

My name is Daniel Simmons, I'm one of the pastors here at the church, so glad to be here with you wherever and whenever you are watching this.

---You may be wondering, "Who is this guy?"

I have been a pastor at TSC for 10 years. I started as a campus pastor, launched the North Raleigh campus which rolled into our Capital Hills campus. In 2015, I moved onto the executive team full time. I have seen God do a lot in the past 10 years here at TSC, people become believers, their kids become believers, I've seen people live out their faith in RDU in amazing ways, and I've seen many of my friends move all over the world and the country for the sake of the gospel. God has only continued to do these types of things in quarantine, and that is why I'm so excited to have Summit Online, where so many of you are joining us from right now. And why I believe that despite everything 2020 has brought us, one thing is for sure: the local church remains God's Plan A."

On my 16th birthday, the department of motor vehicles changed my life **for the better**. That is not how you thought that sentence would end, is it?

On the morning of my sixteenth birthday, I walked into the DMV prepared to walk out with my first driver's license but instead, I failed...the eye test. That's right, I didn't even get a chance to get behind the wheel of the car. Now I knew my vision was not great, I was aware that I had to squint a little at the TV, I sat on the front row of my classes to see the board a little better, but to be honest, I thought my vision was fairly normal. After all, I had passed the eye exam at school, I had passed the eye exam at the DMV the year before, and I figured that any issues I had with my sight were very minor.

And then I actually got glasses and put them on for the first time--if you've ever experienced this you know exactly what I'm talking about, because I put them on, and I could not believe how I saw the world. And I got behind the wheel of the car to drive home, and I could not believe that I had not gotten in a wreck that year. "Oh, there's a stop sign in my neighborhood right there...who knew?" But the glasses gave me a whole new perspective. I saw detail, I saw clarity, I saw distance and depth. I looked up and saw ... *leaves. Wait, these trees have had leaves this whole time???* I also realized that I had been totally unaware of how poor my insight was and how much better my life was being able to see clearly.

They created clarity which allowed me to drive better, more safely, more skillfully--everything I needed to be a good driver was improved by the glasses. BC/ the glasses gave me proper perspective.

And doesn't perspective do that for all areas of life? If you can see a situation clearly, you can live through it more effectively.

The passage we are going to be looking at today is James 1:2-6, and this passage talks about having perspective in the area of life where it is most difficult to have and keep perspective, and I'm talking about trials. When we face the trials that life brings, it is easy and common to lose perspective.

-Those are the situations where we lose perspective the quickest and yet need it the most.

Let's take a look at what the Bible has to say about this:
James 1: 2-6

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. [If you're thinking, why is James talking about wisdom all of a sudden? I thought this was about suffering. Well, I'm with you. The first few times I read this I felt the same thing. So we'll come back to that.] 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.

A clear perspective during trials gives you confidence and hope in God.

To understand this, we need to look at three things:

1. The reality of trials.
2. The larger purpose for trials.
3. How to gain God's perspective on trials

So let's dive in:

The Reality of Trials:

1. "Count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith..."

- a. The Bible is honest about trials. There is not one place in the entire scripture that ever minimizes the reality and severity of the trials you face. It is also honest about the fact that you are going to face trials. They are a reality and certainty in this life. I even like the picture that James gives us here by saying "when (not if) you meet trials..." As if you going along in life, everything is good, and you bump into them unexpectedly. It is as if this passage is God telling us "You may be surprised by the type of trial you meet, but you should expect to meet trials your entire."
- b. **Various Trials** means *all types of trials*, big/small, severe/minor, trials that last for a long time and trials that are very short. He isn't talking about a single type of trial, that is why he uses the word various. And if there has ever been a time when every single person that I know has been going through trials, it is 2020. Even if 2020 has some bright spots for you, it has still been very hard. For me, as an extrovert, who loves being around people, I love the people I work with, I don't like being alone, this has been hard. I think I was struggling with some mild depression early in the summer. It has been hard on my kids. One my kids who was doing really well at school, her grades have slipped bc/being online is just not ideal for her learning style. One of my kids has some learning delays, and this has been a rough school year for her. That is no slight on the

teachers, they are doing as good a job as they can given the circumstances, and I'm super impressed by all my kids teachers, but there is no way to get around this, school has been really hard for my kids in 2020. People have lost their jobs, cracks are starting to show in marriages, some businesses have had to close down, and I haven't even talked about people who have gotten Covid, the societal unrest we have had bc/of the issues of race, or the divide in our country over the election. And all the other trials that are out there, they didn't slow down bc/a lot of other stuff got worse. 2020 has been a trial for every single person I know.

- i. The only group that has benefited from 2020 are dogs. People have been getting dogs left and right. We got him. (maybe show a picture). And you are at home with them all the time. That is dog heaven right there. They have benefited from 2020, the rest of us, 2020 has stunk pretty bad.
- c. 2020 has been unique bc/all of us have been going through various trials at the same time, even if 2020 had been a normal year, we would still be facing trials. They are an absolute certainty of life. The good news is, God uses trials in your life. Let's keep going...

