

God's Process of Maturity, p.2

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Alright, grab your Bibles and let's go to James again. What a great great truth is in James. We've started on this one again. I don't know how I got halfway through all these messages, mainly because I didn't want to keep y'all that long when I first started them, but what a powerful truth and for myself, how different this text is to me now four decades into my Christian life than it was when I first exegeted this text many many years ago. Now I grasped the seed, the germ of the truth but having lived out some things through these years, I, I, I, I grasp or apprehend the truth more in full bloom. It's one thing to grasp the seed, it's one thing to see the full bloom.

Can I just say something? This is just not, don't even have really anything to do with my message but, ah, I, I, I just noticed and it was confirmed to me just recently that the Methodist church across the street is for sale, the building, and, um, I was also told that that was the only Methodist church in Muscle Shoals, Alabama. I think that's right. The only Methodist church and I want to tell you from my heart, that particularly saddens me. Do you know there was a time in America when the Methodists were the largest non-Catholic denomination? Today it's the Baptists but part of that's because we know how to radically inflate our numbers when we report them. That's just the truth, just the honest truth, but, um, that's really sad because some of my heroes in church history were Methodist. Ah, when the Methodists first began, the John Wesley, Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, um, there, there was some division among them. I don't agree with some points of doctrine that are important but I know that there certainly are still today some godly Methodist preachers who love Christ and try to preach the word and some wonderful and godly Methodist folks who love Jesus like we love him and, ah, honor the Lord, but the system as a whole a few decades ago started embracing liberal theology, started saying, "Well, what's the culture saying? What's the latest thing? What are the people, we've gotta, we've gotta bend, we've gotta adjust, we've gotta catch up with the time," and thought this would help their numbers. Every single denomination that leaves their biblical moorings to be effective end up in radical decline. Southern Baptists are in a significant decline right now. All of the numbers are going down down down down and you can go back a few decades and you can see when they began to compromise, compromise, compromise to be relevant, to be cool, to be with the latest trends and, folks, we serve a God who does not change. Now certainly some things can change, styles, decorations, some things change, but they start tampering with the stuff that shouldn't

change and, ah, it just doesn't do my heart any good to see that there's...and, in, in, in the bible belt, that there's actually a town without one Methodist church.

Now let me say this: I do know, I don't know a lot, I know there's probably some dear faithful Christians who went there. I don't mean a judgment on all of them, but I have talked at great length and become quite close to folks who used to belong to that church and they ended up leaving the church because they were becoming so radically liberal. They didn't believe in evangelism anymore, didn't believe in calling people to repentance and faith, didn't believe the inerrancy of Scripture, and what did we find them doing? Then after these trends, they started looking to, "Well, we'll have different, unique, clever, fun, entertaining style of worship and that'll build the church." Well, it's for sale and, um, it just, um, we ought to learn something from these things and, ah, I think as a denomination, the Methodists, not a lot of the Methodist individuals, a lot of good folks out there, but as a denomination, they're apostate. Um, that's really sad when you understand the great biblical moral integrity of the Wesleys and the Whitefields and the men who put their lives on the line to begin that church movement. So, um, it makes me very aware at Grace Life Church of the Shoals in whatever God does with our Anchored in Truth ministries, that, um, there's the ever-present temptation as the generations roll to lose the original convictions and my conviction is whatever impact God might let us have as the generations roll by because I really believe what we're doing is building something, a foundation that others will build upon after I'm dead and gone and other things, but, um, I'm asking God to bring it crushing to an end before he lets it turn to unbiblical liberalism. I'd rather it not exist and perhaps that's what God is doing in some other places.

James 2. Let's look at this together right quick this evening. James, chapter 2. James, chapter 1, verse 2 is what I should have said. James 1:2, this local church pastor is writing to his persecuted and dispersed church members and says to them just right out of the gate, verse 2,

2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you will be perfect [or mature] and complete, lacking in nothing. 5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, 8 being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. 9 But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; 10 and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. 11 For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away. 12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has

been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

So I've called this "God's Process of Maturity." God's process of maturity and all of us will find these repeated cycles in our lives as God matures us. Now I know some of you sitting here tonight are facing and living through certain trials, certain troubles, and, ah, God's got a word for you and that's exactly James is writing to these believers who are being viciously persecuted, they're scattered, they're run out of their homes away from their families, their occupation, and Paul writes to them and says, "Hey, consider it all joy."

