

## Comfort in the Character of a Giving God

James 1:16-18

July 23, 2023

Our sermon again today is going to be in the book of James, James, chapter 1. But we once again turn to the book of James and we continue to look at the first chapter, which as we have said before, needs to be seen in the context of trials. It's a context of trials throughout the entirety of chapter 1.

We've already talked at length about God's good intention for the believer in trials, as, as we have looked at much of the first half of this chapter together, that he gives trials to us for our good, for our growth in godliness, and that our responsibility isn't to seek to avoid trials. Which would of course be useless, because trials persist throughout our life and it's impossible to avoid them. So, our goal isn't the avoidance of trials, but rather to learn how to live righteously through them and to grow as God intended.

And then in verse 12 we are given this wonderful promise. For those who take this teaching on trial seriously and through the grace of God and the wisdom that he gives, strive to be obedient to what James is saying here. In verse 12, we're told, "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."

So for the believer, this is what drives us. Our God has made this promise to us as we go through life facing the trials of various kinds. It is the demonstration that we truly are in the category of those who love God, and that the crown of life truly is waiting for us. We are those who have been blessed by God. Last time I was up here a couple weeks ago, we looked at verses 13 through 15, which show the potential negative response that we can sometimes have to trials. A response that no doubt some in James's original audience were having to some degree or another, to fall in the temptation to sin in, in the trial, and then to either directly or indirectly blame God for it.

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James emphatically rebuked any notion of this. As he says, let no one say when they are in a trial, let no one say such a thing that they would ever say that, that God has tempted me. Let no one say that God is tempting me. And the way he anchors this command is by quickly appealing to the character of God. He says this cannot happen because God cannot be tempted by evil and therefore he himself tempts no one.

There's absolutely no evil in God. It cannot exist in him. The reason that James is so strong on this point is because when you start blaming God for letting you fall into sin, or even blaming the circumstances around you for your sin, or you start minimizing your sin because you know you couldn't be expected not to sin in a certain situation, it was just too difficult. When you start to say or think these types of things, then you have wandered into the territory of blasphemy. You begun to call the character of God into question, at least in your heart. Blaming God directly, or even blaming the circumstances that a sovereign God has ordained is to say or to think untrue things about God.

In verse 13, James confronts this as he rebukes and teaches the truth on temptation to sin. And he begins, he begins that teaching with a quick reminder of the character of God. So there, he touches on the character of God in order to help them understand the nature of temptation better. And in the verses we're going to look at today, he teaches more about who God is about his character, in order to further help them in their battle against temptation and their struggle in trials. Help them to put off wrong thinking about God in their trials.

The wrong thinking of God expressed in that previous section, and to put on the right thinking about who God is in the section we're going to look at today. Right thinking about God and who he is, is critical. A.W., Tozer famously said, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." And there is so much truth to that because it indicates where you stand from an eternal perspective.

But that statement is not just true in its totality, but it's also true situationally. There is a real sense in which

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what comes into your mind when you think about God, what you really believe about who he is when a trial hits will determine the ultimate effect that that trial is going to have on you, whether it is going to lead you into falling into temptation to sin or into growing in steadfastness, on your way to maturity.

In fact, whenever you sin, there might be a myriad of things that you are not thinking rightly about. But at the core of it all, most foundationally, when you sin, you are not thinking truthfully about God in that moment. You are not believing in that moment, the truth that you have confessed. This is why what James does here in these verses that we're going to look at this morning. That's why it's so important, because one of the things that will help you the most foundationally in every area of your life, and especially in times of trials, in order to be sure that you are responding right, you need to be thinking right. Thinking right about who God is.

So James here, after contradicting wrong thinking about God that that might assign him some sort of blame in our temptation

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to sin, he goes on to remind the Church of who God truly is, in particular the goodness of God as demonstrated in his giving. And that leads us into our outline for this morning. We'll have three points, three points in this outline. Point number one, God gives no evil. Point number two, God gives every good. Point number three, God gives new birth.

And so you can already see the first point in that that we're gonna to get to in verse 16. It really does serve as an indicator to review the previous verses. So before we go any further this morning, let's read a verses 12 through 18 together now, just to remind ourselves of the fuller context of what we're dealing with, of what we're talking about.

James, chapter 1, verses 12 through 18. "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. 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. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has

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conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 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. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures."

