

The Hope of the Blessed in Trying Times

James 1:12

July 2, 2023

We are this morning, continuing on through the book of James. That's, that's where I'm at when I'm up here, James chapter one and today we're just going to be looking at verse 12. So not making a ton of progress through the book of James, but we are getting through it, nonetheless. James 1:12 and in this morning's text is really a promise for believers, it really is for a the encouragement of believers. So, as we are going through this today, if you look at this text and as we think through it, if you don't see yourself in it, it would be good for you before you leave today to talk to someone next to you.

Find a member of Grace Church they're all over here, find a member of Grace Church and they would love to share the Gospel with you and help you to understand how you too can be the blessed man that is talked about in James 1:12. So, we're once again in James chapter one, again, we've been slowly making our way through this book and we've talked about the fact that the

theme of trials is one of the main topics in this book. In fact, trials is the theme that weaves its way throughout, really throughout the entirety of the first chapter and it is indeed the background context for everything that James writes in his little book.

James is writing to an early church, an early Christian community that appears to be made-up of Jewish Christians. Some among this group are most likely some of the early Jewish believers that were forced to scatter during the persecution against the church in Jerusalem that we read about in Acts 8 and Acts 11. And these Jewish believers face the same types of persecution, the same types of trials that face all Christians when it came to lining up with secular authorities, and in addition to that, the the trials that came from being displaced refugees, like the financial problems that we talked about last week.

Added to that is the additional persecution that these particular believers received from unbelieving Jews who thought that they were apostatizing. In addition to all of this, there

is indication throughout the letter, and some of them are apparently even falling into temptations to live and think in worldly ways. So, before we go any further, let's remind ourselves about how James has initially begun to address these situations by reading again James 1 verses 1 through, and we'll stop in 12.

"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the 12 tribes in the dispersion. Greetings, count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. Let him ask in faith with no doubting, for one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

"For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double minded man, unstable in all his ways. Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation and

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the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass, he will pass away. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also, will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits. 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, James begins his teaching section in verses 2 through 4 by commanding these believers to count their various trials as joy. And again, not because they are joyful in and of themselves, but because it is precisely through these trials that God will work the most in them for their growth and godliness. That's a theme that we're going to pick back up this morning, so it will have helped you if you were here however many weeks ago when we did James 1:2-4. But I think you'll be able to still get something out of this if you weren't and then after that section, he moves on to remind them to ask God for the wisdom that they need to respond rightly to these trials.

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That those with true faith don't just sit around anxiously fretting over trials, but they go straight to their sovereign God with full confidence that whatever God ordains, and commands is good and right. And then he moves to the specific case that we talked about last week of financial trials, which seemed to be one of the more pressing issues that these believers were dealing with. And he directs them to how one with true faith should be thinking when it comes to the various trials surrounding money, whether they are poor or wealthy and as we get into verse 12 today, we're going to see that James still has not left the theme of trials.

Verse 12 is actually an important transitional verse in chapter one that serves as a summary and an encouragement to all that he has said up to this point. And yet it also serves as a glorious truth that needs to be at the foundation of everything he's going to say throughout the rest of the book. And James does this in a way that would be familiar to those who are well acquainted with the teaching of Jesus. And we have said in previous sermons that the book of James bears more in common with the teachings of Jesus, and the Sermon on the Mount in particular, than any other of the New Testament epistles.

And here we see a clear example of this, because you see verse 12 is James's beatitude. Look at 12 again, "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." When you hear that, when you read that, it bears a striking resemblance to the beatitudes that Jesus begins his most famous of sermons with. It is that same type of concept that Jesus does taking a a class of person that would normally be pitied or despised or looked down on, and then raising them up to a place of glory and prestige. Just think back to some of Jesus's beatitudes, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

You see that same pattern that James employs right here in verse 12, He says "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial." Again, we would normally think of that as a pitiable position, and you don't want to be in. But then he says, "For when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life." So, James is clearly thinking about the beatitudes of

our Lord as he writes this to his readers. And most likely in particular, he has the very last one of Matthew's beatitudes in mind. Matthew 5:11, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven. So, they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

That idea of rejoicing in your persecution because of your connection to Christ, not because it is pleasant, but because of the ultimate and eternal reality that the trial points to that is so closely connected to all that James has been saying up to this point. In fact, it's almost like what we have looked at to this point is James's little commentary on Matthew 5:11. And so in a way that would certainly remind them of the teaching of Jesus about the eternal privilege that exists for those who belong to Christ, no matter what earthly circumstances they may find themselves in now. James uses this familiar beatitude style to make this summary statement of encouragement for his audience.

