

“Here Comes Trouble” // James 1:1–8 // The Book of James: *The Gospel from the Outside In*, #1z¹

Introduction

Well, I hope you had a great 4th of July. For some of my friends, this is their favorite holiday of the year... On Tuesday morning one greeted me with a **meme** from that great theologian Ron Swanson, saying, “History began on July 4th, 1776. Everything before that was a mistake.”

That’s not entirely true, which brings us to the Bible--so take out your Bibles if you have them--but Happy July 4th everybody.

We start a new series this weekend... Through the book of James. So, open your Bibles there, if you will... There are 66 books in the Bible; James is the 59th, so that tells you where it’s at in your Bible.

Let’s pray... (In Psalm 34, David prayed, “Let the afflicted hear and be glad...” I pray that you will fulfill that prayer right here, right now, today...)

Before we dive in, Let’s talk for a minute about James, the person, because that might help you appreciate the approach of this book.

¹ Works Consulted: Sam Allberry, *James For You: Showing You How Real Faith Looks in Real Life*, “God’s Word For You” series, The Good Book Company; Tim Mackie, The Bible Project, “[Book of James Summary](#),” December 6, 2016; ESV Study Bible notes; Nancy Guthrie and Dan Doriani, “[The Book of James](#),” discussion was posted by The Gospel Coalition on August 20, 2015; Allen Parr, “Three Tests of our Spiritual Health,” sermon posted by ‘The Beast’ by Allen Parr on Nov 24, 2017; Kaci Nicole, “[Bible Study With Me | James 1](#),” study posted by Kaci Nicole on March 20, 2020; Russell Moore, *Tempted and Tried*. Tyler Staton, *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools*. Tim Keller, *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*. “Study of James,” Paige Benton Brown. And others as noted throughout.

- **James was the half-brother of Jesus--I say half-brother** because they shared Mary as a mother, but Jesus’ father was God, of course, since he was immaculately conceived, and for Mary’s other children Joseph would have been the father.
- **John 7:5 tells us that when Jesus began his ministry**, James--along with Jesus’ other brothers, did not believe in him.
 - That was probably the result of a **jealousy mixed with a little skepticism**: I mean, how could the guy who snored in the bunk next to me and smelled weird in the morning just like the other boys be the God who created the universe?
 - **But, then James met the resurrected Jesus**--Paul tells us in 1 Cor 15--and he came not only to believe in Jesus and worship him as God, he also became the leader of the early church in Jerusalem and one of its first martyrs.
 - BTW, **James’ conversion is one of the reasons I find the evidence for Jesus’ claims so compelling**. Think about it: How many of you had an older brother? What would it take for you to start regarding your older brother as God and worship him? (Satan, you say, maybe, but not God.) James had every reason not to believe in Jesus, but the Resurrection changed his mind.
- **James’ book takes the practical wisdom of Jesus and codifies it into punchy, application-ready, bite-sized chunks**. It is straightforward and in your face. I love it. It’s like the New Testament’s book of Proverbs.

Here’s how it begins:

1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.

Note: The immediate audience for this book is Jewish Christians--the twelve tribes who had been currently scattered around the world--driven out of their homeland, living in unfamiliar and often hostile territory. But James intends this as a double-entendre.

Christians, the true Israel, have also been separated from their homeland, heaven, and now live in hostile territory. So James is not just thinking about Jewish Christians but all Christians.

So, his first admonition, vs 2, begins like this: **2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.**

Count it all joy when you go through trials--trials like being separated from your homeland (or any kind of trial, whether it is persecution or pain and relational frustration and marriage tension or career disappointment or wayward kids or whatever--count it all joy, because these trials are tests, and these tests produce good things in you.

How many of you like tests? You are the kind of person who, in high school or college, just loved exam day? Anyone? There's always a few weirdos. You were the ones that threw off the curve (and we all hated you). Most of us didn't.