So point number one, God gives no evil, God gives no evil. And you see this point in verse 16 because verse 16 really does serve as a transition from the point made in verses 13 through 15 to the main point made in the teaching in 17 and 18. The phrase "do not be deceived" is a command. It's a command to, to get away from the type of thinking that would allow them to excuse their sins, or to blame God directly or indirectly for their sins by blaming the circumstances that he has placed them in, or by blaming the people that he has created and put around them.

So it serves as both a call to move away from wrong thinking and also to move toward right thinking. So, let's

remind ourselves that the reason that God cannot tempt us towards sin, the reason that he can never be accused of bringing any form of evil to us or to work to make us more sinful. The reason why that's not possible, is rooted in the character of God. God does not tempt us toward sin and cannot be tempted in any way. That's the truth that James anchors his point about blaming God for temptation in. That we looked at two weeks ago.

He, he anchors it in God's character. The one who cannot be tempted towards sin cannot tempt us toward sin. God stands totally outside of sin and temptation because he is perfectly holy. So last time we talked about the fact that God's perfect holiness prevents evil from ever being able to gain any footing on God. He is totally unaffected by it. God does not react to sin. He, not God, does not react and he doesn't react to sin. Even God's punishment of sin is not his response necessarily to the existence of sin, but it is rather that which flows naturally out of his good and holy character.

He is actively punishing, but it is similar to how when you, when you throw a piece of paper into a fire, the fire



doesn't suddenly react and focus all its energy on causing the paper to burn. And the fire continues to exist as a fire. Exhibiting all of its natural properties and the paper is destroyed because of what it is and what the fire naturally is. God is holy and this is what happens when sin comes into the presence of a holy God.

God doesn't deal in sin in any way, it is against his nature. God is holy and he is true. He has said that he has saved us to become a holy people, so it would go against his revealed will of purpose to bring something into our lives in order to make us more sinful. He only brings things into our lives in order to make us more holy. It is our sinful nature that takes that which God intends for good, takes what God intends for good in our lives, even the most difficult of trials that he intends for good, and then uses them as an opportunity to sin.

God also cannot be tempted because temptation can only exist in the presence of weakness. Temptation appeals to us because it grabs onto some sort of perceived need or want that

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we have. There is something that we don't have, so we sin in our desire for it, or we sin to acquire it. God is fully sufficient in himself. He needs nothing. Therefore, it is impossible for him to be tempted. If God were to desire something which he did not have, then he would have a need and God needs nothing.

If there was something that he lacked in any way, then he would not be perfect. If something could be added to him in order that to make things better for him, then he wouldn't be perfect. He wouldn't be God. The sufficiency of God is also why it is the gracious purpose of God to reveal himself to us. That's why it is so kind of God to call us, to know him more and more fully. It doesn't benefit him in any way. He gains nothing for us to find our greatest joy in him. It doesn't add to him, but it benefits us in every way.

If we too could find our total satisfaction in God, in knowing him, it, it would have the greatest impact on us imaginable. We would be temptation proof. There would be nothing for temptation to grab a hold of. The difficult circumstances around us. The way others act towards us. Even the most sinful

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of actions toward us would just, just hit us and slide right off with nothing to cling to. Because you can't tempt the one who is fully aware that they have no further need, can't tempt the one whose joy is full, whose joy is complete.

It is impossible in any moment, as we said earlier, for us to both sin and to also be rightly thinking who God is. It simply cannot happen. Would be more ludicrous than been, than being in the most luxurious and wonderful buffet imaginable and then being tempted to go outside and eat gum off the parking lot. So James is pointing out that by directly or indirectly indicating that God bears any responsibility in our temptation to sin, we are assaulting the character of God. We are saying or thinking things which cannot be true of God and are therefore blasphemous.

So he says do not be deceived, don't be deceived into thinking that. Don't be deceived into not thinking what we're about to talk about. Don't be deceived about thinking wrongly about God. The word deceived implies that they are maybe not fully aware of the ramifications of what they are doing. When

they are thinking like this, they are not really taking into consideration maybe the gravity of what their attitudes or they're complaining is saying about the character of God.

