

February 26, 2023

1-Faith That Works...When Life Is Hard

INTRO

We all face hard times don't we?

I want to tell you about a 17 year old who went through a particularly hard time.

This person dove into the Chesapeake Bay after misjudging the shallowness of the water. They suffered a fracture between the fourth and fifth cervical vertebrae and became a quadriplegic, paralyzed from the shoulders down. During their two years of rehab, they experienced anger, depression, suicidal thoughts, and real doubts about God.

However, during occupational therapy, this person learned to paint with a brush between their teeth and began selling their artwork. They ended up writing over forty books. Not only that, but they have advocated for the rights of those with disabilities across the planet. They helped usher in the Americans with Disabilities Act, they established the Wheels Across the World program working with inmates to refurbish wheelchairs and then distribute them all over the world.

Who is this person? Jonni Eareckson Tada **(slide of picture of Jonni)**



And what was it that held Jonni together all this time? God. Jonni went on to say this later on

(Jonni quote slide)

He has chosen not to heal me, but to hold me. The more intense the pain, the closer His embrace. The greatest good suffering can do for me is to increase my capacity for God. Real satisfaction comes not in understanding God's motives, but in understanding His character, in trusting in His promises, and in leaning on Him and resting in Him as the Sovereign who knows what He is doing and does all things well."

We all face hard times don't we?

There is hard stuff going on in our world

- Earthquakes in Turkey & Syria where around 50,000 died
- Hit 1 year of Russia invading Ukraine

Chances are, there is hard stuff going on in your life

- Going into hard time, in a hard time, or coming out of
- Stress Survey (American Psychological Association & Gallup)
 - 27% adults most days so stressed they can't function

- Around 45% for those 44 and under

Big Question: How do we respond when life is hard?

Main Point:

God wants to use the hard stuff in your life!

So we're going to get real practical this morning as we launch into our five week series on James. And I want you to think about the hard stuff you're going through right now. And we're going to hold that up before God right now by using His Word.

Would you pray with me as we continue our time together?

BACKGROUND

So let's go over a bit of background on James before we open this letter up. We're reading James' mail and it helps to have some context here.

Text James to (928) 228-4301

- Jesus' brother
- Faith & Works
- 54 imperatives in the book of James in 108 verses
- Written to Jewish believers, also including Gentile believers

¹James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

Notice that James refers to himself as a servant. Not making a big deal out of being Jesus' brother. Why? B/c his identity first and foremost is that of a servant of God.

How do we respond when life is hard?

1. See the Big Picture

- Zoom out and Look at the 30,000 foot view
- **Airplane:** view from 30k ft vs view from ground



² Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,

- As you're going through trials, it's like you're being handed a label maker. And you have the option to label it as **pure joy**.

- What is joy? Deep seated favorable disposition that transcends circumstances
- *Many Kinds*: All kinds of trials!
- Why on earth should we consider them pure joy?

³because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything

- *because* of the result! Trials and testing bring perseverance
- *perseverance*: the ability to continue on in the face of adversity
 - As a runner, you know what this is like-endurance
- *let it*: we get to partner with God in these hard times. This looks like our 5 values in the midst of it. Leaning into Him.
- *mature and complete*: he's got a purpose for you!
- God is right there with you in the trial
- **What are YOU going through?**
 - loss of a loved one?
 - divorce?
 - financial stress?
- When going through trials ask yourself:
 - What is God up to here?
 - What does He want me to do with this?
 - How is using this to grow me?

How do we respond when life is hard? See the Big Picture

How else do we respond when life is hard?

2. Talk with God

- He cares about what you're going through!

⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

- *lacks wisdom*: When we go through trials, we often need wisdom. The ability to see life from God's perspective and live accordingly

- *generously*: He doesn't scold, say stop wasting my time, etc.
- *will be given*: promises us wisdom. That does not mean we get exactly what we want

6 But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. 8 Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

- Wave of the sea (picture)



- Imagine being out in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, which James would have been familiar with. What happens to the waves? They just go back and forth without any real purpose. Imagine a beach ball on there.
- When you and I go to God and then to doubt, back to God and then doubt, we're like that wave
- It looks like this: God give me wisdom about this important decision for my family. And then we run back to anxiety, worry and control. And then back to God, etc. etc.
- What's the natural consequence of this? Being double minded and unstable. God's not saying you don't get it now as much as He's saying you can't even receive this.

- What this is NOT saying: if you have a sliver of doubt, you get nothing.

James is not, then, here claiming that prayers will never be answered where any degree of doubt exists—for some degree of doubt on at least some occasions is probably inevitable in our present state of weakness. Rather, he wants us to understand that God responds to us only when our lives reflect a basic consistency of purpose and intent: a spiritual integrity. -Douglas Moo

How do we respond when life is hard? We Talk with God
How else do we respond when life is hard?

3. Keep going with the finish line in mind

- There's a finish line and it's going to be oh so sweet!

9 Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. 10 But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. 11 For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business. 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 is telling believers that whether they are rich or poor, remember the end result.

- Don't pursue merely riches because that's going to



pass

- Their spiritual identity is their ultimate source of significance
- \$ can be a threat to single minded devotion to God
- *Persevere*: that same word from verse 3. To stand up under the trial. To bear it. It means you don't give up and you keep going.
- *Crown of Life*: we are going to get eternal life with Him!
- **crossing the finish line.** I ran cross country in high school. The feeling of finishing the race was amazing!
 - You and I one day will cross the finish line. We will be with the Lord. There is a finish line.

NEXT STEP

- I want you to think about that trial that you are going through right now
- If you're comfortable, hold out your hands as a way of saying, God I'm giving this to you. And I'm going to pray out loud and you pray in your heart as we give these things to God
- ****pray****

CONCLUSION

Joni Erickson Tada has been in a wheelchair for over 55 years now. And in those 55 years, she has dwelt with God in the midst of the ups and downs of life to sustain her. In her own brokenness she has looked to the one who sustains her.

How has Joni faced the hard situations in life and how do we?

1. See the Big Picture
2. Talk with God
3. Keep Going with the Finish Line in Mind

May we too, like Joni, lean on Him and rest in Him through it all

**pray

**Prayer Team

**Connect Card (bring this on stage)

Faith that Works

(Week 2) Group Study: James 2:1-13

“Keeps the Royal Law”

SMALL TALK

1. **To what event (or kind of event) would you love to have “the best seat in the house”? Why that event?**

VIEWPOINT

2. **READ James 2:1-13.** James is writing to an economically depressed community. Why might favoritism be a problem in this setting?
3. For what reasons does James oppose favoritism? (2:4-13) How much does how we treat people matter?
4. What is the “royal law”? (2:8) How does the law give “freedom”? (2:12-13, see 1:25, and Matthew 22:34-40; 7:12)

GETTING PERSONAL

5. What is the person like who is easy for you to be welcoming and friendly toward? What does this say about you?
6. Is it easy or hard for you to be kind and caring to marginalized and disenfranchised people? Why?

MAKING PROGRESS (THIS WEEK)

7. How can you take steps this week where mercy triumphs over judgment?