I heard about one sophomore in college who was in an ornithology class (Do you know what 'ornithology' is? The study of birds), who sweated all semester in anticipation of the notoriously difficult final exam.

Having made what he regarded to be the "ultimate effort" in preparation for the exam--he stayed up all night memorizing bird facts--he was stunned when he walked into the classroom to take the test, because there was no test paper, no multiple choice questions, no essay prompts, just a single ppt screen of 25 different pairs of bird legs, with the instruction, "Identify these birds by their feet."

"This is insane," the student protested. "I didn't prepare for this."

"Well, give it your best shot," said the professor. "Because this is your final exam, and it counts for half of your grade."

"This is not fair. I won't do it!" the frustrated student said. "I'm walking out."

The professor said, "If you walk out, then you fail the final!"

"Go ahead and fail me," the boy said, heading for the door.

"Fine. You have failed. Tell me your name, young man," the professor demanded. **At which point the boy pulled up his pant legs** and said, "You tell me, professor! You tell me!"

Tests reveal weak spots in our knowledge. But tests can also be opportunities to deepen our knowledge, to fill in the gaps of our understanding.

And that's what trials and difficulties do for us, James says. They reveal the weak spots in our faith and give us opportunities to grow in it. **"Affliction,"** Tim Keller says, **"is how we move from abstract knowledge of God to a personal encounter with him."** I would dare say that there are many of you who have a great deal of facts in your head about God, but they have never become personal, relational encounters. And the reason for that is you have never brought God with you into suffering.

On the whole, the American church does a pretty poor job preparing us for trials. Most of us assume that life is supposed to be good, and if life is not good, something is wrong.

But that's not been the assumption for most of human history. In previous generations, people expected life to be short, and painful, and brutish. Previous generations had no problem believing in an afterlife because this life was so hard.

But our culture--Western culture, with all its conveniences and prosperity and technologies--tells us that life should be easy and filled

with happiness and zen and fulfillment, and so we're shocked when life goes wrong. Which it always does. Despite all our technology and our best practices, life is still filled with heartache and disappointment and broken relationships. And that happens to the richest and poorest alike. Some of you are there now.

Bottom line: we probably need this instruction by James even more than the original audience did.

In the next 6 verses, James gives us **3 commands** to heed when we go through a trial.

The commands are about **Perspective, Patience and Prayer**

1. Perspective

In vs. 2 he tells us to **"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds..."**

- Joy is not what I typically feel in a trial. Typically, I feel anger, especially if my suffering feels unjust. What did I do to deserve this? Why was this person able to get away with that? God, where are you?
- Or, I feel despair--Are things ever going to change? Will the pain ever go away? Will this relationship ever heal? Maybe this weekend you are asking, "When will my big break come? Will these fertility treatments ever work? When am I going to find my soulmate?"

And what feels the hardest in these trials is when heaven seems silent. You pray, and it's like nothing changes. In you, or the situation. Am I talking to somebody out there? It would be one thing if I got a "no" to my request. That might be disappointing, but at least I knew someone up there was listening. But silence feels like God is unmoved and unconcerned, like he's ignoring me--if he's even there.

- To quote pastor Tyler Staton, whose book *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools* has a great chapter on the silence of God: "Silence makes me feel like the only One with the power to stop the disease that is ravaging my mother from the inside out can't be bothered. Or the only One with the power to open my stubborn womb is too distracted to care. Or the One I've held my desire for companionship in front of for decades yawns in the face of my loneliness."
- But James says to 'count it joy,' because God is using the test to produce steadfastness in us.
- He's testing whether or not you actually trust God. Whether or not you'll lean on God's character even when you're surrounded by chaos and confusion--or silence.
- I will tell you from experience that this is **one of the hardest things to do** in the Christian life. It's what I've called **trusting God in the "blank spaces"** of your life. Those spaces in your life when it feels like God is absent.
 - I take the term from the life of David... In 1 Samuel 16:13, Samuel has anointed David to be the next King of Israel, and as the oil of anointing is still wet on David's head, Samuel gets up and leaves.
 - And then, the narrative on David's life stops, and there's a blank space.
 - Scholars say the narrative on David's life doesn't pick up again for about 7 years. All that is represented by this little blank space in your Bibles.
 - I have to ask: What were those 7 years like? What's it like to be anointed King of Israel but then go back to the pasture for 7 years? David didn't run down to the palace to start trying on robes; he didn't go on a speaking tour to explain his vision for Israel. He went back to the pasture where he followed sheep around... *for 7 yrs*. Imagine the boredom; the tedium, the confusion: "God, I thought you wanted me to be King." These 7 yrs were a blank space where God's writing in David's life seemed to *stop*.