Verse 16 is actually the only imperative in the passage we're looking at today. It's the only command, the command to not be deceived. This is something they need to work to obey. And it's a good word for us also because it is quite easy for us to fall into that same type of deception. In the midst of a of a trial we wouldn't purposely say something like God is tempting me to sin. We wouldn't share that with someone, hopefully. But as we complain about circumstances, or make excuses for our behavior, or justify ourselves to the people who lovingly confront us, we too have fallen into a state of deception. We are, in some way or another, through our words or actions, lying about who we have confessed God to be.

We confess him to be perfect and holy, but we act as though he is not, that he's okay with our imperfections. We confess him to be sovereign over all things, but we complain and whine like he actually isn't. We confess him to be good, but act like there

is no good, and in fact only evil in what he's putting me through. We confess him to be sufficient to be all that we need or want, but then we complain in our downcast in our souls because of something else that we feel that we lack. We need something more than him. And in those moments, if someone came up to us and asked us directly to deny Christ, or to say that God, he'd say out loud that God is not sovereign or holy or good or sufficient. We still probably wouldn't give into that directly. But our actions and our thinking demonstrate that we have been deceived into this type of blasphemous thinking.

That's why James feels it is necessary to give us this command. Do not be deceived so that we will be diligent in fighting against deception. So we'll be diligent against fighting against deception. So they will be diligent to examine our hearts and to even invite the examination of brothers and sisters in Christ, so that we will not be deceived. To continually ask ourselves in times of trial is my thinking. Are my actions in this trial consistent with what I confess to be true of God?

It is a good command that is meant to keep us vigilant in times of trial. Because in times of trial we have to be actively fighting against deception. Because it is in times of trial that we are in the most danger of being deceived in our thinking of God when those wrong thoughts about God have the strongest sway in us. And then notice that he ends verse 16 with a reminder of who they are. He calls them my beloved brothers. James does use this phrase in other places in his letter to demonstrate that he's transitioning to a new section of teaching, and he is doing that here. But it also adds weight to the command to not be deceived.

"Beloved brothers" serves as the reminder that they are those who have been saved by God through Christ into this new family. This new existence as a new people. It is the reminder of who you are that adds strength to the motivation to not just this command, but every command. This is why so often in counseling or in any type of discipleship, rehearsing the gospel at the outset is so important. Because everything that we're about to talk about and the problems that we're going to discuss and the sin that's in your life, we need to be reminded of who

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we are in Christ first, to put everything in its right perspective.

So he's reminding you this. This is what God has done for you. This is your new standing, brothers. This is your new standing before him. Now obey this command. That's why in so many war movies, before some major battle, you see the, the speech from the general or the king or the commanding officer. They remind the people who are about to go into battle who they are, who they serve. They remind them of their central relationships, who they are fighting for, what kingdom they belong to. They remind them of their identity because it's the ground for the command that they are about to receive.

So James is saying, you are my beloved brothers through the great and gracious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's who you are. So be vigilant in fighting against being deceived about the character of the God who has saved you. God is the giver of no evil. It is impossible. It is far from him. Don't be deceived, brothers. Do not think wrongly about God. Think

rightly about God's character, about what he actually does give. And that brings us to our second point.

God gives every good. God gives every good, verse 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." So temptation to sin is not from God. Far from it. But rather every good and perfect gift is from him. So James is shifting here from rebuke and warning about mishandling trials and thinking wrongly about what God is doing in the midst of them. He's shifting from that back to now, encouraging them with the truth of God's character, the truth of who God is. No longer who God is not but who he is.

The gifts that God gives us are a reflection of his character. So we don't receive temptation. We don't receive temptation to sin, because there is no sin in God. But we do receive good and perfect gifts, because God is good and perfect. It's his character. And we're not in this statement supposed to see two different categories of gifts from God, the good gifts and the perfect gifts. They are synonymous words that, that



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James is just using here to add emphasis to the beneficent nature of God, who he is. So far from ever giving us anything even close to evil. God gives the perfect, God gives the good.

And notice it says every good and perfect gift. There is no good that you have ever received that was not from God. All that is good comes from God. That is, all that is coming from him down to us is good gifts. Evil in fact only exists because the good gifts of God are abused for sinful purposes by a sinful mankind. When you, when you think about that, that that's what evil and sin are, it makes our sin even worse. It's the abuse of God's good gifts. And that word that is translated there is coming down. It's a present active participle.

