



Transformed Through Suffering

[James 1:1-18](#)

First in a 14-part series titled: *Wholly Transformed*

Pastor Matt Friend – January 9, 2022

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– OUTLINE –

Big Idea:

Suffering is the “heat” God uses to bring out the best “flavor” in Jesus’ followers.

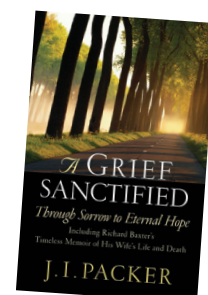
Through James, what does God call us to do when we suffer?

- #1 – See your trials as gifts from God that will eventually bring you eternal reward ([vv. 2-4, 12](#)).
- #2 – Pray that God will help you see His wisdom and goodness in your pain ([vv. 5-11](#)).
- #3 – When you’re weak and tired, be extra alert for sinful temptations ([vv. 13-16](#)).
- #4 – Keep your eyes on your Father ([v. 17](#)).
- #5 – Keep your eyes on your future ([v. 18](#)).

Recommended Book

[A Grief Sanctified: Through Sorrow to Eternal Hope](#)

By: J. I. Packer





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– NOTES –

Introduction:

Today we begin a 14-week series titled “Wholly Transformed,” studying verse-by-verse through the little book of James.

The book of James is a power-packed summary of everything Jesus is and everything Jesus taught. If you’ve been in the Church for a long time, you’ll notice many similarities in James with the book of [Proverbs](#), the book of [Job](#), and Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (in [Matthew 5-7](#)). It’s as if James took these three sources, through them into a kettle, and mixed them together under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. James’ goal is simple: *to wholly transform us into the image of Jesus*.

Building on that illustration... The image of a boiling pot or kettle of stew over an open fire helps me keep the book of James (and this sermon series) organized in my mind.

- Think of the book of James as the pot of stew. This isn’t just any stew; it’s “spiritual-transformation” stew made with 12 ingredients to transform our spiritual lives.
- This series is a 14-week series. After two introductory messages, each message will examine one of the 12 ingredients of spiritual formation throughout chapters 2-5.

This weekend and next we’ll deliver two introductory sermons from chapter 1.

- Next weekend, in vv. 19-27, God will call us to eat the stew. (“Don’t just look at it! Eat it! Enjoy it!”)
- Today’s message, from vv. 1-18, is all about the fire and heat needed to cook the stew. Just as heat brings out the best



flavor and brings all the ingredients together, suffering brings out the best flavor in God's people and brings together all other spiritual ingredients.

Big Idea:

Suffering is the “heat” God uses to bring out the best “flavor” in Jesus’ followers.

Big Idea Expanded:

We could restate the big idea in a number of ways...

- God uses trials and temptations to transform us into the image of Jesus.
- Suffering is the environment God uses to transform us more into the image of Jesus.
- Suffering is the fire under the kettle where the stew of spiritual discipleship is made.
- Suffering is the heat under the kettle where the stew of spiritual formation is made.
- To make strong disciples, God throws us in the Crockpot of suffering and turns up the heat.

Suffering is, indeed, the “heat” God uses to bring out the best “flavor” in Jesus’ followers.

What “flavor” does God want Christians to have in the world?

- In [Matthew 5](#), He calls us to be the salt of the earth.
- In [Ephesians 5](#), He calls us to be like Jesus who is a sweet flavor.
- In [Galatians 5](#), He calls us to taste like the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

The best “flavored” Christians love God, love each other, and love their neighbors.



Christian, God wasn't done with you the moment He saved you. No, He was just beginning. Jesus not only saves us; He transforms us. We'll be on this transformation journey for the rest of our lives!

Paul declared, "Be confident of this, he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" ([Philippians 1:6](#)). "It is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill His good purpose" ([Philippians 2:13](#)).

If you're here today (attending, watching, or listening) and you're not yet a Jesus-follower, I really hope you'll get in on this. You don't want to miss out on the gospel, the good news! God creates, sin breaks, and Jesus saves. Jesus died on the cross for our sin, He was buried, and He arose from the grave to save you. Believe on the Lord Jesus today and be baptized! (Register [here](#) for our next baptism service.)

Christian friend, the gospel doesn't end there. Again, Jesus not only saves; He also transforms and restores!