- And yet, we learn later that during that season was when God was actually doing some of his best writing in David. It was there, in the pasture, that David developed the courage and skill with the slingshot to fight Goliath. It was there he learned the themes that would one day emerge as Psalm 23. This was David's time of trial, and it was where God produced 'steadfastness' in David, which he couldn't have learned any other way.
- David, as we know him, became David in that little blank space in your Bibles between 1 Samuel 16 vv 13 and 14.
- **Change your perspective: "Count it joy"**--because there is a good and sovereign God that is at work in you in the trial. **This is important:** *Joy is not a feeling that overcomes you.* Many people are waiting on a feeling of God giddiness and Holy Ghost Hallelujahs to take them over. That's likely not going to happen. Joy is a byproduct of believing the promises of God in the midst of great pain. You may *FEEL* the same, but in the promises of God your heart and mind elevate to a peace and joy above your feelings. You are overcoming the world. God has called you not to a joy in the world, but to a joy that overcomes the world.

Which leads to the second command:

2. Patience

4 And ***let steadfastness have its full effect***, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- Listen: Trials don't *automatically* produce good in you. It was Nietzsche who said, "What doesn't kill me, makes me stronger." He was not a Christian, and that statement is not true. There are a lot of things that do not kill you that make you weaker and much worse as a person. Trials do not automatically produce good in you. For many, unexplained pain produces bitterness and doubt and despair.

- You have to choose whether you are going to trust and hold onto God's character and let him work his good in you. But that transformation is not automatic.
- Listen: **As Charles Spurgeon** used to say, "Times of doubt are like a foot poised to go forwards or backwards in faith. This trial can indeed take you further in with God; but it can also drive you backwards into unbelief."
- I'm reminded of the story of the little bird **story of the little bird flying south** for the winter. But he got a **late start**, so he got caught in a snowstorm. The storm was so bad that ice formed on his wings and he couldn't even fly. He went down for a crash landing, and couldn't get back up. He thought, "Great. Now I'm going to freeze to death." But then suddenly a cow came and... took a dump on him. At first, the little bird thought things had gone from bad to worse, but then he realized that the manure has warmed his wings and was thawing them. And he got so excited that he started to **chirp and sing**. But **this attracted a cat**; who comes along and ate him. **And the lessons from this great little parable are 3: Lesson 1: Not everyone who drops manure on you is your enemy. Lesson 2: Not everyone who digs you out is your friend. Lesson 3: When you're in manure, sometimes it's helpful to keep your little chirper shut...** and see what God is up to.²
- Which is why we have this command: *Let steadfastness have its full effect.* Let God do his work.

There's times you just need to be still. You don't need an answer. You won't get an answer. You have to just rest in the character of your heavenly Father.

I think about Paul and Silas in Acts 16. Unjustly imprisoned; publicly whipped and humiliated. Sitting in the darkness of a prison cell, their lacerated backs leaning up against that cold, filthy dungeon wall, at midnight. And what do they start doing? They start singing out their worship. What were they singing? We don't know, exactly... but I'm

² Craig Groeschel, "The Making of a Man of God," 1 Kings 17

sure it was something about God's character and his faithfulness. There they are--open wounds, unjustly imprisoned, and they're singing, "God is so good! He's so good, he's so good to me." And the jailor can't believe it. "How is this happening?" And then God sends an earthquake and the prison walls fall down and their chains fall off and the jailor falls on his knees before them and says, "What must I do to be saved?"