That means we are to understand from this that the good gifts of God are continually coming down upon us without ceasing. It's not merely the past, get, good gifts that we think of that are from God, that, they are. But that is not the point. It is the very nature of the good and giving God to continually be giving good. So it's not the goodness of the gifts that James is emphasizing. It is that which is continuously coming down to

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us from God without ceasing. He's not emphasizing the gifts there is, because there is nothing that we could do. What he's emphasizing is that there's nothing that we could do to prevent God from continually lavishing good gifts upon us, because that is not just what he does, but that is who he is.

So if you can imagine this world and everything in it with no sin, if that were possible, that, that is what God gives. All of creation has been given to us to be rightly enjoyed by a good and kind creator as gifts which should cause us to respond with thankfulness and praise, giving glory to the, the creator and the giver of all of these wonderful things. It's only our sinfulness that then takes so many of these things. We make them into tools for our sin and servants of our selfishness. Opportunities for immorality, turning the created things into our idols.

But this is not the intention of God in his giving. God gave us this earth, and he then created mankind with the ability to cultivate it and mold it into that which would be useful, fulfilling the earth and subduing it. So many times it's easy

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for us to see all of the just crazy technological advances and view them with skepticism and see only sin, and danger, and wickedness that they can lead to. But all advances of technology and otherwise are part of the good gifting of God. Sin did not lead to it. Sin actually hampers and corrupts all of the advances we see around us. We would be a more technologically advanced race were it not for sin.

It is, it's actually amazing to think about, isn't it? That God in his goodness, built into his original creation, in Genesis 1, all that we would ever need for cell phones to exist. All of the materials that go into producing a working cell phone are found on the earth and refined. And as, as mankind, through science, further discovers more and more about how God created the world to work and that he has built into his creatures the ability to learn and comprehend and then take that knowledge and apply it to the rest of his creation. God did that. It is a gift from God.

We cannot create more matter. We can't create things out of nothing. We cannot invent and apply new laws of physics and

thermodynamics. We have what God has given us in creation, and that is all we have. We can simply, though, take that which God has given in his perfect creation and develop it to the ends which he has ordained for his creation to be used. That's amazing. He's never, he's not surprised that, we're oh, look what they did with that iron ore, I wasn't expecting. He's not like that.

It would be so helpful for us if we could learn to look at everything around us. All that makes life easier, or more colorful, or makes food taste better. And thank God for it while we enjoy it. If we would focus on the goodness of God and so many of these gifts rather than their potential for sin, it might actually help us to be less inclined to use them for sin and to think better about them from a stewardship position. It's a very hard to in the same instant, thank God for the ability to talk to your grandma across the country and see her face on a phone and then in the next moment use it to sin against him.

We should be blown away by the fact that everything that it takes to make airline travel possible, to make a computer or

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cell phone run, the, the materials and abilities to make it possible to communicate with the other side of the world through voice and video. Everything that it takes to, to make space exploration possible, all that it takes to make those things happen, comes from the physical creation of God in his original creative work and the ability he has given to those he has made in his image to understand, discover, and develop it.

It's amazing. Yes there is, of course, more potential to pursue sin and immorality within the palm of our hand and, when it comes to some of our devices and other things. And, and certainly that means that there may be times when we remove them from our lives because they are being abused and perverted by sin, or it's become an idol. And because we understand that all of our satisfaction comes in the fully sufficient creator God who has given us the gifts, we can put those things aside quickly. But overall, we should look at everything around us and just be blown away by the goodness of God and all that he's given.

Long for the day when we are able to receive the good gifts of a continually giving God with no sin present to corrupt it anymore. And James does intend for us to connect to God as creator, to God as giver. To see the connection between creation and giving. He calls him the Father of Lights, the Father of Lights. And almost all commentators recognize that the, the lofty language of actually this entire verse. But then this phrase James is referring to the lights of the heavens from creation, so, so the sun and the moon and the stars. Borrowing the language from Genesis 1 to refer to him that way. Even though no word that could be translated as heavenly is actually in the Greek text there, some translations supply the word in order to help the English reader make this connection. So that we can see it that way.

