother, and Laban is called Jacob's brother, when in reality they are both uncle-nephew pairs. Jews writing in Greek wouldn't necessarily give up this custom just because Greek does have a word for cousin.

This leads some to conclude that the James who wrote this letter is both the leader of the Jerusalem church, and one of the twelve apostles, the son of Alphaeus. Which would make him a cousin of Jesus, who would have grown up with Jesus, possibly even in the same house.

I find this persuasive if not absolutely conclusive. This would explain to me also why this James doesn't need to distinguish himself from the other James who was one of the 12. If there is still James the leader of the Jerusalem church, and James one of the twelve, then I'd expect this James to have to distinguish himself from the other somehow. But he just says 'James,' assuming that there will be no confusion about who he is.

Who then is he writing to? Who are "the twelve tribes in the dispersion?" He's writing to all Christians who will read this, but he likely has in mind specifically the Jewish-Christians who were scattered away from Jerusalem after the martyrdom of Stephen.

This is a general letter, which means it isn't addressing one specific church or one specific issue. This is like Colossians or Ephesians, or even to some extent Romans, that were addressed to one church, but tackled more general topics. As opposed to Galatians, or the Corinthians letters that were addressing specific issues fairly particular to that church.

In effect, this should be read like an apostolic-pastoral letter from a pastor to his flock that has been scattered due to persecution.

One more comment on this verse, notice how he describes himself, "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." So, the point of this book then, this letter, is James's pastoral instruction on how to live in the fear of God and under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Or simply, how to live by faith in the face of a chaotic world. Or again, he's describing how to live according to godly wisdom, or what he will call in chapter three, the "wisdom that comes down from above."

James 1:2-4

Look at verses two through four. Here, he lays out his first principle of godly wisdom, or key to living a life of godly wisdom. We'll walk through these one at a time, but notice the logic of this section. Verse two is the command, "count it all joy," then verse three is the ground of that command, "for you know." Verse two says, "do this," verse three says, "because." Then, verse four is an enticement, basically another reason to do the command, something to sweeten the deal.

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

The first principle of godly wisdom that James lays out is that we must not evaluate our circumstances by our circumstances. Or maybe a bit more exact, when we evaluate our circumstances, we need to factor in not just the things we can see in front of us, but we need to also factor in the nature of God, the sacrifice of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit. The sovereignty of God is the background against which we see our trials, the sacrifice of Christ is the lens through which we see our trials, and the power of the Holy Spirit is the eyes by which we see our trials.

There are two implications that this command has for us. The first is that in life you will experience things that are in themselves not good. And the second is that godly wisdom requires that we take responsibility for our thoughts and feelings.

To the first point, Job mourning his sudden calamity, and Jesus weeping beside Lazarus's grave are examples of godly mourning. There is suffering in life that should be mourned, and evil in life that should be opposed. So, what James is saying here is not a command to go through life on a constant morphine drip just numb and indifferent to the world. But it's a command to look above and through the trials to see God above them, Christ with you in them, and the Spirit strengthening you through them.

And to the second point, godly wisdom learns how to take responsibility for our own thoughts and feelings. In our post-Freud world, our culture wants us to believe that we are not responsible for our thoughts, our feelings, or even our actions.

What James is laying out for us here is the fact that the better part of godly wisdom is simply learning to tell yourself the truth. A large part of our misery and grumbling and discontent comes simply from letting our feelings be led by lies and half-truths instead of the truth.

And this isn't a call to a kind of general "believe true things about God." But a call to a disciplined approach to your thought life. To identify what you are thinking and how that is shaping your feelings.

The first step is to identify what it is that is leading you to grumble, or to be discontent. The second step is to parse out what is true in that and what is false. And the last step is to confront the false with the truth.

So, you might be grumbling and discontent because you lost your job. Usually, we can identify the external event pretty easily. But it's not the event itself that is making you discontent, or making you grumble at God, it's what you're believing about God in that moment. You're thinking that God has abandoned you, or failed you, or that he's not going to provide for you, or that he has no right to let this happen to you.