That earthquake was just a physical manifestation of the soul quake that Paul and Silas had gone through in trusting in the good character of God even in the midst of darkness. Their prison walls falling were one thing; more importantly were the walls that kept them from leaning into the good character of God in the midst of pain and darkness.

- Listen: every great Bible hero had a moment where they had to choose: Am I going to trust in the good character of God--the character I see demonstrated in the cross and resurrection--or am I going to let this chaos push me into disbelief and despair?
- Are you going to anchor your soul in God's character and let God do his work, and let steadfastness have its full effect? Only then will you be (vs 4) "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."
 - Did you get that? ONLY through perseverance in suffering can you be perfect and complete. We have a lot of people here who sign up here for Bible studies, because they want to know God better, but if we had a way you could sign up for suffering, I'm guessing nobody would sign up for that. James says, "There are dimensions of God that you will only know from the heart when you suffer."
 - There is a part of Christian maturity that can only come through pain, darkness, and unanswered questions.
 - It's like **Martin Luther** said: 3 things make a great Christian: Prayer, Bible Study, and Suffering.
 - **None of us want pain.** The question is do you want to know God more than you want to avoid pain. If so, then you'll "count

it joy" when you go through trials and patiently "let steadfastness have its full effect."

Which leads to the 3rd command:

3. Prayer

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. **Good news!** God will help you! He will give you the wisdom, the direction, the insight, and whatever other resources your soul needs for this to make you better.

But, there's a condition: 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

(Now, let's be clear: When James says, "with no doubting," he doesn't mean you never have questions, and you live at all times with absolute certainty about what God is doing and feelings of peace. Every Christian I know struggles at times with doubts and confusion.

What James is saying is that as you go through trials, you can't hedge your bets. The word "doubt" is literally **di-psychos**—(di) two (psychos) minds. Your loyalties are divided.

- **On Sunday** you are praying to God asking him to fix your problems, but on Monday, you take matters into your own hands.
- **On Sunday, you say, "God, I need you to work in my marriage."** But on Monday, you are punishing your spouse or trying to manipulate them or feeling justified in being unfaithful to them.
- **On Sunday, you say, "God, I need you to work in my finances" but on Monday you switch to plan-B** which is to cheat on your taxes or overcharge your customers or stop giving your tithe. You

are hedging your bets. You are asking God to work, but you are not really leaning all your confidence on him.

Tony Evans says that many of us have a mutual-fund approach to God, and here's what he means by that: **If you've invested in the stock market**, you know a mutual fund is a way of spreading out your investment risk. Instead of putting all your money into one company, a mutual fund spreads your investment out over 100's of companies, so if one fails, you make it up with the others.

That's fine as an investment strategy, but it won't work in our relationship to God. If you are going to receive any help from God, you have to lean all your confidence in him and do things his way. You say, "God is not helping me in my situation." Well, have you leaned all your hope into him? If not, "that person should not suppose that he will receive *anything* from the Lord." You are DI-PSYCHOS. With God, it's full trust or it's nothing.

Now, when I say leaning all your weight on God, do I mean that you are doing nothing at all to fix your problem? Like--if you pray for healing, then don't go to the doctor? No, God expects us to be active in solving our problems--but there is a way of being active that is still dependent on God--and it shows up in two ways--you leave the ultimate outcome of the situation to God, and you refuse to step outside of God's will in getting things done.