Now what's he saying? I. He's saying these are required trials. Required trials. Consider is in the imperative mood. When he says consider it all joy, it means he commands them to do this all at once. He's not saying feel like it's a joy. He's not saying, ah, look for the emotion of joy. He's saying consider, declare, speak it to yourself that it's a joy when these multifaceted trials come our way and I'm gleaning through this because I'm not gonna preach all that I've already preached to you. So there's a sense in which as God grows us in the faith, he has multifaceted trials that comes our way that he's gonna use for our good and for his glory.

Now, secondly, revealed faith. Required trials is number 1, number 2, revealed faith. He says, verse 3, "knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance." Now knowing means believing and understanding something. He said, "You, you, as a Christian you ought to believe and understand something and that is that this testing is revealing something about you." When a person is tested, it doesn't make them anything, it reveals something about them and what he's saying is when you are born again, at the new birth you were given a sixth sense. You have your regular natural five sense but there's a sixth sense you were given and that's the faith capacity. You have a capacity to reach out and grab ahold of things from a faith perspective that gives you an understanding others don't have and so what he's saying when a trial comes, the faith that God puts in you all of a sudden comes to the forefront. The faith rises up within you and says, "I see God's doing something."

So the trial serves to squeeze out of you the faith that God placed in you at conversion. The trial manifested and activated this already residing though yet unmanifested and unactivated faith. The Bible says God has allotted to each man, that's each believer now, a measure of faith. So you face a trial, you're to as an actor you're gonna say, "I'm gonna consider this joy. My God knows what He's doing. He's in control of everything that comes my way, everything that comes my way is filtered through His hands of love and perfection, and I'm gonna consider it joy," and that in itself is that rising of faith whereby you see that God is behind this.

Now he says in verse 3 this produces endurance. Literally it means it results in endurance. You could say it results in staying power. The more you go through these cycles, the more you consider trials a joy, the more faith rises up in you and say, "I see God's doing something. I know God has a purpose in this." Then you get to where that's

just the pattern of the way you function. You've become steadfast in doing things from a faith perspective and God, that he's up to something good and for his own glory. So this attitude and this activity of sustaining faith is, if you will, the bloom or the blossom that God's looking for in your life. So the revealed faith comes forth as you continue to draw on this faith to see God's hand behind these difficult circumstances. You begin to come to a place where this is pretty much the steadfast way you approach life and that's where God wants to get us.

Now we come to what's obvious and that is, number 3, resulting maturity. Resulting maturity. Verse 4, he says, "let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect." The word "perfect" there in the New American Standard literally means maturity. It doesn't mean sinless perfection, it means now you are looking at things in a mature Christian way. You've in a sense, not absolutely, and, I, I, I want to be careful with this word, but in a sense spiritually you've arrived and that it is your natural default to grasp and look at these situations from a godly perspective from the fact that God's up to something and my faith is grasping that reality.

Now the perfect result he talks about here means the proper end. That's where he wants you to get to. He wants to get you to the proper end through all of these trials and that is that you are joying in God and praising God and seeing God's great hand behind it all. Um, you, you have heard me say from this pulpit that a lot of the trials and the difficulties and the warfares that we've faced as a church and that I faced individually as a pastor were necessary for me. It was necessary for me. Ah, now I may not have been guilty of some of the...ha, well, most of the slander and the spins people would bring in accusations and attacks against me, but that didn't matter, I needed to mature and I needed to repent of things those people didn't even know about. God knew about them, they didn't know about them. And I needed to grow in ways they didn't know, and now it's, it's gotten to where I, I, that's my default viewpoint.

I was counseling with a pastor just recently and he talked about this thing that came, ah, unveiled in his local church, some things that were concerning and, and, and upsetting, and I immediately rejoiced and he thought I was a little bit strange. I said, "No, no, this shows me God's hand is on your church. He wouldn't expose these things and work you through these things if he wasn't planning on using your church." You've got a trial in your marriage, praise the Lord, God's working on you. God's doing something. You've got a trial at work, God's doing something. You've got to make sure you have the perfect end result. You've gotta make sure you learn to respond right in faith so that God will say, "You, you're, now you're at the default place of responding in faith and not with the whiny, complaining, bitter, fault-finding, blame-shifting spirit that the world so commonly has." We function on a higher level than the world and he says this way, this is the way we become complete and in other words mature in all of our parts in verse 4.