These are the lies that you need to confront with the truth. The main task of godly wisdom is learning to tell yourself the truth. This is not far from what Solomon means when he says, **"the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."**¹

James here mentions "trials of various kinds." I think that's a really helpful little phrase that he included, "of various kinds." For one, various trials require different responses to count them as joy. And second, it's easy to think that James is only here talking about spiritual trials; persecution, and martyrdom and things like that.

But James is casting a wider net than that. Yes, he certainly has persecution and martyrdom in mind, but he also has the more "normal" trials in mind, like needing to fix something else on the car when you're not sure where you're going to find the money for it, or being sick again, or being sinned against in some way, or another sleepless night with the baby. All of these are trials just the same.

There are basically four kinds of trials that will require distinct approaches to count them as joy.

First there's persecution, where someone or a group of people are hassling you in various ways because of your faith. This could be everything from getting teased at the lunch table in middle school, to getting thrown into the colosseum with a bunch of angry lions. Or more applicable in our day, getting fired or passed over for promotion for refusing to go along with some new HR initiative.

¹ Proverbs 9:10.

While these can be some of the most painful trials, these can also be the easiest, for some, to count as joy. You're suffering very tangibly for Jesus. There's a certain dignity in that, and a clear sense of, to some extent, walking in the footsteps of the martyrs and missionaries of the past. It's easier to see these trials as spiritually significant.

Second, there's what you could call "fallen world" trials. Here you could lump in sickness, injuries, the frustrating friction and hassles of life – the car repairs - as well as being sinned against. What it looks like to count these as joy is different than for trials of persecution. But the underlying principles are not that different. Do I trust that God is good in the middle of this? Do I trust that God is sovereign in the middle of this? Do I trust that God is wise? That he loves me? Do I trust that God can strengthen me to endure this? Do I trust that God is sanctifying me through this? So, the underlying principles are still the same.

Then third, there's trials of discipline for sin. There are times where either through the consequences of our sin, or God's special providence, he will discipline us for our sin. So again, the same underlying principles are in play, but it's a little different. In these trials it's easier to see God's justice in it, he's doing *this* because I did *that*. And if we have eyes to see, it's easier to see how God is sanctifying us through it, he's doing *this* so that I don't do *that* again.

God's discipline for our sin is one of the most sure signs that he claims you as his own child. So, when God disciplines us for sin, we count it joy, first, by seeing it as a sign of God's fatherly love, and second by being grateful for his work to sanctify us. When he disciplines us for sin, we shouldn't pray for God to be quick about it, but we should pray that he would do whatever it takes to root out that sin in our life. Don't give me half-measures, pull out the root.

Then last, there are the trials of hard labors. This kind of trial is unique in that it's generally hardship brought on by some kind of good or noble circumstance. Here I just mean the labors and tasks that God puts on your plate in your various callings and stations in life. Could be your boss gives you some special project, or even a promotion and now you need to run the whole team. Could be the hard work of starting a new church, or moving overseas to plant churches there. Or it could be the work and sacrifice of motherhood.

Sometimes we get tripped up by these trials, because we don't really know what to do with them, since they aren't really suffering, and yet they can feel exhausting and stressful. So, we either don't engage our "count it joy" muscles, or we just start thinking about hard work like it's some kind of suffering.

So, all the same, we need to learn to discipline our thoughts, and call on God for strength and help. All the while, thanking God for the privilege to get to do this work.

Now, where it gets more complicated is where these categories start to overlap. When you are given some big new responsibility at work, but you're given that responsibility because your boss is lazy and will probably take credit for it in the end anyway. So, there's a little bit of hard labor trial, and a little bit of fallen world trial. Or you're a mom, which is always hard work, but then one of your kids is sick, like really sick. Again, that's a little bit of both.

So, don't think of these like hermetically sealed categories, but just as a framework to help you start the work disciplining your thoughts and feelings in order to count your trials as joy. Sometimes, we can't even begin to make heads or tails of the trial, sometimes we just need to say, "this is a various trial, blessed be the name of the Lord."

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

He's given us the command, the imperative, now here he gives us the grounding, *why* should you do the command.

He's simply saying, 'trials are how God strengthens your faith.' Or, count it joy when you face trials, because this is just a normal part of Christian discipleship, this is a part of the process. This is how God sanctifies you, and matures you. Trials are a normal part of Christian discipleship.