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Just as Jesus taught that the poor in spirit, the meek and the persecuted, or to count themselves as blessed in the eternal economy, so too, James says, "Is the one who remains steadfast under trial." The word blessed is that recognized Greek word *makarios*. They can have the meaning of happy, and it's translated that way sometimes, but it means more than that. It is not merely a present tense emotional state, but it is a state of wholeness, a state of being that does have a present reality component to it, but it still looks forward. It still looks toward that which continues on in its fulfillment, it is a state where nothing else is needed for completion.

Whereas happiness comes and goes, blessedness is a remaining constant, and it refers to being in the favorable position of right relation to God. So, it can only really be used to describe then an actual Christian, one who has been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, one whose sin has been paid for in full, and one who now possesses a righteousness that has been given to Him. Because this is true of us, we are in a fixed position of blessedness when we are in Christ and there is a sense of happiness or joy that can never be taken from us. The one whose God is the Lord is blessed, and he is blessed because

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even when he has lost all else, he has not and cannot ever lose God.

He has been permanently reconciled to him for all of eternity. Right now, we both await ultimate fulfillment of all the promises of God for us, but we also live in a fulfilled state because nothing else of any ultimate significance can in this life be added to us. We may get a new car or a new house or a new job or a new family member. Nothing can actually ever be added or taken away that would make us any more or less in this blessed state. Those who are in Christ are the blessed, are the blessed. Therefore, all that the bible says is true of the blessed man is true of every true believer.

And here in verse 12, we are reminded of three particular blessings that belong to every true believer, because every believer should be able to see themselves in this verse as the one who remains steadfast under trial. These are three truths that will encourage us as we deal with the trials of various kinds that regularly come into our lives. And there are three points for our notes today. Point number one, our renewal is

constant, point number two our reward is coming, point number three our relationship is confirmed.

So, point number one, our renewal is constant, our renewal is constant. For this point, we need to see the connection that James is making in this verse back to verses 2 through 4 where he introduced his basic teaching on trials. In fact, most commentators point out that it is pretty easy to see that James is just picking up his thoughts right here in verse 12, straight from that section in verses 2 through 4. You could maybe think of verses 5 through 11 as parenthetical a verses that tell us how to deal with trials and then give us a specific relevant example of one.

And then James just continues on in his teaching on trials, so we see that the word for trials a that can also be translated as temptation, actually, which we'll talk more about next week. But here it is in verse 12, it's still referencing trials just as it did in verse 2. So, there's that connection to verse 2, and then we also see the word for testing that is used in verse 3. The word *dokimos* is, is used here again in verse 12 also. So,

there's this connecting between verses 2 through 4 and verse 12 that we're supposed to see.

So, what James is referring to here at the beginning of verse 12 is the one who has taken the commands of verses 2 through 4 seriously and is now striving to be obedient to those commands. It's like he is saying, as you put 2 through 4 into practice, be encouraged by now this what you see in verse 12. Because the man who remains steadfast under trial is the one who is thinking rightly about his trials. The one who is counting them as joy, not because they are wonderful in and of themselves, but because his greatest desire is to be conformed to the image of Christ.

Because God has ordained trials in the lives of believers for just this reason, the one who remains steadfast under trial is the one who doesn't see his trial as something to flee from, but as a test from God for the purpose of growth. The one who understands that God has sovereignly ordained a diverse array of trials for the duration of your life in order that you can gain the very thing that you want the most, to be like Jesus. So,

James's beatitude here is for the believer who has put into practice the teaching of 2 through 4.

And it's a reminder that the renewal that takes place in our lives as God works in us through our trials is constant, and it will continue on throughout our lives until the day we die. Another way to put it then would be blessed is the man who sees trials rightly and lives in a constant practice of relating to his trials in a godly way. So, this first point is really a helpful reminder and summation of some of what we learned together. Already in verses 2 through 4, we reminded there that there is no virtue in just experiencing a trial in and of itself.