James wants to remind us of the goodness of God in all creation. We, we should make that connection. This is who God is. He has created this entire beautiful earth and has given the ability and the means to for us to see it and enjoy it. The Creator God gives us all good things in the act of creation and he does this apart from anything that we could do to earn it. Adam and Eve didn't work to earn the gifts from God. To be

certain of this, and look no further than the fact that he kindly gave us all that he has given in creation as gifts before he even created those he was giving it to.

The sun, the moon, the stars. They exist for God's glory, but for our use. God doesn't need the sun to see during the day. He is light. Doesn't need the moon to see during the night. Doesn't need the stars to guide him. Nothing is gained in God from the existence of the sun, the moon and the stars. They are only useful for us that we may both use them for our practical good, and also so that we might be in awe of them in order to rightly focus our worship on their Creator. They are again just a further demonstration of the character of God as giver. Humans aren't even around yet and God is giving to them.

So James reassures us of our confidence in the character of God, that he only gives that which is good and perfect, and in fact is the giver of all that is good, that is his character. Good gifts are just naturally proceeding from him. This is all humanity has ever known from him in the entirety of our existence and even before our existence. And this is how it will

always be. God is the giver of every good and perfect gift, and he will continue on existing like this. There will never be a time when God is not continually giving good because God does not change. He is immutable.

And this is the point that James makes really beautifully in the second-half of this verse. And look at verse 17 again. "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." This is a, a, a difficult phrase to interpret. It's one in which there are many possible textual variants. That's why you're going to see slightly different language among the translations. But thankfully, what whatever the, the best translation might be, the meaning is still clear throughout them all. No one disagrees about the meaning of what James is saying here.

What James is doing here is keeping, he's keeping the picture of the sun, the moon and the stars in the mind of his audience. And he's taking though, that picture, and then, and now he is contrasting the unchanging nature of God with the



changing nature of that which he has created. It's important to know that there this is a very poetic verse. James is not trying to write a scientific treatise on the movement of the earth in relation to the movement of the stars. He is pointing out the changing as it appears to us.

We look at the sun, one time of day, we look up in the same place and it's not there the next time we look. The word for variation that is used here has, has more of a sense actually of regularness or expected to change to it. It doesn't mean surprise change, like, like you're expecting to see or experience something different than what you actually saw or experienced. It is. It's a helpful word in describing, ah, the change we see in the sun and the moon and the stars, because it has a sense of the rhythmic cycle of change.

So it's not that the sun actually changes position, but that it moves across the sky when we look at it. When you look again at it one point in the day and then you look again a few hours later, it's not there anymore. It's in a different place. At the end of the day. It's behind the mountains. You can't even

see it anymore. And we're not caught off guard by that. We expect that. We would actually be surprised if this didn't happen. That's why it's a, a miracle in the book of Joshua. The moon likewise is sometimes full. Sometimes it's a half-moon, sometimes it's a full moon, sometimes a crescent moon. Sometimes we can't see it at all. But it's changes in an expected way. We expect change to see change from these things, so James is making it the point that the nature of these things is to change.

The word he uses for shadow also helps to make the point. It's actually an extremely rare word for shadow. It doesn't just refer to any shadow that you might see, but it has to do with the expected variations of shadows that you see due to the position of the sun in the sky like on a sundial. So again, expected change of that which is created. That's why some translations go with the phrase shifting shadow. The song we sung today. There is no shadow of turning with thee from this section.

But what James is doing here is beautifully weaving the themes of God is creator and God is immutable, together using the same part of his creation to make the point. God doesn't move like the shadows from the sun. When we look to him, when we look to God, he is always the same. He never retreats into darkness. At the end of the day, he is the same. So he is keeping these examples of some of the greatest things in creation before us in order to show the greatness of the unchangeable God compared to even the most mesmerizing parts of his creation. He's doing that here, but you. But you can make a similar point from any part of creation.

It is the nature of everything that is created to change over time. To at the very least, wear down. All creation is in the constant process of gradual change. You can make the same point by looking at pictures of yourself 10 years ago. Some things might be slowly changing, but everything is changing to one degree or another. But just as change or mutability is the nature of all that has been created, unchangeableness or immutability is the nature of the one who has created. God is unchanging. He is immutable. Malachi 3:6, "For I the Lord do not change."