James says, "*It's only when you lean all your confidence onto him that you will get any help from him.*"

Here's a word picture I've used over the years to illustrate this (and I was looking back through my notes and haven't told it in a while): When I was in high school, some friends of mine and I got into rock climbing and rappelling. Both rock climbing and rappelling both involve scaling a rock face and ropes--but with rock climbing, you are moving up and down the mountain by means of your arms and legs

and the rope acts as your safety line. In rappelling, you have transferred all of your weight to the rope. Well, the first time this little group of 4 friends of mine and I decided to go rappelling, one of the guys claimed he knew how to do it. (Looking back, he had no idea what he was doing and it's a genuine NT miracle that I'm standing here today. But at 16 years old, your safety standards aren't as high). At any rate, when we got up to the top of this rock face he asked for a volunteer for who wanted to go first. That should have been my first clue that he didn't know what he was doing--he didn't want to go first. Somehow I got nominated to go first, and I hooked in, and I remember that incredible moment when he told me to lean back over the edge of this rock face. It felt like the most unnatural thing in the world. You are leaning backwards into what feels like a headlong plunge into certain death. Before leaning my weight back, I stood there for a solid minute asking myself why I was doing this. I prayed and asked Jesus to come into my heart again; I did this (cross) just in case those guys were right. My friends were all cheering me on. I'm quite confident that if my manhood had not been on the line, there's no way I would have done it. But it was, and so I leaned back. And the rope held me. My 'expert' friend looked relieved. Then I summoned all my courage and leaped with all my might and moved about two inches down. But then I did it again with a bigger jump, and soon enough I was at the bottom.

My best friend at the time was second in line, and he was even more scared of heights than I was. From 75 feet below, I could see him shaking. Now, one thing about my best friend--he was better looking, more athletic, and more popular with the girls. So I hated him. But he was my best friend. And so it was with great delight that I saw how scared he was. And he must have stood there for 10 minutes trying to work up the courage to lean back. After about 10 minutes, he held the rope tight, stretched one foot back, then another... and began to shimmy down the face of the rock.

Was he rappelling? No. He was climbing down the rock using the rope as a safety line, and there's a world of difference between rappelling and using a rope as a safety line. To really rappel you have to put all your trust in the rope.

Well, here's the thing: There was **a point in this rock wall where the rock face quit going like this** and started to go like this. And nobody is strong enough to climb upside down. So, when my friend got to that point, he hovered a few minutes in indecision, and then climbed back up.

That vertex represents a trial in your life. And in that trial it's revealed whether you are really trusting God with your life, leaning all your weight on him, or whether you are using him as a safety net while you hedge your bets with other things.

James says that the only kind of faith that will get you through a severe trial--the only kind of faith that gets heaven's help--is the faith that leans all of its weight on God.

Is that what you are doing?

Listen, Jesus repeatedly warned that there will be times where it feels like God isn't responding to our prayers. You think, "Well that is just me. I bet J.D. doesn't feel this way." No, Jesus told a parable because we all feel this way. **Luke 18:1** says that, "And Jesus told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart." He knew sometimes we would pray and we would lose heart because it feels like nothing is happening. And then the story he told was about a woman who wanted justice from this old, crooked, uncaring judge but she kept asking and asking and through her relentless requests the Judge finally gave her what she asked for. The point of that parable, of course, is not to compare God to an unjust judge and imply that he is crooked or uncaring, but to contrast him with one: If even a corrupt Judge gave this woman justice because of

her persistence, how much more will God see that our persistent prayers get answered?

Did you know that the Bible says that God collects two things? **Tears and prayers.**

Psalm 56:12 says, "You have kept count of my tossings and put my tears in your bottle." Every tear you've wept in a trial, he's kept.

And he's kept your prayers, too. I love this scene from Revelation: "And the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, **which are the prayers of the saints.**" (5:8) For years and years and years the saints have prayed--for justice, for help, and sometimes it felt like they were being ignored. But God had heard every one of them, and he kept them all.