Trials are the constant reality for everyone who is born into this sin cursed world, James said in that passage, "When you face trials of various kinds" and in that phrase, we are reminded that in the word, when that trials are inevitable, he, we, we should expect them. It's not if you face trials, it's when you face trials, and he uses the word various. So, the, the trials come from everywhere, they come from everywhere. There's

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a multitude of trials and they're present at every stage of life, in every area of life. Moving from one place to another doesn't alleviate trials, it just moves you to a place with a different variation of possible trials.

Last week we saw that there are trials of poor and there's trials of wealthy, every stage of the year, and there's trials for those who aren't married and there's trials for those who are married. There's trials for those who have no children and trials for those who do have children. There are the trials of having a job at the trials of not having a job and differing trials between jobs. There's the trials of being a teenager and the much greater trials of raising a teenager.

Trials are not special or unique, everyone in here is almost certainly dealing with some sort of trial right now. They just all fall in different places in our minds on the severity scale. So, there's the trial of the loss of someone close to you, and the trial of the loss of sleep because of your neighbors you celebrated the first of July all last night. Just different trials, different places on the severity scale of

where those trials are. The virtue comes not in the existence of the trial, but in how the trial is handled.

All suffer under trials, but only the godly endure, only the godly remain steadfast rather than panic and try to flee from trials when they come. Remaining steadfast here has the same meaning as enduring, it's translated that way in some translations, and that really does get back to that point of not seeing our trials as something to run away from. It also doesn't mean to just grin and bear it until it's over. That's what enduring the trial is like, like grabbing onto a pole in the middle of the hurricane and just clinging on for dear life until it's over. And then when it's over, you may be saying a quick prayer of thanks to God for the pole and then thinking to yourself that you've come through the trial well, that's not God's intention for trials.

Again, you don't have to be a believer to just live through a trial without dying. Lots of unbelievers have experienced the same type of loss and pain that believers have and then end up going on to live fairly normal lives afterwards. What James is

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talking about is the principle that we saw in verses 2 through 4 to "count it joy when you meet trials of various kinds. For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness," and that steadfastness will have its full effect to mature you in Christ. He's talking about growing through the trial, of continuing to move in the direction of godliness, in the direction of sanctification that you have been heading on ever since the moment that Christ saved you, and not merely continuing on in spite of the trial.

But as we talked about a from that first section, using the trial to make even greater strides in your sanctification than you could have made without the trial, this is what the term stood the test implies. That the trial acts as a test for your faith, it demonstrates who you really are, what you actually believe about God, not just what you say you believe. Do you actually believe it? Do you place your trust in these things you say you believe? Do you actually put any real weight to it? And then when you pass the test, it serves as this great encouragement and it spurs you on toward even more righteousness as you see the promises of God really being fulfilled in your

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life through the trial, and you take the next one with greater joy.

But as you remain steadfast under trials and you are able to even count it as joy because you are able to properly balance earthly and eternal perspectives, that's what it means. You continue to grow and manifest the fruits of the Spirit, and you do it even more abundantly than before the trial. And this is all just this incredible encouragement as you pass the test in a way that is totally unexplainable apart from the promises of God working through the holy spirit in your life. So, for this point to be an encouragement to you, it is essential that your greatest desire truly is to grow closer and closer to God and become more and more like Christ.

It's not something that you merely mentally assent to, it's not just a yeah, the bible says that Christians should desire Christ likeness above all else. So, I know I'm supposed to, and I'm going to work on that. No, it has to really be your greatest desire and then you also have to really believe that the truth from verses 2 through 4, that the primary means that God

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accomplishes this in our lives. The primary way he accomplishes Christ likeness in us, the primary way that he matures us in him is through trials. If you truly desire and believe these things, then this first point should be of great encouragement to you because we really do see here that we will be tested through trials for the entirety of our lives.

That's what you get when you follow the logic of verse 12, this is where you come to. Remaining steadfast or enduring is present tense, it's the present tense, the idea of actively, continually standing firm. It is something that this person is in the midst of doing. Then it says, "When he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life." So, when the test is over, once he has passed the test and he will receive the crown of life or the crown that is life. We'll talk more about that in a moment but notice that the inference here is that the test goes on for the entirety of life.