So, how does God transform us? We'll see throughout this series that God uses 12 ingredients to transform us, including the Bible and prayer. However, before we examine those ingredients, James will teach us an important lesson from 1:1-18: *suffering is the tool God uses to expedite our spiritual transformation*. Like fire under a tasty stew, suffering is what brings all the ingredients together and pulls out the best flavor.

Suffering is the "heat" God uses to bring out the best "flavor" in Jesus' followers.

This intro chapter on suffering would've encouraged first-century Christians. They were suffering all sorts of persecution and poverty. And I'm convinced these truths will encourage us.

How have your last two years been? Did you know 2020 was going to be a trilogy? The last two years have been hard for everybody... except dogs. Dogs are living their best lives. They've loved every



minute of the quarantine. Cats, not so much. 😊

In full disclosure, the last two years were hard for Sarah and me (surgeries, my sister's death, catching Covid, watching our oldest daughter leave for college). However, our suffering is nothing compared to some within our Church family.

What can I say to those who are suffering? What can I say to you? In the heat of the moment, I probably won't say much of anything, nor will our pastors. We just want to be there for you.

However, I feel really burdened to prepare you now before the next trial comes. Please listen! Don't ignore this message like you ignore the flight attendant before a flight. Turbulence will come! Thankfully, we're about to discover the solution together. The Bible speaks to this. Let's dive in to our text.

Who wrote these words?

[James 1:1](#) tells us it was himself.

- In the New Testament, there were several leaders named James, including two of the original 12 disciples ([Mark 3:16-19](#)).
- According to [Mark 6:3](#), this James is the oldest half-brother of Jesus. (Mary was his mother, but he wasn't virgin-conceived like Jesus was. Joseph was James' birth father.)
- From what we can tell, James didn't initially believe in Jesus as God. He knew Jesus was a good kid, a good teen, and a good man, but he evidently thought Jesus was a little crazy ([John 7:5](#)).
- However, something eventually changed James' heart. What was it? Jesus' resurrection! [1 Corinthians 15:7](#) says that Jesus made a special appearance to James after His resurrection, and James believed! It's amazing what a good resurrection can force you to believe!
- You can read more about James' story in [Acts 12](#) & [15](#) and [Galatians 1-2](#).



- In short, James became the Lead Pastor of the Jerusalem church and pastored there for nearly 30 years. He loved his congregation and the loved him.
- As we study through this book, you outdoor lovers will love James. He uses at least 30 references to nature, including waves of the sea, rain, animals, birds, reptiles, and sea creatures. He would've fit in well in West Virginia.
- Sadly, James was martyred in A.D. 62. Historians tell us that he was thrown off the top of the temple. When his enemies found him still alive, they beat and stoned him to death. James was no stranger to suffering, nor was his congregation.

Through James, what does God call us to do when we suffer?

#1 – See your trials as gifts from God that will eventually bring you eternal reward ([vv. 2-4, 12](#)).

James connects right away with his first-century Christian readers by admitting that life is hard. (He would be martyred sometime after writing this letter.) He reminds them and us that God uses trials in our life to produce endurance and to make us more mature.

“Consider it pure joy” = *Consider* is a black-and-white accountant’s term; it’s very matter of fact. It could also be translated “count,” “calculate,” or “evaluate.”

James isn’t telling us to discount our visceral emotions when we suffer, for God has created us to be emotional beings. ([Ecclesiastes 3](#) tells us there is a time to laugh and a time to cry. In [John 11:35](#), we see that “Jesus wept” when His close friend Lazarus died.) Please don’t misinterpret James 1:2 as a stoic. Don’t feel like you have to put on a happy face and pretend that everything’s okay.

However, even in your tears and grief, God calls you to see, consider, and evaluate your trials with a heavenly perspective. Take joy in the fact that God is all-wise, all-good, and is working out a plan for your eternal reward.



How can we develop such an attitude? By believing what James is about to say. Let's keep reading.

“Whenever” = Trials and suffering aren't an *if/maybe* situation. They are certain. As a Jesus-follower, you will face troubles, difficulties, and problems “of many kinds.” Anything could be included here: people dying, bad news at the doctor, financial hardship, job loss, getting depressed or anxious, getting your heart broken, your kid wilding-out on you, your job crushing you, someone betraying you, and more. The word “trials” here is plural.

So, what truth do we need in order to be thankful and joyful in our trials? Verse 3 tells us that the testing (literally, the “heating up”) of our faith produces perseverance. What's perseverance? Some translate it “steadfastness.” A more common word in our vernacular is “endurance.” James promises that God will use the trials of your life to increase your endurance.