Again as we remember the context in which James is writing these things his intent is clearly that this truth would encourage these early Christians in the midst of their difficult trials. It should be an encouraging truth for them and for us. In the midst of our most difficult circumstances. God is the creator and the giver of all good gifts, and it is his nature to continually give us that which is good. And he cannot change from this. That which is good is always and will always be coming down to us from God. It is impossible for us to have a need that he would be unwilling or unable to fulfill.

Some things that we see in our lives are easy to see as the good hand of God, lavishing us with his love and with undeserved gifts. Those types of things are easy to see, and they're actually so constant in their flowing out from him that we often take them for granted and forget to praise him for them. Interactions with our children and grandchildren. Time with our loved ones. The beauty of the scenery around us. You know, the ability to go on a walk or on a drive and, and see the things we see and to get there faster than we would. The air that we breathe, the wonders that we behold with our eyes, the good

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tastes that we are able to enjoy. God didn't have to make food taste good. Have you ever thought that? We would eventually eat it to not die? It's kind of him to do that.

All good gifts that we should be constantly thanking God for. So there's those gifts that are easier to see, but yet in their easiness to see we are, it's easier for us to take them for granted. And there are also the other gifts from God that don't seem like gifts at the time, gifts of suffering and trials. Gifts we would rather not have, but that are intended for our good and growth and are given for us, be, given to us because they're best for us, not necessarily because we want them.

And the only reason that we don't see them as good like the others is because of our weakness and our immaturity. Like maybe when you were a kid when your grandma would give you a savings bond, do they even give savings bonds anymore? Is that a thing? I'm not. I'm not sure if anyone does that anymore. But it's this official certificate that if you hung on to it and kept it safe, it would eventually mature and be worth more than anything else

that you were probably getting for Christmas. But you had to wait like 10 years. And when you're 8 years old and you're comparing this certificate to remote control cars and Legos and video games, this does not seem like a gift. No thanks Grandma. Just what I wanted for Christmas. The gift of responsibility and patience.

You don't see that at eight year old, eight years old, cause you're immature. You don't see it at the time, but eventually you will come to find that it was the most valuable gift you received. In 10 years you are going to be happy that this is what you received and not a remote control car. And that's the way it is with the good gifts of God also. And we can be much more certain that God has his best intentions for us in mind than even the most loving Grandma. The unchanging God who continually bestows good gifts upon us will not cease giving us good gifts. And they are good because he knows what is good for us, whether we feel like they are good or not.

I think I said this before also. If we knew what God knew, we would always ask for exactly what he gives us, whether it is

the type of gift that we will immediately enjoy or the type of gift that will benefit us most over time. So James means for the truth of the unchanging nature of a God who is continually giving good gifts to his people to be of great encouragement as they deal with trials. And just to put that kind of final stamp on this truth, he then reminds them of the greatest of these gifts. And that leads us to point three.

Point three, God gives new birth. God gives new birth, verse 18, "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creation." The preeminent gift that we have been given, the gift that even if it were the only one that we ever received, would be more than enough reason to praise and worship him for all, for all of eternity, is the gift of regeneration. The gift of being born again. This truth of the salvation that we have been given by God through the gospel of Jesus Christ should be the foundational truth that we anchor all of our joy in, in the midst of any trial.

It says he brought us forth and that, that language is. That's more language that James has already used that reminds us of, of the birthing process. He is continuing the metaphor that he had used earlier, but now he's doing it more positively. Whereas sin is brought forth or birth from being lured and enticed by our desires, God brings about new birth, the new birth of his people, through the word of truth. Indeed, this is quite similar to the language that Jesus was using in John 3 that we read earlier. And since James has more allusions to the teaching of Jesus than any other New Testament epistle, James probably does have in mind that teaching from Jesus or a similar teaching from the Lord as he's saying these things. And in this verse, verse 18, we actually see a, a secondary outline on the teaching of the new birth that almost became a sermon next week.

We can summarize this teaching in three sub-points. Sub-point A the cause of the new birth, sub-point B the means of the new birth, and sub-point C the goal of the new birth. So first sub-point A, the cause of the new birth. The cause of the new birth is laid out right there at the beginning of the verse. It says, "Of his own will he brought us forth." It is God who chooses to regenerate us, to bring about the new birth in us



that causes us to respond to the gospel. He is the one that opens our blind eyes to the truth of what he has done for us in Christ. And that's perfectly fitting with the, the narrative of birth, or the metaphor of birth that both Jesus and James use.