It is always a present tense reality in your life. The testing, the trials, and then the reward, eternal life, is given at the end of the test. So, there is a sense in which we

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already, yes, we already as believers possess eternal life. But that's not what James is referring to, because it is a future receiving of the crown of life. It is the gift of a new quality of life upon our death. So, therefore the only thing that could be meant by stood the test is the faithful perseverance of the believer in every trial until the end of their physical life or the completion of the race that's been marked out for us. So, the picture is of the one who remains steadfast under trial is a definitional characteristic of the blessed man, the blessed person.

It's a characteristic that describes them throughout their entire life. It's not a description of how they handled one specific certain event, it's who they are. So, so you need to see the difference there. Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial is referring to a certain type of person, not just a call for righteous living in a particular circumstance, this isn't an imperative, it's a description. It's like saying that guy over there, that's the that's the type of guy that remains steadfast under trial. When you say that, you're not referring to a specific thing that you've seen

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necessarily you're referring to who that person is, definitionally.

James is saying that this is who the blessed one is. This should be a defining mark of every Christian; we should be known as a people who remain steadfast under trial. It should be a constant description of us. And it's not that we don't hurt, it's not that we go through trials without hurting. It's not that we don't feel pain or sadness in the midst of the trials, of course we will. But the truth of the trials will change us in a different way than they change those without Christ, that's what we're talking about.

Trials will not cause the Christian to grow in bitterness, trials will not cause the Christian to grow in anxiousness, to grow in their fear, they don't cause us to to, to turn to sin. They don't cause us to turn to selfishness, they don't cause us to turn to self-loathing, they don't cause us to grow, to grow hardened or calloused or cold toward others. That's the effect the trials can have on those who are not in Christ, but not on the redeemed, not on the blessed one. No, but through every

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trial, the believer strives to grow, and we find that our trust in God is, is greater than it was before the trial.

That our joy in Christ has grown through the trial, that the Gospel has become more precious to us as a result of the trial. That the trial has caused our hearts to soften towards others, to grow in grace and mercy towards them, to grow in Christ likeness. This is not telling us to be steadfast under trials so that we can receive a reward. It's not telling us to do that so we can receive a reward, it's not a command to follow. Right here is James stating the reality that this is what a Christian is, this is what they look like. That should be an encouragement to all of us, Christians should be able to look at their lives and see the ways that they have been positively shaped as they respond to trials and be encouraged that this proves that they are in the category of the blessed and all that applies to the blessed applies to them.

And while the truth stated here that this is going to be our condition for our entire lives, that the life of the believer will be a life of continually remaining steadfast under

trial, that this is the unending test that will mark each of our earthly lives, well, that might seem discouraging at first, might seem discouraging at first. I actually think we can find quite a bit of help in that; it can actually be quite reassuring if you let it. It's encouraging. It's reassuring because it rips us out of that discouraging to potentially soul crushing false reality that we like to live in.

That place where we essentially think that life is lived and enjoyed between trials as we try to avoid them, knowing that God has declared that this is what our lives will consist of. Just constantly going through various types of trials, some more difficult, some less difficult, there's no way out of it. And that if we were able to see things the way that God sees them perfectly, we wouldn't actually want it any other way. God has decreed that the only type of person who passes the test at the end of his life is the one who can be described as remaining steadfast under trial.

Therefore, no trials would mean that it is impossible for me to ever be described like that, I don't want that. So, it's

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useful for us in that and it is also helpful because knowing this keeps us from wasting our lives in the foolish pursuit of trial avoidance. You're going to get old, you're going to get sick, you're going to gain pain and lose looks, you're going to lose friends, you're going to be persecuted, you're going to be treated unfairly, you're going to be used by people, you're going to be disappointed by people, you're going to suffer hurt from friends and close relatives, you're going to lose things that you weren't expecting. At some point you will be forced to live without something or someone that you were not prepared for, that never imagined living without.

If it hasn't happened to you yet, it will, this is all a certainty. It's all a certainty and there is comfort and there is peace that comes when you start living and preparing in expectation for these things rather than frantically and anxiously believing and acting like it is within your power to permanently keep them all away if you can just figure out the right decisions to make. Well, this of course doesn't just mean that we decided to live like unhealthy lazy slobs, since trials are going to come anyway. If that's your reaction to this, then

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that just demonstrates the goal of your life has always actually been about avoiding pain and not glorifying God.

