



OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

MORE2LIFE — BE PREPARED

OCTOBER 23-29, 2016

MAIN POINT

Trials, in the hands of God, are God's means of bringing His children to maturity.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. Discuss stories that have inspired you from outside the Christian faith ... things that have required physical or mental endurance.
2. Share an example of a time when you had to endure something and what that experience was like for you. What motivated you to persevere during that time?

Leader: Endurance can take many forms. We often think of endurance when it pertains to physical long distance events such as a marathon or a triathlon. Yet endurance is not merely physical, but also spiritual. James begins his letter urging endurance in trials. This is because suffering for the faith is assured, yet the trials our faith brings in part serves to mature us into Christ-likeness. There truly are rewards for our endurance.

DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 1:1-4.

3. According to James, we should have joy facing trials. Why would he say such a thing?
4. When you have experienced trials in your life, did you consider it all joy or become depressed and discouraged?

Leader: James advised those facing trials as a result of their faith to approach them with joy. When such trials are rightly faced, they are avenues to spiritual growth. When faced wrongly, they become temptations to evil. James did not say trials should make us happy or that we should look forward to them. Rather, James wrote with a deep

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realization that such pressures have a way of strengthening our character and faith. In other words, they develop perseverance.

5. Why is perseverance critical for our growth? What rewards come from it?

6. Share incidents in your life where you can see the truth of verses 3-5?

Leader: Perseverance or “endurance” is not the goal, but the means of reaching the goal. The goal is to become mature and complete. A physically mature adult who behaves at the level of a young child is not a mature adult. Likewise, a Christian who is mature in the knowledge of the Scriptures but whose behavior does not match his or her profession of faith is not a mature Christian. This maturity expresses itself most clearly in the form of love: love for God in the midst of our suffering, love for others in their suffering, and even love for those who might cause us suffering.

7. In what specific ways does suffering provide an opportunity for believers to experience and show love as they follow Christ’s example?

8. How can testing or trials actually help someone be more like Jesus?

Leader: Endurance is self-authenticating; we grow in endurance by staying the course of faith and not being swayed by trials. Proven character follows naturally from the believer who has remained faithful through trials. Enduring trials causes us to grow in faith and love, and such growth is a testimony of the gospel’s true power.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 12:9-21.

9. In what sense are all of the things Paul mentions an expression of love?

10. How might suffering help you mature in the areas that Paul mentions?

Leader: When we love others—even our enemies—with the sacrificial love of Christ, we display His humble, loving character. Such love is the pinnacle of Christian maturity brought about in part through trials and suffering, and brings glory to God as a result. Any one of the areas Paul mentions might come very easily one day, yet be a challenge for us the next. Yet we can be sure that God loves and is forming us into His people who model His love.

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

13. What has helped you see God's hand and feel His love during times of affliction in your life?

14. How can you share the faith and hope you have with someone you love this week?

PRAYER

As you close in prayer, give your group members the opportunity to pray silently for a few minutes. Challenge them to assess before God the example they set for others through their personal ministry or lack thereof. Encourage them to ask God to reveal relationships in which they are trying to please other people, rather than God Himself. Then as you close in prayer, pray that boldness and love would characterize your lives as you shine for Christ this week.

MEMORIZE

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. — Romans 12:12

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

JAMES 1:1-4

1:1. James, the half-brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church, referred to himself modestly as a servant, literally "slave." The term indicates full submission to God and the Lord Jesus Christ. James wrote to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations, a reference primarily to Jewish Christians scattered most likely because of persecution such as that following Stephen's death (see Acts 8:1b). Some interpreters extend the designation twelve tribes to include all the people of God in Christ.

1:2-3. James advised those facing trials to approach them with great joy. The Greek word translated "trials" can be used in a good or a bad sense. When trials are rightly faced they are avenues to spiritual growth; when faced wrongly they become temptations to evil. In this context James is using the term in a positive sense; trials are tests of faith. The noun translated "trials" is related to the word rendered "tempted" in verse 13, but there the word clearly refers in a negative sense to the temptation to sin. The Greek term translated "many" kinds literally means "variegated" or "multicolored."

1:4. Perseverance or "endurance" is not the goal, but the means of reaching the goal. The goal is to become mature and complete. A physically mature adult who behaves at the level of a young child is not a mature adult. Likewise, a Christian who is mature in the knowledge of the Scriptures but whose behavior does not match his or her profession of faith is not a mature Christian.

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ROMANS 12:9-21

12:9-16 Transformed thinking (1-2) is explained in a series of short exhortations. Paul has expounded divine love in this letter; now he shifts to the disciple's "faith working through love" (Gal 5:6). Christians are one family, and they should honor one another and display genuine affection. They should be fervent in spirit or let the Spirit kindle and motivate their service. They should also rejoice in the hope of Jesus' return; share what they have, and share the joys and sorrows of the church family. Keep praying—in the afflictions and persecutions of life, members of the body are to support one another. Pride is a great sin and humility is a great virtue. One shouldn't think too much of oneself. "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1Pe 5:5).

12:17-21 Christians often suffer hatred and persecution from society (1Pe 1:6; 2:11-12; 3:14-17; 4:12-16; 5:9). The normal response is to retaliate, but Christians are called to serve and minister God's grace to a lost and hostile world. Jesus is our model. As much as possible, we are to live at peace with everyone. God is the sovereign who can convert even a Saul who persecuted the church. God is the judge and the administrator of wrath. Our role is to display God's grace and love in our lives. God in Jesus conquered evil on the cross. We are not to let evil conquer us.