Birth is something that happens to you as the result of the decisions of others, namely your parents. No one who has ever existed decided to be born, and it's the same way with spiritual birth. You don't decide to be born again. Just as it would sound silly and like you don't understand how birth works. To say I decided to be born, it likewise is a total misunderstanding of the clear teaching of Scripture to say I decided to be born again. But that's why Jesus compares it to the, the blowing of the wind in the passage from John 3:8, something you don't have control of. The wind blows where it wishes. You hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.

So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. God makes the decision of his own will to bring about the new birth in our lives. Ephesians 1:3-5, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every

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spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will," as Ephesians 1:3-5.

And this is, this, this truth is a, is a wonderful comfort in times of trial because it means that God isn't merely keeping his promises to give good gifts to someone who happened to find their way to believing in the gospel, but rather keeping his promises to someone he chose to bring about the new birth in, even before the foundation of the world. All of God's good gifts, all of his promises throughout the scripture for believers have always had every single individual believer in mind when those promises were made. So the cause of our regeneration is the will, the decision of the perfect, good, immutable God whose character has been on display throughout this passage. And what a wonderful comfort that should be for us.

Now leads to the second sub-point, sub-point B, the means of the new birth. The means of the new birth. So the way that God accomplishes the new birth in us is by the word of truth, by the word of truth. The other places where we see this phrase in the New Testament help us to understand what James is referring to here. A little further down in Ephesians 1 from, from the portion I just read a moment ago in verse 13 of Ephesians 1. Paul says, "In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit."

At the end of verse 5 and 6 and beginning of verse 6 of Colossians 1 we read of this, "you have heard before in the word of truth, the gospel, which has come to you." So those two passages described for us clearly defined for us what the word of truth is in reference to. So we can see through these verses and others like it, the word of truth, the means through which we are saved, is the preached gospel message, the preached gospel message.

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God regenerates your heart, and you are now able to respond to the gospel message, which is your salvation. And so the word of truth, this gospel message, is this, you were created by a holy God, the one true God of the universe, the creator of the heavenly lights and every other thing in existence. He is the giver of everything good. He is perfect light, and in him there is no darkness at all. But you are a member of a sinful, rebellious humanity. You have sinned against God by your nature and by your choices. And since God is perfect, evil can have no part with him. And since he is perfectly just, as we read earlier from John 3, you stand condemned before him already. The just punishment against an infinite, eternal God is an eternal punishment, an eternal hell.

That's what each of us deserves for our sins. But God, in his mercy sent Jesus Christ. He is truly God and truly man. He lived the perfect life that we never could, never sinning in thought or action, totally obedient to God in every way. And yet he was delivered up to death on the cross, and on that cross God was pleased to pour out his just wrath that was due to every single person whom he has willed to bring a new birth to. He took that penalty on himself, and now all who see this gospel

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for the precious truth that it is, and therefore turn from their sin, repent of it, and put their trust in the life and the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, become children of God.

They're saved to become a part of his church, part of this beloved family of brothers and sisters that James has been speaking to in this letter. So the gospel message by itself does not save you, but it is the means by which God saves you. You may have heard the gospel hundreds of times in your life before regeneration takes place. But then at one point or another, maybe while you were hearing it in a sermon, maybe while you were reflecting on it, on what you had heard in the quietness of your home, the new, the new birth took place. Your eyes are truly open to the goodness of God and the depravity of your sin and the beauty of Jesus Christ when you responded for the first time truly with the gift of true faith and a true repentance that is the result of a totally transformed life.

And friend, I need to say right now, if you think that that might be true of you this morning, maybe this has taken place in you upon hearing the gospel just now. Please do not leave here

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without talking to someone about that. And if it's not you, if you're still in your sin, if you maybe prayed a prayer at one point in time but there's no real evidence of transformation, maybe the trials that you go through are proof of that. If you're honest with yourself when you look at your life, it could not be described as one who is living for Christ.

Friend, it doesn't matter if you've snuck through our church membership process. Doesn't matter if you've been in the Church for 60 years or 60 minutes. You still are among those who stand condemned before a perfect God, among those who walk in darkness. And if you were to die today, or if Christ were to return now, all that awaits you as an eternal torment, eternal separation from the face of this good and perfect God. Turn from your sin now. Trust in this gospel message. Please don't leave here today without talking to someone about where you stand before God. At the end of the service, we're going to have people over here. You're going, you're going to be pointed in their direction. You will leave here today with no excuse.

