

Father, I thank you for these truths that we have been proclaiming that we have been listening to. You are faithful. What a friend. What a compassionate, powerful, loving, gracious friend you are. You are faithful to us.

Spirit, I ask that as we look to your word, as we listen to you through your word, that we would hear you speaking words of encouragement and of challenge and direction. In your name, Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Covenant Church family, it is good to be with you. You know that we are in the midst of a sermon series on gratitude and in the midst of that gratitude sermon series, we're in this kind of three part section of that series that is talking about gratitude in the midst of difficulties, in the midst of trials. So last week David began unpacking that. He began giving us kind of a biblical understanding of difficulty or of trials and showing us that our trials can work to bring us closer to God, bring us, make us more like Christ and bring others close to God. So he mentioned those, those three kind of ideas.

He focused on the first one of those, how, how our trials can work to bring us closer to God. And this morning we're going to look at how our trials can work to make us more like Jesus. And next week Rob is going to preach about how our trials can work to bring others closer to God. So the passage that we're going to start with this Morning is James 1:2-4. And I invite you to turn there or to look up at the screens and hear these challenging words from James.

He writes this in verses 2 through 4 of chapter 1. Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that testing, the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. So there's a lot of interesting things that we could say about this passage, but I want to focus and, and, and be really clear on the primary point or the primary idea that it's communicating. And, and that is this idea that we are to consider it a joy when we face trials.

Other translations of this would say count it as joy or consider it an opportunity for great joy. But, but the point is clear. We are to consider it a joy when we face trials. So the question that comes to mind then is why? Why in the world would I take joy in the suffering or trial that I'm experiencing?

And the answer that James gives in these verses is he says that trials produce perseverance, which works to make us mature and complete. So for me, mature and complete sounds a little vague. So I want to sharpen that a little bit. And we can do so by looking at what Paul writes in Romans 8:28, 29. Paul writes this.

He says, as we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Now here's the purpose for those God foreknew he also predestined to be here it is the purpose to be conformed to the image of His Son. So the purpose God has for us is to be conformed to the image of His Son. So to be mature and complete in God's view is to be formed into the image of Christ. So here's the principle that we're going to explore this morning.

It's this, that our trials are counted as joy because they work to form us into the image of Christ. So I'm going to keep that up on the screen for the rest of our time because I really want us to wrestle with and consider that and look at it from some different perspectives, this idea that our trials are counted as joy because they work to form us into the image of Christ. So the two questions that we'll ask as we probe this principle is first, the question, how does this work? And secondly, the question, do you want it to work? So first, as we think about how this works, I want to take us back for a moment to some of the things that David shared last week when he brought us into the story of Corrie Ten Boom from her account of her life in *My Hiding Place*.

And Corrie tells the story of her and Betsy. They were taken off into a Nazi work camp, and they were stripped and sprayed down and mistreated and sent to work all day, and then sent to these horrible barracks that were infested with fleas. And in the midst of this terrible trial, Betsy is encouraging Corrie to find ways that they can be grateful in the midst of these horrible circumstances. And Corrie says, Betsy, how can we be grateful in the midst of this? And Betsy is encouraging her to even be grateful for the fleas that they are experiencing.

And Corrie thinks, how in the world would I be grateful for these fleas? And they, as the story goes, they learn that because of the infestation of fleas, the soldiers would not come into their barracks and flea find that they had Bibles which they weren't allowed to have, and that they were having Bible studies which they weren't allowed to be having. And these Bibles and Bible studies were giving them incredible encouragement, and it was because of the fleas that the soldiers never came in and discovered all of that. Corrie writes in her book. She says the experiences of our lives, when we let God use them, become the mysterious work of preparation for the work he will give us to do.

When I hear a story like this, that's incredible, inspired, incredibly inspiring in the midst of horrible circumstances and to see the way that Cory and Betsy could be grateful in the midst of these circumstances, I look at that and I say, that is an incredible mindset. I want to have that mindset. I mean, I think I would feel like it's a superhuman power to have that kind of mindset in the midst of such horrific challenges. Yet it's interesting, sad that several of us, many of us, probably all of us, are facing trials right now, and we are not counting them as joy. Now, I'm not being judgmental.

I'm just trying to be honest that I think we're all experiencing this right now. So rather than getting defensive about whether or not and to what extent we are counting our trials as joy, I want to pause for a moment and introspectively name and notice some of our trials. So first, I just. I want you to think about the answer to this question. What are the trials at the forefront of your mind and heart right now?

If you have a pen and a paper, then I'd say write them down. And that's. That's how it works for me. I need to get things out of my mind and on paper so I can look at it. Maybe you can just bring them to the forefront of your mind and you can visualize the answer to that question.

