

When Life Is Hard

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[0 : 0 0] We are starting a new series, and we're going to do the Bible reading in a few minutes' time. We're starting a new preaching series. We're going to be going through the book of James. And the book of James is this really interesting little book of the Bible.

It's right at the back of your Bible. And just because it's little doesn't mean it's unimportant. The book of James is fascinating for a couple of reasons. It's one of the books of the Bible that Christians, most Christians, really enjoy, and pastors really struggle with.

And the reason is this. It's so practical and concise. And pastors really struggle with this because, you know, we like theological arguments and digging into Greek and our ivory tower study stuff. And James isn't really interested in any of that. He is very practical and to the point. One of the most famous sentences in the book of James is found at the end of the first chapter.

So he says, don't merely listen to God's word and deceive yourself. Do what it says. Very to the point. Very wonderful. So the book of James is a great book in that way.

[1 : 0 9] It's also very interesting because James is the brother of Jesus Christ. His younger brother. And technically his half-brother. He had the same mom, different dad.

They would have grown up in the same house together. Sat at the same dining room table together. He would have watched Jesus growing up. And what's interesting is James no doubt realized there's something special about Jesus.

But James didn't believe that Jesus was the Christ. And so even when Jesus is an adult, John's gospel tells us that his brothers didn't believe what everybody else was saying about Jesus. And yet later on, James did come to believe. And it's amazing how he writes about, he calls him our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. As the result of seeing Christ rising from the dead, James came to believe that Jesus really is who he said he was.

[2 : 0 8] I, by the way, I have this wonderful older brother. His name's Simon. He's also a pastor. He lives in Singapore. He's two years older than me and I really look up to him and respect him in many, many ways.

But I've never called him Lord Simon. Or the glorious Lord Simon Murphy. But James came to see that his brother really was who he claimed to be.

And so he writes here in the first verse, a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. And later on, our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. It's wonderful that this man who was once filled with doubts and skepticism, later on came to write a book of the Bible.

And we see that, as we read the book of Acts, we actually see that James came to be the leader of the church in Jerusalem, which was one of the biggest churches in the first century.

In chapter 15 of Acts, he is the chairman of this very important council. And so James is this really important figure in the early church. He's the brother of Jesus. He's the leader of the church in Jerusalem.

[3 : 1 1] He's one of the key leaders. And yet, if you look at verse 1, how he describes himself, he says, James, merely a servant of God and a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This man who has this remarkable CV, brother of Jesus, leader of the church, just sees himself as this humble servant. And then maybe the last thing to say by way of introduction is, who is James writing to?

Well, he says he's writing to the 12 tribes of the dispersion. In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel, God's people, were made up of 12 tribes, 12 clans.

It was a way of describing God's people. And in Acts chapter 8, we see that God's people in Jerusalem, the Christians, encounter persecution and difficulty. And so they flee out of Jerusalem.

They go and live all over kind of the Roman Empire. But James, who was this pastor in Jerusalem, still carries these men and women on his heart. Even though they're no longer part of his church, he loves them.

[4 : 11] He wants to know how they're doing. He's concerned about the fact that they're facing these trials. And so he writes to these Christian Jews all over the Roman Empire to encourage them, to encourage them in their faith.

This is what the book of James is about. It's written by this humble pastor to these Christians that are going through a difficult time, who are facing these various trials, to encourage them to keep on going when life is hard.

And so on that note, let's listen to the reading from this morning. And Karen is going to come and read James chapter 1, verses 1 to 8. Let's listen up. Lord, please speak to us from the book of James.

This is chapter 1, starting in verse 1, we read, James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the 12 tribes in the dispersion, greetings.

Count it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

[5 : 20] 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.

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. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.

He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. This is the word of God. Great, thanks, Karen. Let me pray for us, and let's ask God to speak to us.

As Karen prayed, Lord, we want you to speak to us. We want to hear your wisdom for real life. This week, God, as we go into the great city of Hong Kong, we want our eyes fixed on you, God.

We're going to face various trials. Lord, we want to experience and encounter your grace. And so, God, won't you encourage us from your word? Won't you speak to us from James' words to us?