We don't get to violate the commands of our Lord to be diligent stewards of our bodies, of our time, of our resources and our energy. Living in a way that expects trials is different than living in a way that invites them and tries to create them. Now the faithful Christian balances all of these things. We live as good stewards of all that God has given us, including being good stewards of the trials that he brings into our lives and again, if we are willing to accept this, it is so freeing. It frees us up to live lives free of any real worry, content to live moment to moment in faithful obedience. If there is no real trial going on in our life, we live in thankfulness, seeking wisdom from God about what righteous, righteousness looks like in this situation, and then faithfully walking in obedience.

If there's a minor trial in our life, well, what we do then is we live in thankfulness, seeking wisdom from God about what righteousness looks like, and then faithfully walking in obedience. And then if there's a severe trial in our life, what

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we need to do then is live in thankfulness, seeking wisdom from God about what righteousness looks like, and then faithfully walking in obedience. This is the Christian life, and it is gloriously freeing to embrace this truth and be rid of the anxiety of living our lives for trial avoidance. So, the first encouraging truth about God's design for trials in our lives is that during this life, through trials, our renewal, our growth in godliness is constant, it's constant, for the rest of our lives.

And that brings us to point two, our reward is coming, our reward is coming. "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life." Or again, it could be translated as the crown that is life. This is in reference to the eternal true life that awaits us upon our death. James brings in the imagery of being a victor in a competition, here the term crown is in reference to the victor's crown in an athletic competition, it was the wreath that was placed upon the head of the winner.

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So, James is saying the only one who remains steadfast under trial, the one who is marked by this characteristic, will come to the end of his life victorious. He will have passed the test, and he will be the recipient of life. And these things are it's not that that's what earns him the life, now these things all go together. The God who saved you is the same God who brought you to the end of the race, who brought you through all of the trials, and who has promised this crown of life for you. The phrase crown of life is used one other place in the New Testament and it's, it's fascinating to see it's used in a in a very similar way.

So, if you want to quickly turn in your Bibles to Revelation 2, Revelation 2, you can see this for yourself. In Revelation 2, we're going to be looking at the letter to the faithful church in Smyrna, of the seven letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3. Smyrna was one of only two where Christ issues no corrective for that church, he only commends and encourages them. So, the city of Smyrna was known as a city for loyalty to Rome, and the cult of emperor worship was strong there, and thus the church there faced great persecution. In

fact, about 50 or so years after the death of John, the early church Father Polycarp was martyred in Smyrna.

But look at what Jesus tells the church in Smyrna to encourage them, it's quite similar to what James speaks of in our text. In Revelation 2:8 through 11 we read, "And to the Angel of the church in Smyrna write: the words of the first and the last who died and came to life. I know your tribulation and your poverty, but you are rich, on the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death."

So, you really see in this the similar type of encouragement for the Christian who is being persecuted. Just like James just said, Jesus reminds the church in Smyrna about the true riches they actually possess, even though they're in

poverty. We talked about last week, he tells them that they are about to suffer and notice he doesn't, he doesn't tell them how to get out of the suffering. He just reveals it to them as a certainty so that they don't waste their time trying to figure out how to get out of it, but rather how to live through it, how to live in it.

He refers to the suffering as testing, just like James does, he doesn't tell them again how to escape death, but commands them rather to be faithful unto death. And upon their death, the faithful completion of their testing, they too will receive the crown of life. And that crown here is described a little bit more in that last comment says, "The one who conquers, the one who receives the victorious crown will not be hurt by the second death." So, beloved, what a what a joyous connection we should see in this this is for us.

Though this type of persecution isn't something that the type of persecution we see at the Church of Smyrna. It's not something that any of us have had to face, at least not yet. It may come to us one day, isn't even more likely to come to our

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children, our grandchildren. You know, the likelihood goes up with every generation that goes by. But even if we never face this type of suffering, type of suffering that potentially leads to martyrdom like we see in Smyrna when we look at our own lives and we see ourselves remaining steadfast under trial.