This word for *perseverance* or *endurance* comes from a farming society. It pictures an ox “bearing under” the weight of a yoke and accepting that it's his job to plow the garden.

Four hundred years ago, when the King James Version of the Bible was translated, they chose the word “patience.” This word worked back then, for the English-speaking world had a deeper understanding of patience; however, since then, the word *patience* has evolved (or devolved). Unfortunately, patience doesn't mean today what it did 400 years ago, which is why I think the word *perseverance* or *endurance* serves us better.

In our modern English...

- Patience refers to hunkering down and riding out a snowstorm. Endurance, however, provides the better idea of standing up, leaning in, placing one foot in front of the other, and making progress through the storm even when it's difficult.
- Patience refers to sitting on a beach while the waves crash



on you. Endurance, however, supplies the better idea of stand-ing up, jumping in, and training for your next triathlon... even when it's difficult.

- Perseverance and endurance are personified as Frodo and Sam (in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy) continue on their way to Mordor, painfully putting one Hobbit foot in front of the other, even when they would have preferred to hide in the Shire.

The New Testament speaks much about God working this trait of perseverance in us: [Luke 8:15](#); [2 Thessalonians 1:4](#); [Revelation 2:2; 13:10](#).

“Steadfast Christians are increasingly undaunted by tribulation ([Romans 12:12](#)). They feel the sin that clings so closely, and do not hesitate to cast it aside ([Hebrews 12:1](#)). They walk through the wilderness of affliction without fainting ([2 Corinthians 1:6](#)); they groan for redemption without grumbling ([Romans 8:25](#)); they suffer scorn without stumbling ([Matthew 10:22](#)). Their eyes tell the story of battles won, temptations defeated, and the crown of glory awaiting ([James 1:12](#)). They are the oaks of righteousness among us, weathered trunks who brave the raging wind ([Romans 5:3-4](#)). They are the saints in whose faces, set like flint toward glory, we sometimes catch a glimmer of Christ.” –Scott Hubbard

“Often in suffering, we have eyes only for what our trials take away from us. We watch, speechless, as the fire swallows up so much we held dear. But underneath the ashes, our trials are producing something. ‘Testing...produces steadfastness’ ([James 1:2-4](#)). If we will trust God and wait patiently, our trials will give us far more than they take away. –Scott Hubbard

Faith is like muscle tissue: if you stress it to the limit, it gets stronger, not weaker. That's what James means here. When your faith is threatened and tested and stretched to the breaking point, the result is greater capacity to endure.

We tend to think that our faith endures *in spite* of our trials, but



James says that it's *because* of trials—the regular exercising of our faith—that our faith endures. He calls it perseverance.

Paul understood this, “We do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead” ([2 Corinthians 1:8–9](#)).

Malcolm Muggeridge understood this, “Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful, with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my seventy-five years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness, whether pursued or attained.”

Think with me: How did you mature physically? To be very specific, how did you learn to walk? Through lots of bumps and bruises along the way. How did you mature mentally or emotionally? The same way—through lots of bumps and bruises along the way.

What's the difference between a rookie star athlete and a veteran star athlete? Both are talented, but the veteran has more experience, is more mature (think Tom Brady and Payton Manning) because they've been around the block a few more times. Maturity is like the Farmers Insurance commercials, “We know a thing or two because we've seen a thing or two.”

So why do we think maturity in the Christian life is any different? Spiritual formation isn't “holy pixie dust.” Growth comes through bumps and bruises. It comes through the dark night of the soul.

According to James, what else do trials produce in our lives? They have a “finishing effect” on our souls, just like a wood-worker finishes her piece of furniture or a concrete worker smooths out his concrete.



Trials make us “mature and complete, lacking nothing” (v. 4).

We’ll see throughout this series that James loves the word “mature.” He uses some form of it seven times in his short book. It’s why Warren Wiersbe titled his book on James, “Be mature.”

The word mature refers to wholeness, flourishing, a well-balanced life, or a completely integrated life. James understands us! From his perspective (which is the Holy Spirit’s perspective), you and I are not naturally whole, flourishing, well-balanced, and integrated people. No, in some form or fashion, we are fractured people with gaping inconsistencies in our character. Every one of us. Yes, this means you. Yes, this means me.