Now we get to what I call an interlude. Look at verse 5. In verses 5 through 11 there's an interlude that, um, ah, certainly connects to these truths and in verse 5 he says here, notice what he says, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it shall be given to him." Now how many times

– listen to me – how many times has something happened, you're troubled, you're heartbroken, you're angry, you're, you're disappointed, a trial comes, how many of you immediately go, "God, give me wisdom. What are you doing? God, give me wisdom. What are you up to?" If he's not doing something, if he's not up to something, if he's not using this out of deep love for you, you can't even comprehend the depths of his love for you, then he's not God. Our first response should in faith be, "God, give me wisdom. What's going on here?" Now in my experience, God does two things: number one he says, "Here's what I'm dealing with in you," and secondly, "If I can get you to be honest there, I'm gonna show you what I'm dealing with all around you." Give me wisdom.

I'm so very very grateful that I was taught by a Christian teacher, I mean, right after my conversion to seek God for wisdom. If there's anything that's been a key to God using me, ah, through the years is I have pleaded with God from early in my Christian experience, "God, give me wisdom. Give me that capacity," and you might define wisdom this way, let me say it this way, it's the proper understanding and use of knowledge. I have knowledge about this trial, I have knowledge about these bad things that are happening in, in my life, these consequences, these circumstances, now God, give me the wisdom to use this right, to understand what you're up to.

Now he didn't say you're to ask God for strength. I'm not suggesting that's wrong but that's not what James says here. It don't say ask God for strength. It doesn't say ask God for grace. I'm not suggesting that's wrong but he didn't say that. He didn't say ask God for deliverance. I'm not even saying that's wrong but that's not what he said because those things are important but they're secondary. It's to ask God for wisdom.

I remember reading about a pastor who had a godly older lady in his church who had just recently lost her husband quite suddenly and she herself had suffered a stroke, so the pastor very kindly and compassionately went to her and he told this dear church lady, he said, "I want you to know I'm praying for you," and the lady said, "Well, what are you praying?" He said, "Well, I'm praying you'll have strength. I, I'm praying that, that you'll have the help from God that you need." She said, "Well, that's good but would you pray that I would also have wisdom so this won't be wasted?"

Do you go to God and say, "God, show me what You're up to"? Some of you have spent your whole Christian life never getting to first base on these principles but it's never too late to start and learn to consider it all joy when these multifaceted trials come your way. Literally it means, ah, with all kinds of dynamics and twists and angles. It's more than one trial. It's a, it's a combination of trials coming your way because God's up to something. He is growing you. He is maturing you. He is doing something in you.

Then he says in verse 6, "But he must ask in faith without any doubting," that is, you must ask God believing that he's up to something good; that he's a sovereign God in control of all of it. Not like it's out of his control, it's in his control. Do you ask him knowing he's doing something for your good and his glory? If you don't go with that kind of faith, he's not gonna answer that prayer. Believing that God's way is right – now listen to me – also believing that God's method of using trials to grow his children is good and

wise. Now think about it. We're gonna all go through trials. Praise the Lord, we get to go through trials that help us because our God's gonna make sure they do.

He says don't be a corky Christian. Look what he says there in verse 6, "But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind." Well, if this thing happens, so I'm over here. This other thing happens, so now I'm blown over there. This thing happens and so now I'm mad. This thing happens so now I'm hurt. This thing's happened so now I'm full of anxiety. And you just, you just a corky Christian, you're like a cork on the waves. No, he says don't be like that. You're not to be the victim of your circumstances, you're to be the victor through your circumstances. Sounds a little bit like Joel Osteen, doesn't it? But there's a proper way to look at that from a biblical perspective. He's a nut. He just is. Ephesians 4:4 reminds us no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine. Same idea, just bouncing all over the place.

Then in verse 7, "For that man ought not to expect that he will, he will receive anything from the Lord," verse 8, "being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." So if you think God might be doing something, "No God's not doing something, I'm just the victim of this circumstances, I'm just, I'm just depressed by this, I'm just distressed by that," look, look, look, that don't matter, God matters who's behind that, who's hand's behind that. Think about Joseph in the, in the prison there in Egypt after Potiphar's wife had lied about him trying to make a, an aggressive sexual, ah, ah, assault toward her or approach to her and, and, and, but he, every evidence in the Bible shows us that he doesn't look at the circumstances, he trusts God's up to something. Daniel in Babylon, Daniel in the lions' den, Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego in the fiery furnace, they didn't look at their circumstances, God's up to something. God's up to something. That's where you faith comes in without doubting that he's up to something, without doubting that he's faithful, no vacillating, no hesitating.