When we see ourselves living in a way that is unexplainable apart from the saving power of God. When we find ourselves, then we find ourselves in the same company as the faithful saints in Smyrna, we can have the same encouragement. We can take the same words of comfort from our savior, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." Oh beloved, the crown of life is the certain and coming prize for all, for all who are in Christ, all who demonstrate their union with him in their continual faithful living through the regular trials of life.

Yes, as we said earlier, there is a sense in which we already possessed eternal life, but this is more in reference to the quality of that new life, the quality of life that we will possess when this earthly life comes to an end, the life that can't be hurt, can't be touched by the second death. It is a

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reminder of the paradise that awaits us, that all the difficulties of this life are temporary, that the greatest life that we could ever imagine here, the best times that we have spent in this life at its best, it's only a glimmer of the true life to come.

Or, as Thomas Watson has said, "Whatever trouble in this life a child of God meets with, it is all the hell he will ever have." This is the glorious truth also about our brothers and sisters in Christ who have graduated on to heaven. I'm sure you can think back over years to to many faithful brothers and sisters in Christ to finish their earthy race and have received the crown already. Dear loved ones and fellow church members, you can remember conversations with them, ministering together with them, sharing meals with them, even walking the halls of the church with them, greeting them and having deep and meaningful life changing conversations with them, they have now finished.

They've now finished their time of testing, may remain steadfast and trial, stood on the day of the final test and

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received the crown of life, just as God has promised to all who love him. And though their physical bodies are dead in a way to future resurrection, their souls, their souls, are now experiencing true life in a way that we can't even imagine. They experience no more hurt, no more pain, only joy. They're able to be in the presence of God himself, to look upon the one whom they love.

There is no part of them that wishes for the opportunity to come back and relive even their best moment in this life. And it's no offense to those who miss them. They have just finished this race, this time of testing, they have graduated. They have moved on that life that their loved ones may have been faithfully and lovingly asking God to preserve for just a few more days or weeks or years while they were here. Even at its best, that life was just a glimpse of what they now live. And brothers and sisters, the only difference, the only difference between us and them is time and the completion of a few more tests.

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We, too, will join them, along with all the faithful throughout history. And finally, experience for the first time what life truly is. Crown of life is as real to us as the diploma is to the underclassmen. So, as the underclassmen sits in the graduation ceremony, as you're there, you, those whom they once went to school with have now completed all their tests. And they're now, now you see them holding their diploma, moving on, moving on to really beginning their life, the underclassmen knows that the diploma is real.

He sees it in the hands of the person who is walking the halls with him just a few weeks earlier. And while you might miss what their personality brought to the school, and you're going to miss seeing them in class and you know that you know that this is the way of things. And eventually, they needed to move on, and they needed to really begin life, but you know that the same thing is coming for you also one day. Yeah, there they are, standing with the diploma that they were promised when their time at school would come to an end once they had passed all of their tests and you will be there too, one day.

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Again, the only difference between you and that person is time and more tests that need to be passed. So, be encouraged, dear Christian, because just as every test passed in school points ahead to the day that you graduate, so every trial, every trial now, every time of testing that we come through, every time we, we come through another trial, trusting in Christ, remaining steadfast, seeking his wisdom on how to grow closer to him and more like Christ through it.

It points us ahead to the certainty of one day receiving that crown of life, joining finally with all who have come before us the faithful members of the church in Smyrna and every other persecuted church. The faithful men and women throughout church history who steadfastly endured and obeyed through testing and trial for the glory of God and the victory of his church and all believers we've known and loved, and who have gone ahead of us. Just a little more time and just a few more tests, we too will know what true life is. So beloved, in your trials, be encouraged, because through them God is constantly renewing you and because in them, we see the certainty of our coming reward.

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And finally, point three as we endure trials, our relationship is confirmed, our relationship is confirmed.

“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.” Suffering well when we are under trial, remaining steadfast is a demonstration of your true love for God and this is so great for us to understand that all of these truths go together. God promises to give the crown of life to everyone that loves him, and those are the same people who remain steadfast under trial.