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So the cause of the new birth is the will of God. The means of the new birth is the word of truth the gospel that you've just heard. And that leads us to sub-point C, the goal of the new birth, The goal of the new birth. And we see this in the last phrase in verse 18. The goal is that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures, so that we can be a kind of a first fruits. That is the goal. That is the end for which he causes us to be born again. Now what does that mean? There are two characteristics of what is meant by first fruits that we should probably keep in mind here.

First, in the Old Testament, first fruits represented that which has been set apart for God, that which is holy. The Israelites were commanded to give the first portions of their crop and set it apart for the Lord. So, so it's just, even with just that in mind, you can imagine that this would be an especially precious truth for these persecuted Christians who are enduring so much. They have been born again to new life in Christ, and now and have now been set apart as his own. The promise that even though things are hard right now for them, they are among the very first members of the Church of Jesus Christ, called out from this world separated and set aside from

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those who are persecuting them as those who now belong to Jesus himself. The first members of a Church that will one day spread across the entire world over the coming generations.

But the second aspect of first fruits, the one that's probably more what James has in mind, is that first fruits were significant because they are the guarantee of a future crop, a future full harvest. When you see that very first apple on the apple tree, you know that's an apple tree. More apples are coming. It is the beginning of the fulfillment of the promise that guarantees that what was promised will one day come in its fullness. So since he says first fruits of his creatures and not just of mankind, not just of people, he has in mind the final fulfillment of all of God's good promises, the coming total redemption of the entire heavens and earth, the new birth in the lives of Christians. That's the first fruits of the new heavens and earth that God has promised is one day coming also.

The citizens of the coming kingdom are being born into this cursed world, but they are a new people born for a new creation, a new heavens and earth. The first fruits of that promise. The



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truth of our new life in Christ points us forward to the day when he will make all things new. The change that God has wrought in our lives is the certain sign that all sin and evil will one day be no more. The defeat of the power and the penalty of sin that we experience in the new birth in our own lives. That is the sure indication that the totality of sin, its power, penalty and even its presence will one day come to a complete end.

God is bringing about his new creation, his kingdom, through the creation of its citizens, first through the new birth. But that new birth points to the day, and it helps to fix in our minds the truth that one day all things, all things will be made new. So beloved brothers and sisters, as we face trials of various kinds. And as persecution maybe begins to slightly intensify for us, let's be encouraged and rejoice in the same wonderful truths based in the unchanging character of God.

God has no part in evil. He never directs evil toward us in any way. He gives us only what is good, and he gives us all that is good. Everything that the Lord gives us is good, whether we

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see it that way or not in the moment. We can be confident that this is the case because of the immutable character of the God who has given it. And it's the very same God who has given us the ultimate gift of our new birth, of our regeneration. He has made us a people for himself, and he will one day bring us into the new kingdom that he has caused us to be born again, to inhabit.

But until that day, Christians, until that day, he continues to bring forth more citizens, bring forth more people through the word of truth, as we go about the mission of faithfully preaching and proclaiming it. And he continues to make each of us more fit for that kingdom, even through the gifts of trials and suffering. Let's pray.

God we thank you so much for the wonderful blessed truth in this passage. Lord, that all evil, all sin, all wickedness that we experience in this life is the result of a corruption of what you have created to be good. We thank you, the father of lights, that you have given us all good things in your creation and that you continue, that it is your character, your

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unchanging character, to continually pour out good and perfect gifts on us from the beginning of our existence, through all of eternity. That is all we experience from you, Father.

We are so thankful for these things and help us to go out from here today encouraged by the unchanging character of our wonderful God. Encouraged by our true and unchanging standing as part of his church, the church that has been paid for through the blood of Jesus Christ. God, that we would keep these things at the forefront of our mind so that we can handle all trials, all temptation righteously to grow and mature through them, to be able to recognize the, the easy to see gifts and give thanks for them and even the hard to see gifts and give thanks for them. God, I pray then that we would be diligent, diligent to faithfully preach and proclaim the word of truth for as long as we have breath. That would be the mark of our church and pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.