Or what are the trials at the forefront of your mind right now? I want you to bring those up, and then I want you to consider this question. How do you feel about those trials? That one or two trials that you brought to mind? How do you feel about those right now as you process how you feel about them?

Maybe some of you are saying, you know, I feel pretty good because I feel like the Lord is working His. His transformation in me through those trials. I feel God strengthening me through those trials, and I'm grateful for his work. If that is your story right now, that is fabulous and you have something to teach the rest of us. If you're thinking about these trials and thinking about how you feel about these trials, and what's coming to mind is you're thinking about how.

How sad you are about this or how mad you are or how scared or fill in the blank with the many different emotions that we could feel. Then I want to ask, is, is God's word? Is James in God's word telling us to stuff those feelings? Is God's word telling us to put on a mask, to fake it until we make it? Is God saying, shame on you for not having enough faith right now?

No, please hear this. That is absolutely not God's heart. God wants us to share with him our feelings as raw and as honest as we want to be. God wants to hear all of that from us. But then what do we think when James tells us to consider it?

Joy. Pure joy. My brothers and sisters, when you face trials of many kinds, James is inviting us into a process. Not a fake it till you make it declaration. Put on the mask.

Yeah, everything's fine. In the midst of my trials, James is not inviting us to that kind of declaration. He's inviting us into a process. It's rich and it's rewarding and it's a painful process. It takes time and it takes lots of reps of listening to the Holy Spirit.

And this process of taking joy in my trials, it's. It's not outlined here in these two verses in James, but it's exemplified abundantly throughout Scripture. This process is called lament. We see it in the Psalms of Lament. We see it in the Book of Lamentations.

What I want to do for just a few moments is I want to show you how the Book of Lamentations charts a course. It charts the course for lament, which in trials is the path to gratitude. Strange to think that lament could be the path to gratitude. But that's what we see when we look through the Book of Lamentations. So if you look at the Book of Lamentations and

we're not going to read all five chapters right now, but I do encourage you to read all five chapters sometime this week.

When you read the first two chapters of Lamentations, you see the author crying out to the Lord, describing the misery and the horrific pain that the Israelite people are going through as their land has been destroyed and they have been conquered. And it is raw and honest and terrible what they are going through. And as the author names his misery before the Lord, we notice something. We notice a contrast between the broken, sin wrapped circumstances that he's describing and the holiness of God to whom he's addressing. And when we look at this contrast, this is so important as the writer is talking to God, we see this contrast between the holiness of God and The brokenness of our sin wrapped circumstances.

So the next thing that happens in Lamentations, in chapter three, we see the author. He's still in the midst of these circumstances. And he declares in verse 22, he says, because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed for his compassions. They never fail, they are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness.

This isn't what the author is feeling, it's what the author believes as he's looking at the holiness of God and the brokenness of his circumstances. And he believes that God is faithful and God is loving. He doesn't feel it, he doesn't see it, but he's hoping for for it. He's rehearsing the truth that he knows to be true, even though he's not experiencing it in the moment. So we see in Lamentations, first he cries out to the Lord and we see the contrast between the holiness of God and the brokenness of circumstances.

And then as he looks to the holiness of God, he begins to rehearse the truth of God, whether he feels it or not. Then in Lamentations 4, as the author continues to lay out his misery and his pain to the Lord, he's talking about all that he's lost. And as he processes what he's lost, we see revealed in that some idols. An idol is anything that we pursue, anything we pursue or we praise more than God. So as I articulate my trials to God, as I articulate my losses, I find myself naming losses which reveal some idolatry.

Part of my pain is that I've lost some things that I idolize. So the last step we see in Lamentations of this path of biblical lament is the author again continues to lay his misery before the Lord and he ends with hope in God. Because when trials expose a contrast between the holiness of God and the brokenness of sin, when trials give us an opportunity to rehearse God's truth, when trials reveal our idolatry in our life, then I find myself squarely in the middle of God, transforming me into more and more into the image of Christ.

Lament bears this fruit when we are looking to God for answers rather than looking to our pain for justification. So I want to distinguish between these two. What I've just walked through is biblical lament, which is looking to God for for answers, which is different than looking to our pain for justification, otherwise known as wallowing. All right, so wallowing. Looking to my pain for justification.

That's what Satan wants me to do. Looking to God for Answers. That's what the Lord wants me to do. It's easier to look to my pain because I feel my pain, I experience my pain, it's all around me. And it's easier sometimes to look to my pain rather than look to God, who is invisible.

So I look to my pain for justification because I want to feel right, justified in my pain. I want to feel right rather than looking to God for answers when I'm not sure what the answers will be. And I may or may not like his answers. I want to try to play that out in an illustration between these two. This difference between biblical lament and wallowing.