I love how Tyler Staton says it, "Every prayer you've ever whispered, from the simplest throwaway request to the most heartfelt cry, God has collected it like a grandmother who scrapbooks a toddler's finger paints and scribbles... God has treasured up every prayer we've ever uttered, even the ones we've forgotten, and he's still weaving their fulfillment, bending history in the direction of a great yes to you and me."³

And when God brings the final restoration to the earth, it starts with those golden bowls filled with our prayers. **Revelation 8:** [3] And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, [4] and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. [5] Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

³ P. 177.

Every prayer you pray, God puts into a bowl. There are these bowls in heaven that are brimming with cries for healing and justice and restoration and vindication. Some of them are prayers that I have prayed. (A lot of times, God answers our prayers now. But sometimes, he delays--and you pray for 30 or 40 years before getting an answer. You pray and pray and pray for that prodigal and it's 30 years before God brings them home). And sometimes you die without receiving the answer and you think God has ignored you. But he's kept every one. **And the final restoration of the earth begins with God giving a categorical and unequivocal yes** to all those prayers that we and other saints have prayed over the years.

God has not missed a single prayer we've ever prayed, and Revelation 8 tells us that there is coming a moment where God answers yes to all of them. In the end, every prayer of a believer is an answered prayer.

Not one tear you've shed or one prayer you've prayed has God ever missed. And soon he's coming with redemption for all of them. In the end, every prayer of a believer is an answered prayer.

So, will you approach God without doubting? In the midst of all the chaos of your life, will you hold onto the character of God like I held onto that rappelling rope?

VAMP

James 1:5, one more time: **5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously** (In Greek it says literally, "the giving God." If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask the giving God who gives generously) **to all without reproach...** (without reproach, which means condemnation or shame or disapproval--he doesn't wag his finger and lecture you about all the ways you got yourself in this mess. He responds with tenderness and generosity like I do one of my kids when they are hurt. One of my daughters comes home with a broken heart after being betrayed by a friend, or treated rudely by some

boy--I don't respond with a life lesson about how she should have better protected herself. If there's a life lesson in there for her, we'll get to that later. For now, all I want to give is comfort and help. And go find who hurt them and punch them in the face. My girl has a broken heart and I want to help. This is what God does when we come to him in our pain and mess). He gives *TO ALL!* No matter who you are or what you've done. The giving Father radiates with openness and love and willingness to help.

Is this how you think about God when you pray to him?

One of the old Christian mystics named 'Julian of Norwich' used to ask, "*When you pray, what expression do you see on God's face?*" Is it an expression that is stern and serious--angry? Condemning? Maybe when you pray you see a God aloof and uninterested, looking the other direction as you try to get his attention? Or, when you pray, do you see his expression as that of a friend--full of inviting and happiness and peace and comfort?

When you pray, see the God that is presented here in James 1:5, because seeing God that way will enable you to persevere through this trial with patience, and even count it all joy.

I said it before, let me say it again: All biblical heroes, in the midst of what felt like God's absence and silence, came to a point where they defiantly and boldly said, "I choose trust."

I choose trust because this God to whom I am praying is not one who looked down loftily and apathetically on my pain from heaven; he's a God who entered into it. He suffered with me in it so that he could redeem me from it. Nor is he a God powerless in the face of disease or death or defeat; he's a God who was driven by those things into the grave, but then 3 days later burst out of that grave victoriously with a promise to do the same for me. I choose trust.

I want to close with you by sharing the story of a woman named Emily who lived out James 1. I actually don't know her personally, but she was kind enough to share these thoughts from her journal--(I want to read a couple of pages from them, it's worth it):

"If you had asked me what I was thankful for before September, I would have said that I am thankful for my family, my home, my job, and for God—for a husband who loves and cares for me, for four children (ages 14, 11, 9, 5) who are healthy and happy, for a home I never dreamed I could have, for a career that I love that allows me to work from home... and for a God that has provided me those things—regardless of my worthiness.