Jesus stresses this in Luke 9:23, when he offers a call to discipleship. He says, **“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”** Self-denial, and the cross are the normative curriculum for the school of Jesus. Trials are how he teaches steadfastness. For some its persecution and martyrdom. For some it’s the sin, sickness, and suffering of this fallen world. For all of us there’s a component of discipline for our sin. And for some it’s hard labors in our various vocations. But trials are just how God works steadfastness into his children.

Then, look at verse 4, **“And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”**

Here, again, he adds a kind of enticement. What God is doing in your life through your trials will be more effective if you will learn to count them as joy.

So, notice what he’s doing at a small scale first. He’s expanding the significance of steadfastness. He’s saying that as you grow in steadfastness, as your faith gets stronger and more robust, it isn’t just a small component or aspect of sanctification, but it’s actually a controlling aspect. Trials make you grow in steadfastness, but steadfastness itself is something of a master virtue. As you grow in steadfastness you grow in every aspect of sanctification.

As you grow in steadfastness, sin gets less enticing, peace gets more pure, love gets more sincere and more consistent, joy gets more robust, zeal for the kingdom gets more potent.

So, trials don’t just help you grow in endurance, but they help you comprehensively grow as a Christian.

This is an enticement, but he’s also letting us know the stakes. He’s saying, you need to learn to count trials as joy first, for the simple fact that they are God’s means of sanctifying you, but second, so that you can let them have their full effect.

He’s pressing on us here that not only is grumbling, discontent, and bitterness towards God dishonoring to God, but it also short-circuits God’s purpose in your life through those trials. If you want the trials in your life to have their God ordained effect, you must learn to receive them from God as his tools for your sanctification.

Doctrine

That is the text in its details, let’s do a little doctrine work.

There are two doctrines that should be mentioned in relation to this passage that will help us as we think about how to apply this passage. I’ll just say a little about them in passing.

The first is the doctrine of providence. Providence just means that God is in control.

The doctrine of providence flows out of the doctrine of creation. As God is the creator of everything, so he is the governor, provider, and ordainer of everything. He is as much the author of the plot as he is the author of the setting.

The only way we can count a trial as joy is if we believe that God can and will use it to accomplish some good purpose. Providence doesn’t make counting trials as joy *easy*, but it does make it *possible*. If God is not in some sense sovereign over every detail of my life, then I have no guarantee that he will be able to ultimately bring any good out of my life. If God is not sovereign over every detail of my life, then counting my trials as joy is just wishful thinking.

Ephesians 1:11, **“In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.”**

Romans 8:28-29, **“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”**

In Romans 8:29 there you see the second doctrine; sanctification.

I've touched on this a bit already, but here we just need to note that the Bible doesn't present conversion, becoming a Christian, as the end of our difficulties, but as the *beginning* of the process of being made like Christ. Trials are the normative means of sanctification.

Luke 9:23, **"Take up your cross and follow me."**

Isaiah 48:10, **"Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction."**

Acts 14:22, **"through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."**

Providence and sanctification.

James starts his description of godly wisdom with an appeal to faithful endurance in the face of trials. For the Christian thinking about how to live life today, this is where doctrine gets practical. What you think about God matters. What you think about the Christian life matters. If you are going to live wisely in this world, you are very quickly going to need to decide how you are going to respond to trials and hardship. Proverbs 9:10, **"the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."**

This is where James takes us as well.

How you respond to trials shows you whether or not you fear the Lord.

Is God in control of your life?

Does he have the right to be in control of your life?

Is he wise?

Is he good?

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Godly wisdom begins with a high view of God's providence, and a clear-eyed understanding of the process of sanctification.

Christian, this is so important for you. If you would have any stability in the middle of social, economic, and political upheaval, if you would have any courage to do anything bold, if you would have any hope for your future, if you would have strength to endure hardship, sickness, sin, and the death of those you love, you need to rest your soul on the God who is in control of all of it.

This goes back to what I was saying earlier. Godly wisdom isn't about complicated and sophisticated theology. But it is about *deep* theology. You don't need to have nuanced philosophical answers to all the knotty questions about God's providence, but you do need to believe deep in your bones that God is in control. He is not anxiously trying to figure out how to make the most of it. He is working a plan that he devised in eternity past, and he has yet to revise one single detail. The more that this simple fact can be brought into contact with all your trials, and sorrows, and confusions, the more you will be able to "count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds."