Wallowing, by the way, is what many of us do when we wake up at night and we stay awake for a couple hours wallowing in our trials. So it's what we all do at some point, wallowing. So for instance, if I get in a car accident and I break my leg and I'm looking to my pain for justification. So I say, man, this stinks. This stinks.

I love that car and now it's ruined, I'm inconvenienced, I have to mess with insurance companies. This rude jerk messed up and he's the one that caused this accident. Now I have a broken leg and I'm out of commission for the next eight to 10 weeks and I'm just mad and this stinks. And I have a right to feel this way because I've been wronged. If I look to my pain for justification, I'll feel worse and worse and worse and I just keep feeling worse, but justified in my feeling terrible.

If I look to God for answers, then I say, God, why did this car accident happen? I liked that car. Now I realize that you're a good and mighty God. Why did you let that happen? Now I have a broken leg and it's going to mess up the next eight to 10 weeks of what I had planned.

And as you talk to the Lord about this, you recognize this contrast between the holiness of God and the mess of the sin wrapped circumstances that you're facing. And then as you process the holiness of God. God, I know you could have stopped this. Why didn't you do that? You look at your perfect God and you begin to rehearse the truth of what you know about God, even though you're not feeling it in the moment.

God, I know you love me and I know you're in control. I just don't understand why you let this car accident happen. As you continue to process this with the Lord and you process your losses. You begin to have some, some idols revealed. You say, God, I love that car.

Maybe I loved it too much. You say, God, this is. This is so annoying. This is going to cost me so much money to get. Maybe I'm idolizing money too much.

Say, God, with this broken leg, it's going to take me out of basketball and exercise for the next eight to ten. Maybe I'm idolizing basketball and exercise. So you process these things with the Lord. And as you begin to have some of these idols come up and you shed some of these idols, then you look to the Lord and you say, lord, I can't put my hope in anything other than you. Lord, before this car accident, I was gliding through life not recognizing my need for you.

And now I'm recognizing my need for you. Thank you for this car accident. So, okay, it doesn't happen that simply in three minutes. Sometimes it happens over the course of weeks, months, or a year. But that's the process of biblical lament, which is different than wallowing in your pain and looking for justification.

When you look to God for answers, you find hope, you find love that heals, and you find gratitude. So much so that your trials, so much so that you count your trials joy. Because your mind is no longer fixed on the trials, but on the spiritual transformation that God has brought in your life through those very trials. Scripture teaches a gratitude that that is a gratitude, not instead of lament, but it teaches a gratitude that is in and through or on the other side of lament. And that's possible because gratitude has in view God's work of spiritual transformation, which is slowly but deeply happening when we walk through biblical lament.

When you have the conversation with God in the midst of your trial, and remember that conversation is talking to God and listening. Lots and lots of listening. That brings us full circle to this principle that we're testing. Our trials are counted as joy because they work to form us into the image of Christ. How does that happen?

It happens through the process of biblical lament. God transforms us more and more into the image of Christ. As we take joy in that gift of being made more and more into the image of Christ.

There's one more question that I want to probe with you to explore this principle, and that is this is being made into the image of Christ. What you really want. For me, asking this question exposes some more idols. The idols of comfort and success and security is Christ likeness. What I really want.

One of the most dangerous things that affluence does to us is it lures us into thinking that that we can have both comfort and spiritual transformation. Life is teaching me that the more that I seek after both of those things, the more I get neither of those things. I must choose one comfort or spiritual transformation. When spiritual transformation is what I choose, if it's what I choose as the highest aim in my life, then I will grow to consider it pure joy when I face trials. Because these trials, that is your passionate conversations with Jesus, in the midst of these trials, they will grow your character more and more and more into the character of Jesus.

Love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and gentleness and self control. There is no more nourishing feeling in life than being transformed more and more into the image of Christ, becoming more of who we were created in the beginning to be. So if it takes trials to bring that on, and it does, then I hope that we'll say with Paul

and with James that though outwardly we are wasting away, inwardly we are being renewed day by day. Because these light and momentary troubles, they are gaining for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we consider it joy when we face trials of many kinds, because we see how these trials are working to form us more and more into the likeness and the image of Christ.

I want to process this just with you briefly in prayer as the worship team comes up and leads us in a song of response. Father, we come before you and we acknowledge this challenge, this challenge of how in the world do we count it joy in the midst of our trials. So, Father, I just. I ask that each of us who are experiencing trials right now would feel your comfort and your permission to cry out to you in the places of hurt and pain. And I pray that as we cry out to you, that we would experience your compassion and that we would experience the miracle of your working in us, transforming us more and more into your likeness.

Father, we want to be more and more like you. Make it so. Amen.