And then verses 9 through 11 he talks about how, ah, material things should not be our final, ah, ah, goal, should not be our, our aim anyway. Now let's see, verse 9, "And the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position." In other words, if God's given you the trial of humble situation, by the way, a lot of these folks were starving almost, and if you're in that situation, God's, the, the, the pastor James says consider that God's got you in a high position, he's doing something through this. It's a great way to look at life.

And then in verse 10, "the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away." The rich man is to keep reminding himself, "Well, I, I may have amassed a lot of stuff but, boom, I may die tomorrow and somebody else'll have it." As a matter of fact, some of you are not wise enough and you gonna leave your wealth to somebody who don't love God and that's, that's a travesty. What I'm saying is either in wealth or nothing, those things really don't matter in the long run, what's God doing in our lives, what's God teaching us, how's God growing us, are we viewing trials as God's up to something good and for his glory.

Now we get down to, ah, verse 12, and that's our fourth main point: the receiving of life. Now, you say the imparting of life and I'm not saying that spiritual life was not imparted to you at the, at the new birth but there's a way that it, it comes up in your life and you walk in this abundant life God's intended for you to have and to know and to walk in.

Look at verse 12, "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial," and that means, he, persevering under trial doesn't mean you just grit your teeth and get through it. A biblical persevering under, in the trial means you don't get bitter, you don't get angry, you don't get resentful, you don't get vengeful, you trust God's up to something. Joseph's brothers traveled to Egypt in the famine, they're starving to death, they meet the Prime Minister of Egypt, the second most powerful man on the earth, his name's Joseph. He was in a prison cell but God meant it for good and God's now exalted him to the right hand of the Pharaoh. He runs the whole kingdom. Joseph's brothers come in there, they don't recognize that it's Joseph; they had thrown him away, they had abandoned him, they left him for dead, so to speak. Actually, they did, it's not even so to speak, they did leave him for dead. God intervened, God protected him, and God's got him now all the way to that high position of being Prime Minister of Egypt. They didn't recognize him. You know how the series of events unfolds and finally Joseph is really good to his brothers, doesn't hold a grudge, is not vengeful, he's not bitter, he doesn't strike back. When it's all said and done, they, they basically say, "Why would you be this way? We threw you away. We left you for dead. We hated you." "Oh, but," Joseph said in the Jeff Noblit Amplified translation, "Oh, but God was up to something good. I had faith to see that this trial, God was doing something for my good and for his glory. You, my brothers, you meant it for evil. I'm not gonna let you off the hook, you need to get with God about that. You don't owe me anything, I'm not gonna hold a grudge. You meant it for evil, God meant it for good." Joseph in that illustration is a powerful picture of the abundant life of Christianity that Jesus promised. He said, "You might have a life and you might have it abundantly."

What's the abundant life? Among other things it means that you're even able by God's grace to grasp your trials in faith, not grow bitter, not grow angry, not grow resentful, not fall into anxiety but say, "God's using this for my good and His glory," and therefore you walk with a new joy, a new blessedness, a new peace. You have an abundant life no matter what the circumstances around you and James is writing and said that's where God wants to get you as a Christian. The world cannot in any way comprehend that kind of approach to life. As a matter of fact, you can't comprehend it, it's just that God saved you and gave you the capacity to walk in it.

He says here you'll persevere under trial. That doesn't mean you grit your teeth and go through it, it means you go through it looking at to God, looking to see what God's up to, that God's behind these things. And cheer up. God brings his children through trials because they're his. If you don't go through any, you're not his. Some of you prayed for me a lot. Well, you still do, I think, a lot but I mean early on in my Christian pilgrimage, in my ministry experience. You prayed for me a lot and you prayed God to bring troubles into my life because you wanted me to be a man of God, you wanted me to be faithful, you wanted me to be true to the Lord and true to the word, and God said, "Okay, this is

what I'm gonna have to do to him." But I'm happy about that. I'm thankful. I don't want to sign up again for some of that journey but I am thankful for what God has done.