The ultimate reason that James can say, “Blessed is the man who,” because this is the person who truly loves God. And this is so helpful for us because there are many times are there not when we act in ways that are unloving toward God and they can lead us to doubt and despair. How could I do this thing? How could I act this way to the one that I love? We know from Scripture there are many places in the bible that equate love for God with obedience to him. There are several places in the Old Testament where we read about those who love God and keep his commandments, and we see that those aren't two categories, but one, those who love God and keep his commandments.

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First John 5:3 says, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." Jesus says in John 14:15, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." So, there is no place for someone to say that they love God if they have no regard for his commandments, if they see them as more of a suggestion, don't have the desire to obey them. Those who continue to practice sin do not truly love or know God and there is biblical reason for such people to question any supposed salvation they may think that they possess. But since Christians do sin, they don't go on in practice of sin. They don't go on in a pattern of sin, they don't go through their life getting better at sin.

But we still sin, and since it is true that to love God is to obey his commandments, then any time that we sin when we fall into temptation, then we are acting in an unloving way towards God. But is acting in an unloving way towards him on an occasion automatically, does that automatically mean that you're in the category of those who don't love God? This is encouraging because this is something that so many real and tender-hearted

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Christians that I know are in here really do struggle with. Again, there is a real place where some people who are way too comfortable with their sin and are just presuming on the mercy of God to save them really do need to have serious doubts about their salvation. I don't want to minimize that.

But for the sensitive soul believer who still sins on occasion but truly hates their sin and immediately seeks the forgiveness of God that is available to them through Jesus Christ, and then turns from it repents many times, this person can begin doubting their salvation because they've acted unlovingly toward God. They begin to think that maybe, this maybe this means that they don't truly love him, and their faith is a sham. Well, this text should be an encouragement for you because it points you to look at how you respond and grow through trials and you will see that yes, you truly do love him.

From time to time, you can act in an unloving way towards your spouse or towards your children. That doesn't mean that your overall position towards them isn't still love. You may

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have sinfully become angry at them and lashed out. You might have made a decision for the family that was motivated by selfishness, and you need to seek forgiveness and reconciliation. But as you look at the pattern of your life, you see one of sacrifice for their good. You see a pattern of one who's willing to deal with pain and discomfort for their sake, and you see a greater joy in their joy than in your own. Similarly, when we fail to obey God in some area, when we fall into sin and treat him in an unloving or even hateful way, we can still look at our lives.

Not just at the overall pattern of the continued growth in godliness. That should also still encourage us, but we can also look at how we go through trials and see in that our love for him confirmed. It doesn't mean that you never sin in your trials or that you don't ever have a sinful, untrusting, ungrateful reaction to your trials, that that is certain to happen. You will not remain perfect through your trials, or God would only need to give you one that's certain to happen. But as you look at your trials, as you look at how you go through them, are you growing through them?

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On the other side of the trial, you find yourself clinging to Christ even more than you did before, depending on him even more than you did before. Are you searching the Scriptures, rejoicing in the truth even more? Does the darkness of the trial cause you to glory in the light of the Lord and his gospel even more? Again, it's not that you don't feel the sting of death, it's not that you don't mourn the loss, it's not that you, you don't feel the, the, the power of the wind gust of the trial that is trying to move you, it's not that you don't feel those things.

But in the end, do you remain steadfast? Can you honestly say, "Jesus, I love you even more? I rejoice in you even more than I did before. The pain and the sorrow of this trial came into my life, and I'm thankful that I was with you through it. I'm thankful that you have used it to make me more like you." All of this points to true love for God because it is a demonstration that you love God for who he is, that you love him for his character, not just for what he could give you. The type of love that so many you know that that type of love that so many young people think is real because of how someone makes

them feel. No real love is present regardless of how you feel in the moment.

A true love for God understands that the pain that is coming upon you from a trial, it's actually a pain that the God that you say that you love could take away from you at any time. Are you OK with that? He could end that trial right now; he could turn it into something that makes you feel nothing but happiness. You know he can do this if he wanted to, but you know that he is in fact testing you through this trial. And so, you go to him in the midst of it, you believe his promises about the trial and the good that he's going to accomplish in you through it. That's what love for God looks like.