Thankfully, though, God is on a mission to transform us! At the moment of our salvation, He begins to—slowly, over time—make us more whole people, filling the gaps of our lives, and putting what’s broken back together. While we may not be happy about our trials, we can be joyful knowing that God is making us better through them.

“Not lacking anything” = The idea here is of judgment day. One day every person is going to stand before Almighty God, and God’s goal from now until then is to prepare you for that day.

We don’t think like that much, do we? We think the goal of life is to be successful, to have a nice job, to get a raise, to achieve a standing in the world, to attain a certain goal, or to have a certain kind of family. Trials shake us up and remind us of what’s really important.

Speaking of judgment day, let’s skip ahead to verse 12...

“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.” –James 1:12

What happens if we persevere under trial? What happens if we don’t hit the eject button or try to soothe our pain with sin? What



happens if we fixate on God's love for us and allow our love for God to tether us to the rest of life? *We will receive a crown of life!* Whether literal or figurative, this is some kind of eternal reward beyond our wildest dreams.

You see, your suffering is not ultimately a thief that has stolen your best years, nor a murderer who killed your dearest dreams, nor a madman who wielded his weapon at random. Your suffering, all this time, has been God's servant, sent to make you steadfast and bring you eternal reward.

Is it okay to do right for the sake of eternal reward? Some Christians have difficulty with rewards, objecting that our obedience to Christ should be pure, unmotivated by any reward. I certainly agree that we don't serve Christ with a "what's in it for me?" attitude. Nevertheless, the New Testament talks much about reward. Whatever the rewards are, they are a kind that only a true Christian will be able to appreciate.

Paul declared, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

In 1:2-4, James just gave us a 4-step progression:

*Trials of our faith → Perseverance →
Mature, whole, flourishing life → Eternal reward*

#2 – Pray that God will help you see His wisdom and goodness in your pain ([vv. 5-11](#)).

It's important for us to see these verses still in the context of suffering. They are sandwiched between verses 2-4 and verse 12 which are all about suffering. James hasn't been distracted. He's not like the proverbial dog chasing a squirrel. He hasn't left the



topic of suffering, but is still talking about suffering. Therefore, we must interpret these verses in light of suffering.

What's going on in the background? James' church members, both the ones living in Jerusalem and the ones scattered abroad are facing intense suffering. They are struggling with the wisdom behind God allowing them to suffer. They are wondering if it's okay to ask God "Why?"

So, I'll ask you: Do you think it's okay to ask God "Why?"...Jesus did. On the cross He prayed, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

James is telling us here that we should ask God to help us see His purposes in our pain. James isn't concerned with God giving us a specific reason for our pain. Sometimes God does and sometimes He doesn't. What's more important is that we pray for God's help to understand everything we just talked about: that God is wise, that He is good, and that He is preparing a reward that will blow our minds!

Has your suffering caused you to feel like James describes here? Do you feel restless like the ocean, never at peace and constantly vacillating back and forth with the tide? Do you feel like the diagnosis on the movie, *The Last Samurai*, that you have "Too many minds"? James essentially says, "Pray that God will help you see His wisdom and goodness in your pain." Ask God to help you see your hardship with eternal perspective.

Perhaps a prayer like the one in [Mark 9:24-27](#) would be a good place to start. "Lord I believe. Help my unbelief." According to James, God is exceedingly generous and wants to answer this prayer 100% of the time.

Suffering is also the context of verses 9-11...

Much of their suffering involved intense poverty. If you were a Jew living in Jerusalem at this time, to become a Christian was to be



hated by your Jewish family. For thousands, this meant losing your job, having your property seized, not being able to buy, sell, and trade at the Jewish market. However, there were other rich people in the church as well. We know from Scripture and from history that many Roman government officials, centurions, and aristocrats believed the gospel. So, in a typical first-century church service you might have both kinds of people mixed throughout the congregation, sitting side by side.

Still in the context of suffering, James is saying, “If you’re poor, thank God for your suffering. It’s going to bring eternal reward. If you’re rich, don’t put your trust in riches which will eventually wither like the flowers in the hot sun. Rather, put your trust in God, and thank him for any suffering he brings into your life as well, whether it’s money-related suffering or not.”

#3 – When you’re weak and tired, be extra-alert for sinful temptations ([vv. 13-16](#)).

I am much more open to temptation when I’m physically, emotionally, or even spiritually exhausted. Have you ever noticed that in your life as well?