Proverbs 3:5-7, **"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. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil."**

Application

Let me wrap up with a few points of application. Like I said earlier, the better part of spiritual maturity is learning how to tell yourself the truth.

So, let me give you a few reminders and a few warnings.

In the face of trials, remember three things. Remember the sovereignty of God. Remember the sufferings of Christ. Remember the power of the Holy Spirit.

Remember the *sovereignty of God*.

Remember his power. His hand is not shortened. He is in control.

Remember his wisdom. His judgements are as the great deep. He knows what he is doing.

Remember his goodness. He is not cruel, or wicked. He does not delight in hardship.

Remember his authority. He is well within his rights to direct the course of his creatures as he sees best.

Remember his love. Whatever happens to you, remember his love shown on the cross. Everything that he allows into your life, or out of your life is filtered through his love for you.

Remember the *sufferings of Christ*.

Remember that his suffering redeems you from eternal suffering. Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

Remember that his suffering redeems suffering itself. The path of sorrow has been made holy by the feet of the holy one who walked this path alone. It is no shame to linger in the tents of sorrow in which the Lord of glory once laid down his own head. It is no dishonor to walk the same path that those feet once walked.

Remember your fellowship with him in his suffering. It was this path that he first invited you on to. If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him.

Remember his fellowship with you in your suffering. He walked this path alone so that you never have to. He is with you in your trial.

Remember the *power of the Holy Spirit*.

Remember his power to refine you. As the furnace refines gold, so he refines you.

Remember his power to comfort you, to make the grace of God sweet to you. He was sent to be your comforter. This means that you will often need a comforter.

Remember his power to uphold your faith. He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. He will give you the strength to endure one day at a time, when you need it, and not before.

Remember his power to give you strength not just to endure, but to conquer.

Now, on the flip side, beware the sin of grumbling.

Beware the sin of grumbling because it dishonors God's providence. Grumbling minimizes God's power to govern, or questions his wisdom to govern, or doubts his goodness, or challenges his authority, or ignores his love.

Beware the sin of grumbling because it rejects fellowship with Christ in his suffering. Grumbling ignores the fact that Christ's sufferings free you from eternal suffering. It denies the fact that Christ has sanctified suffering in his own suffering. It refuses to take up your cross and join him in his suffering, and it ignores the fact that he is near you in yours.

Beware the sin of grumbling because it frustrates the work of the Holy Spirit in you. Grumbling refuses to be refined in his furnace, and refuses to be cheered by God's grace. Grumbling looks to its own strength and despairs of the power of the Spirit for strength to endure and conquer.

James begins his lesson on Godly Wisdom with a call to joy in the face of trials. If you are going to grow in godly wisdom, one of the first questions you need to settle is what to do with difficulties, suffering, and trials.

Is life supposed to be easy? Or are trials and difficulty a part of the process?

The life of discipleship to Christ is not the life of ease and comfort. He calls you to take up your cross and follow him.

Difficulty in your work, vocation, and family is not the sign that you're doing something wrong, but that you're doing something worth-while.

God's discipline for your sin is not a sign that he doesn't love you, but a sign that he loves you and claims you as his own child.

Suffering and being sinned against is not a sign that God has abandoned you, but a sign that he has accepted you into the fellowship of his own Son, who suffered much, and was sinned against grievously.

Lord's Supper

This morning we will participate in the Lord's Supper. This is a perfect way to help us apply this Word to our own life.

This supper, the broken bread, and the cup, remind us of God's power to bring good out of evil, life out of death, victory out of defeat. And they remind us of Christ's suffering, his body, broken for us, his blood shed for us. To partake in this meal is to own Christ in his suffering as your own. And it reminds us of the power of the Holy Spirit, as we feed on Christ by faith, the Spirit builds us up in faith.

Trials are no strange thing to the Christian. Our whole faith is a continual reminder of how God brings life out of death, light out of darkness. To count it all joy takes no lesser faith than to believe in the resurrection of the dead, and the life everlasting, amen.