Not seeking him and committing yourself to him because he is your potential ticket out of your trial, but truly loving him as the kind and loving author of your trial. The blessed one who remains steadfast in trial, the one to whom the crown of life is promised, is the one who truly loves God. It is a present tense love that we see in this verse, the true believer, the one whose love for God is now growing and continuing on into eternity. It

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will always be a present tense love for God. That's what you will always have through throughout all eternity, never a past tense love for God.

So, this also separates the true believer from the one who really had maybe a loving emotional experience at one point in time, the one who loved God at one moment in time. Maybe when they felt really guilty about a sin they got caught in, or maybe we're really fearful of hell and loved the one who would save them from that, loved him only for what he could do for them, or maybe loved God at a point in their life when they felt like no one else like them. They felt like God was the only one who was really there for them when no one else was. They had a real emotional loving experience then; they had that so called love at some point in time. But now, but now, when trials come, they point their love somewhere else. They point their love, they point their devotion, they point their energy to whatever or whoever can ease that pain for that which can get their mind off of the difficult circumstances. They point their love at that which helps them cope, whatever it is that will remove the inconvenience of this trial as soon as possible.

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They love the idea of that relief a lot more than the idea of clinging to Christ while enduring it. They might say they love God, but the truth is they just love the idea of God doing something for them. So, in this age where so many claim to love God, so many want to think of themselves as Christians and are not, we need to remember that the true believer is revealed by the fruit that comes from their lives and even more so in a trial. It's, it's when we see fruit coming out of the most surprising of places where true love for God is the most evident, right?

You should expect to see fruit growing from a well-watered garden. But when you see that fruit is coming from a sick and broken tree in the middle of a drought, when you see fruit coming from that tree and you know that that that tree is of God, right? The one who only claims the love for God sees a trial and screams up at God to pull him up out of it. But the one who truly loves God, sees the trial, walks right into it, asking God to pull him closer to himself while he endures it.

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So, beloved, be encouraged by the fact that every trial you face, every trial you face, will have the ultimate effect of making you a little more like Jesus Christ. Be encouraged by the fact that trials are not something that just pop up unexpectedly from time to time and that you could actually do something about. They're actually sovereignly built into the path that you're loving heavenly father has put you on. That the path of steadfastly enduring trials is the only path you want to be on. Because it's the same path that leads to the crown of life, the crown of life that awaits every faithful Christian, the eternal reward that we desire more than anything in this life, in times of fear and doubt, and in times of anxiousness and sorrow.

Look at how God has faithfully brought you through trial after trial, and how each one has resulted in more and more reasons for your rejoicing, more desperate dependence on him, a greater and greater love for him, a greater and greater appreciation for his gospel, all of this is the result of trials. More of this than you ever would have had in a life devoid of them, devoid of trials. Look at these evidences in your life and rejoice.

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Rejoice, beloved, rejoice blessed ones that you truly are, those who love God. "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."

Our gracious and kind heavenly father, thank you so much for revealing these unbelievable truths in your Word. Truths is so wonderful that we couldn't imagine them ourselves. We could not make them up, we need you to tell us them, we need you to reveal them to us.

Father, I pray for all who are in here today or for those in here who do not know you, who maybe fall into that category of thinking that they know you but, but do not, and their response to trials growing in bitterness or callousness and turning from you and turning to other things is, is evidence of that. Father, I pray that right now you would open their eyes to the glory of this gospel, to their sin before you, and their desperate need for a Savior in Jesus Christ which grant them faith and repentance.

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They wouldn't leave here today without talking to someone here. And God for, for thee sweet and tender hearted believer who feels battered, who constantly doubts their faith, doubts where they stand. Lord, that you would gently nudge their face to look at how they have come through trials, how they continue to cling to you, how they continue to seek after you, how they have grown more and more with every passing test, more love for you, more love for their Savior.

God, I pray that Grace Church would be a church where anyone who comes in would look around at anyone, anyone in here, and be able to describe them as that that's a person who is defined by steadfastly remaining in the midst of trials. And that that would be our testimony. Father, I pray for those in here who are dealing with some very severe trials right now, Lord, that the, the rest of the body would come alongside them, minister to them, love them through it, and that they would, they would be able to grow in it. That they would cling to you more. And on the other side of whatever they're dealing with now, they would see themselves even more like Jesus than they did before and be able to praise you and love you and cling to

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you even more. Pray these things, all in the name of Jesus,
Amen.