Are you going through a trial in your marriage? Let me ask you something: have you gone to God and said, "God, give me wisdom, what are You showing me? What are You doing to me? What are You doing in me?" The preachers say it's not my sister, it's not my brother, it's me, O Lord. Me, O Lord. You persevere on through in faith. In faith. If you come through it with your teeth gritted and not having grown much at all, then you didn't persevere. You, that's not, that's not Christian perseverance. You persevere when you get like Joseph on the other side, you're not bitter, you're not angry, you're not resentful, you're not jealous. You love God.

He said in verse 12 there if you persevere under trial, after he has been approved. That means referring to the test way back there in verse 3, knowing that the testing of your faith, verse 3. He said you've gone through the test and you've been approved, you've successfully. It doesn't mean you didn't have any struggles, it didn't mean you didn't fall some, but overall you got on through it trusting the Lord was up to something for his, for your good and his glory.

Then he says you'll be given the crown of life here in verse 12. That's an interesting phrase, the crown of life. Now this refers not to the victor's crown, that's not what it's talking about. It refers not to a crown of royalty, but the crown of life. Actually it means this, the crown which is life. In other words, you'll have this new approach to life, you'll have this new way of living life, you'll have this new outlook on life because the faith factor has risen in you so that now that's you're steadfast, you're steadfast in it, that is, that is your natural default view of things now. Something comes, "God's up to something." And, and, yeah, we'll still struggle some. I'm not suggesting that you're just in this perfect plane of spirituality, but that's the new way you look at it, the new way you walk in it, the new way you perceive things and that's this abundant life and that is the crown, that's the crowning gem of Christian sanctification to get to this place of spiritual maturity. The crown which itself, or rather the life which is itself the crown. It means a full life, a meaningful life, a complete life, the abundant life that Jesus promised when he says, "If you believe in Me, you'll have life and you'll have it abundantly."

How are you viewing your trials? This is the process of maturity. How are you going through it? Are you, is there faith rising in your heart and are you walking in that faith to see that God's hand is behind all of this? So you have the trial which unleashes the faith God put there are conversion. As this becomes something of a pattern, the bloom, you come to full bloom in your faith where this is the default way you view things in life and view things, that's the maturity God's looking for. And then the crowning blessing is that as a life of new abundance. You have a new level of joy. You have a new level of peace, a new level of contentment, a new level of sweetness, a new level of kindness, a new level of, of generosity. Why? Because God's, you just know God's in control. You're just kind of free.

What a place to be and what a place to live. Now you do not want to resist the grace of God that he gives you during the trial which enables you to respond in faith. In one sense, grace is the power and the desire to do what's right so when you face a trial, God gives you the grace, that, that, that, that desire and that power to react right, to react properly, don't resist that. If you do, instead of coming out like a mature adult, you'll come through your trial like an immature, spoiled, selfish, irritable, disgruntled brat spiritually speaking. And that's why I've said to you before, you know, we have some of the sweetest senior adults in our church. Sweet folk. They're just sweet. I want to grow old sweet, don't you? Now, now, you could sit down with some of these sweet senior adults and listen to what they've gone through and you'd probably look at them and say, "Well, if I was you, I'd be mad." No, no, no, they have the crown of life, the crown which life is that crown, that is, and they're walking in that level of sweet abundant life. That's victory. That's glory.

We don't want to be like Jonah and, you know, when you look at Jonah, you, you get the impression that Jonah just went along with what God wanted him to do but I guess you'd go along too if a whale swallowed you and spit you back up on the beach. But we have trouble wondering if Jonah's heart was really in it because we get to the last chapter of Jonah and he's outside of Nineveh and he's pouting, hoping God would send judgment back on Nineveh. He's mad at the sun. He's mad at the wind. He's mad at the vine. He's mad at the worm. He's mad at God. You don't want to come through the trial that way.

He says one quick word here and I'm done. Look at verse 12, "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial," comes through it properly with the faith he's believing God's up to something good, he's growing in that abundant life factor inside of his own present life, then he says, "for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." To those who love him. When we love God, we endure our trials with sustaining faith and we come out mature and full of abundant life. Now think about it. This thing's come into my life. It's difficult but my God is Lord, my God is sovereign and I love him and I respect him and whatever he's doing, I want to cooperate with him. So I think the, the, the key factor is that phrase of do you love God? I love God because he's so wise. I love him because he's so wise. He knows what he's doing. He knows what he's accomplishing. So wise.

Well, God's process of maturity.