Still in the context of suffering, James takes a moment ([in vv. 13-16](#)) to warn his congregation and to warn us to be on the lookout for sinful temptations.

There’s an important distinction we must make here:

- God does test his children with trials in order to strengthen our character ([Genesis 22](#); [Exodus 16:4](#); [2 Chronicles 32:31](#); [John 6:5-6](#); [Hebrews 11:17](#); [1 Peter 4:12-17](#)).
- However, God does not entice his children with sinful desires. God tests us but he does not tempt us.

Just as we saw a 4-step progression earlier pertaining to blessing, James gives us another 4-step progression here pertaining to sinful temptation:



Natural human desire (like being hungry, wanting your paycheck, desiring sex) → Evil desire (when natural desire crosses into sinful desire: Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:5) → Growing participation in sin → Death

So, in verse 16, he warns us, “Don’t be deceived by the temptations coming your way.

#4 – Keep your eyes on your Father (v. 17).

Have you ever seen verse 17 printed on a pretty painting, maybe with flowers or stars? Maybe you’ve seen this verse on a lace doily or cross-stitched in vivid colors? That’s totally okay, in a general sense. It’s true that everything in life is a gift from God: good food, good friends, a spouse, children, your job, any amount of money in your pocket, your ability to taste, smell, see, and hear. These are common grace gifts from God.

However, there’s a deeper meaning to verse 17 in this context. Again, what’s the context of James chapter 1? *Suffering!* James is reminding us that even our trials, our suffering, and our trouble are gifts from God! Just as fire or heat is a good gift to a tasty stew, so trials are a good gift to the saints. God gives his people suffering in order to make us whole.

James 1:17 is teaching the exact same truth as Romans 8:28, “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

This is the kind of God you need when you’re walking through trials. Even when trials overtake you, you are still the apple of His eye

([Deuteronomy 32:10](#)). Even when the suffering feels meaningless, you are still wrapped in His good and perfect will ([Ephesians 1:11](#)). Even when the flames rise higher, you are still hidden safely in His hands ([Isaiah 43:2](#)). The world changes, the universe changes, culture changes, and your situations change... Yet God never changes! He’s always there. Always rewarding. Always comforting.



#5 – Keep your eyes on your future (v. [18](#)).

This verse lumps “Jesus saves,” “Jesus transforms,” and “God restores” into one thought. It’s important that we remember that Jesus not only saves and transforms; He also promises to one day restore all things. This verse reminds us that the New Heavens and New Earth are going to be phenomenal; however, God has already started the transformation and restoration process in every believer.

“Firstfruits” was originally an Old Testament expression referring to the first and best harvest crops, which God expected as an offering ([Exodus 23:19](#); [Leviticus 23:9-14](#); [Deuteronomy 26:1-19](#)). Giving God that initial crop was an act of faith that He would fulfill His promise of a full harvest to come ([Proverbs 3:9-10](#)). In the same way, Christians are the first evidence of God’s new creation that is to come ([2 Peter 3:10-13](#)) and enjoy presently in their new life a foretaste of future glory ([Romans 8:18-24](#); [1 Corinthians 15:20-23](#); [Revelation 21-22](#)).

Paul wrote, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved” (Romans 8:18-24).

John wrote, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.’ He



will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new'" (Revelation 21:1-5).

There's coming a day when Jesus will return and transform the world. It's going to be glorious! Is there any way we can catch a glimpse of that transformation now? Absolutely! In the lives of Christians when we are wholly and progressively transformed.

- When you meet a Christian who is the salt of the earth, you're getting a glimpse of the New Heavens and New Earth.
- When you meet a Christian who is loving, you're getting a glimpse of the New Heavens and New Earth.
- When you meet a Christian who is joyful, you're getting a glimpse of the New Heavens and New Earth.
- When you meet a Christian who is peaceful, you're getting a glimpse of the New Heavens and New Earth.
- When you meet a Christian who is patient, you're getting a glimpse of the New Heavens and New Earth.
- When you meet a Christian who is gentle, you're getting a glimpse of the New Heavens and New Earth.
- When you meet a Christian who is good, you're getting a glimpse of the New Heavens and New Earth.
- When you meet a Christian who is meek, you're getting a glimpse of the New Heavens and New Earth.
- When you meet a Christian who is disciplined, you're getting a glimpse of the New Heavens and New Earth.

Why do these 5 things? Because...

Suffering is the "heat" God uses to bring out the best "flavor" in Jesus' followers.