In September, completely out of the blue, my husband left me and our four children for someone else (who left her husband and two children as well). This other family were friends of ours; we'd vacationed with them on three separate occasions. I thought she was my friend. My heart died within me. This could not be happening. My Christian husband—the one who had assured our kids that while divorce does happen, it would never happen to us—that we had made a covenant, a promise to God and to each other—no matter what—we will always be here for each other and for them--this was the man who was leaving... I asked what he was going to tell the kids; he said he didn't know. I told him, "You can't just leave without telling the kids something." Surely, I thought, this would hit him—he would not be able to look at these precious children and tell them that he was leaving... but he did. He called them back downstairs from bed and told them he was leaving. They didn't understand... Was this for work? When will he be back? No, kids, I'm moving out—not to come back. He left. We were crushed.

God, is this really your plan? How could this be your (will for our lives)? I know that you will heal my heart, I know that something good will come from this—but how?... I have never been so angry.

Our poor children are suffering terribly; their father's "wants" come before their "needs." He says, "I still love my kids." Really? How can you love them and cause them such pain?

Next journal entry:

After four months, God is beginning to heal me in a way I'm not sure I want to be healed. I want to see justice, but it is not mine to inflict. I am beginning to try to pray for him, and not just about him. For him to come back, not to me but back to God. I have to forgive him to get through the bitterness... But how am I going to make it? God says pray, so I do. I'm praying for a miracle—for him to snap out of this and find his way back home—but I am also moving forward without him.

Final journal entry:

...It has now been six months, my situation has gotten worse, and yet I feel truly blessed.

My husband is still gone, still with his girlfriend. He has told me that they will be a part of our kids' lives and I need to get used to that and not hate her. He told me that if she is my enemy, then I am his. My kids are still dealing with the impact that their dad left; they are depressed, angry, confused, and frustrated. My oldest has started questioning his faith; he is rebelling against all authority, and lashing out at his family. My house is up for sale—a short sale, which could turn into foreclosure... And yet, in the midst of all this—I have come to know God on a different level, to see him work in a way I had only heard about. To experience this is quite amazing.

I've never had a big tragedy in my life—never really had to fully rely on God. I mean, sure, I prayed and saw God work—but not like this. Before, when I needed God's comfort, the image in my head was me clinging to Jesus and him hugging me. My image

now is me completely collapsed, and him carrying me—and it is awesome.

In the midst of this horrible situation, I see glimpses of what God is doing and how my life and our lives will be changed—and I get excited to see who I get to be at the end of all this. Like being in a race, where it starts to rain and you hit a mud pit. You can't go around it, you have to go through it—and the rain and the mud are weighing you down—you can't go through it fast; you must concentrate on each painful step . . . but at the same time, something is keeping you upright and compelling you to continue. In the distance, you see what appears to be a sheet of rain (almost like a car wash rinse) and then you see it—the sun; it is perfectly clear . . . The person you will be there will be stronger, and filled with peace . . . I can't wait to use what God has taught me. I have explained it to my children like this: In every fairy tale, there is always a tragedy, and the protagonist faces that adversity, overcomes it, and thrives because of it.

God is giving us our fairy tale—(Can you see him there) at the end?"⁴

Can you trust God like this? Can you embrace the mystery and hold onto the goodness of God in this trial?

I know I'm talking to some people in here right now who are in a trial. And maybe you need the wisdom James is talking about. The command is to pray. Or maybe you need the Spirit's resources to persevere. We have a generous, giving God who is ready to give it w/o reproach.

So, here's what I want to do. We're going to open these altars . . . why don't you come and ask him for that kind of help? *If any of you lack wisdom . . .* Let prayer be your first act of declaring: "I choose trust."

Prayer teams, you come. And when I stand you up, our worship leaders will come--and if that's you, if you need wisdom or strength, I want you to step out into the aisle and come up around these altars and pray. If you want someone to pray with you, we'll be here. Just look at us and we'll come.

OK, stand now, and you come . . .

⁴ "Life Story: The Fairy-Tale Ending" by Emily--in Tim Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, chapter 1.