God has a larger purpose for trials

1. **"For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."**
 - a. James wants to make it very clear that God is at work behind every single trial you go through. Think about that for one moment with me, every single trial you have ever faced, whether big or small, God has been behind the scenes doing a work IN you. A trial happens **TO** you, but God is at work **IN** you. **God has a goal and a purpose for every trial you face, and that purpose is to build your character.** Testing produces steadfastness. This word in greek literally means to Hyper Stand." It is to plant your feet and not budge no matter what comes your way. It is not mere patience. How many of you have sat in an airplane on the runway and pilot comes on the loud speaker and says "we're a little backed up today, and we're going to have to sit here for 30 minutes, just want to thank you for your patience." Everyone looks around at each other and says "As if we had a choice." Patience is passive, but steadfastness is active. When I think about the bravery of all the firemen and police officers and first responders and medical workers when 911 happened. That is steadfastness; they did their job, they manned their posts, they did not fail under the pressure of a terrible trial. Trials develop this steadfastness.

- b. But steadfastness is not the end; steadfastness is working in you to bring about an even deeper result: 3 things it produces: **perfection, completeness, and lacking in nothing**. This means a lot. Let's break down these 3 words quickly:
- i. Perfection: it means being mature in every aspect of your life,
 - ii. Complete means wholeness (Richard Bauckham describes this as integration between what you believe and what you do; your words align with what you do; that you are able to say no to certain things that would detract from a healthy life; and consistency over time.)
 - iii. Not lacking in anything. Not material means, but you are equipped to handle whatever life throws your way.

This is God's goal for you. It is not to take away the trial, it is not for you to simply to make through the trial, it is for you to become everything you can be in Christ, and God is going to use the trial to accomplish this. This is the perspective that God wants us to have.

Now, at this point, you may be thinking, "Pastor Daniel, I like the sound of a lot of this. I get that suffering is real (Point 1). And I've heard before that God is doing something through it, even if I can't see it—which I absolutely can't right now (Point 2). I've even heard that I'm *supposed* to have joy in suffering (Point 3). But can I be honest with you? I just can't

manufacture those feelings in my heart. I can't *make* myself be content in this suffering."

If that's you, let me just say, first of all, *I get it*. These truths about suffering don't take away the tears or the pain. I wish they did. But that's just not how it works. If you're anything like me, and you came across a big button that said, "End suffering," you'd press it, right? But if 2020 has done anything, it should make us realize we don't have that button. **Our choice isn't between suffering and not suffering. It's between suffering *with HOPE* and suffering *without HOPE*.**

Verses 2-4 tell us there IS hope, verses 5 and 6 tell us how we can gain the perspective to get that confidence and hope.

Look at verse 5-

How to gain clear perspective

verse 5: ***If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. 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.***

James is direct and on the nose. **If you want gain the perspective that brings confidence and hope, ask God for wisdom.**

1. First thing we see: Humility: James says “**if any of you lacks wisdom.**” To gain wisdom, you have to realize you are deficient in wisdom. You are not as wise as you think you are. Every situation requires a new fresh way of looking at it. No two situations are exactly the same, so the wisdom that worked in a situation last year is not going to be sufficient for the one in front of you today. Even the most wise people couldn't have anticipated the problems we have faced in 2020. When the types of people you think of as wise, when they encounter a hard situation, they go to the Lord first. He is their starting point.. They begin by humbling themselves before the Lord and asking for his help. Later on in the book of James he says “**God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.**” Wise people consistently humble themselves before the Lord, and the Lord consistently pours out his grace and his wisdom on them. **Wise people are not primarily smart, they are primarily HUMBLE.** That is the marker of wisdom. Do you want to be wise? Humble yourself before the Lord and realize you need Him to provide the wisdom.
2. Second thing we see in gaining wisdom is that there is a right way to ask. You ask in faith. James uses strong language here, but he isn't using strong language so that you will be a great Christian that never fails, he is saying “Know who you are asking.”
 - a. **IF YOU KNEW WHO YOU WERE DEALING WITH, YOU WOULD NOT HESITATE TO ASK.**
 - b. Bc/as this passage makes clear, **GOD IS GENEROUS.** You could actually translate the first part of this sentence as “Ask the giving

God.” He longs to pour out goodness on his children. He gives without reproach meaning, you can't tire him out with asking. (Example of me receiving support letters, I can get irritated, I can be stingy, but not God, He loves it when we ask for Him to move and work in our lives).

When we call out to God during trials and ask for wisdom, what are we really asking for? 1 Cor 1: 24 tell us that Jesus is the wisdom of God. When you ask for Wisdom, God's response is not to give you knowledge, but to give you himself. It is and always has been about relationships. And isn't that what we need most when we are in the midst of trials? We don't need mere answers, we need comfort, we need tenderness, we need a relationship with someone who is going to be committed to us and walk with us through the trial. God has not abandoned you in the trial, he is not sitting in heaven watching your every move ready to criticize you if you make a mistake in the trial, He wants to walk along side of you in the trial.

How can you be so confident that this is true?

BC/he walked through trials. All through the OT, we see that God himself had trials, primarily bc/of our sin. But he didn't walk away from. His commitment to us never faded. We see that most clearly on the cross, where Jesus endured the most severe trial for you and for me. **And the purpose of his trial, to change us. To make us new creations, to make us his children. He uses the trials we go through to change us, but he used the trials he went through to change us.**

If you know this and believe this, then your confidence and hope will be secure even in the worst trial.