[6 : 28] May we hear not just James' message, but your word to us today. We pray this in your great name. Amen. Okay, so this passage today, nice and short, is broken up into two sections, verses 2 to 4 and verses 5 to 8.

And the two big ideas are this. When life is hard, okay, I know that's not really a full sentence, but when life is hard, to seek the wisdom of the gracious God.

When life is hard, seek the wisdom of the gracious God. So let's look at what James says just here. Firstly, when life is hard. I'm sure you probably don't need too much convincing that life is hard. It's testing. It's challenging. If anyone doubted the reality of that, COVID-19 just reminded us of the reality that life is not always a bed of roses.

But the danger, of course, is that sometimes we think, oh, COVID was this wild anomaly, a once-in-a-century anomaly. Now that we got through that, let's just get back to the good old days, and life will continue wonderfully.

[7 : 40] But the reality is that even before COVID, and certainly post-COVID, life is full of trials, full of difficulty, full of challenges. And so look at how James says this.

He says in verse 2, James is writing to these Christians, not because he thinks they might be a good one.

He might possibly, on a bad day, have experienced some trial. But because he knows they will. He says when you encounter trials. Not if that may happen.

When. It's going to happen. We are a very young church. 35% of Watermark is between the age of 20 and 29 years old. And let me just say to those of us that are younger in our years, and especially if you're a high schooler, the world tells you that the world is your oyster.

And you can do anything you want, and be anything you want. And just look inside yourself, and you can fulfill any dream you want. Friends, let me tell you, life is full of challenges.

[8 : 44] It is hard. And so let me encourage you, don't believe the Instagram life. That is not real life. You know, sometimes I meet up with people, and someone will say, I'm going through a really difficult time.

Really, really struggling. Life is hard. I wake up full of anxiety. Sometimes the dark cloud hangs over me. And yet, when I see the Instagram account there, in Bali, you know, with a cocktail in their hand and an infinity pool, I think life couldn't get better.

Friends, Instagram is not real life. That's called a holiday. Real life is the baby not sleeping throughout the entire night, crying all night long.

Real life is getting a miserable teacher at school. Real life is having your girlfriend break up with you. Real life is not getting that promotion or having that psycho boss that makes your life difficult. Real life is getting cancer or moving to another country that you don't want to move to. Life is full of disappointments. And a hundred times a day, we're told in our culture and our society, that just look within yourself to be what you want to be.

[9 : 57] Fulfill your dreams. Do whatever you want. Friends, don't believe it. Life is full of trials. Various trials. And when these trials come, James wants to tell us that the Christian worldview tells us not merely to respond just passively, not to respond emotionally, but to think about it, to engage with it.

Look at what he says here. He says, count it all joy or consider it all joy when you face these trials. Now, James is not saying, you just lost your job.

Your wife's about to give birth to twins. Your cell phone just broke. Yeah! What a joy! Life couldn't get better. No, no, he's not saying that. He's not saying, enjoy the trials, or look forward to suffering, or make, you know, cause the person in your CG to suffer, because that's a good thing.

He's saying, rather than responding emotionally or stoically, engage with it. Think about it. Consider it.

Consider how God might want to use this trial in your life for your good. You see, what do we tend to do when life is hard? One of the temptations is, as I said, to respond emotionally.

[11 : 20] We can say, God, why is this happening to me? How can you let this happen? I don't deserve this. Woe is me! Or, we can respond stoically.

We can disengage and numb ourselves through escapist behavior. We can binge on Netflix, or binge on social media, or food, or work out at the gym twice as hard, or dial into our work, as a way of escaping the reality, and the pain, and the difficulty of life.

But James says something else here. He says, no, no, make a deliberate and a conscious decision. Not to feel sorry for yourself. Not to just seek the comfort in Netflix or social media.

But actually, engage with the God who is allowing this to come your way. And seek the comfort and the joy that God will bring as He works in you and through you in this trial. This week, I was listening to a podcast of somebody that I really look up to and respect.

And he was talking about the fact that 10 years ago, he was diagnosed with cancer. And at the same time, his wife went through major, major health trials.

[12 : 30] Many surgeries. And for a couple of years, both husband and wife were battling these major trials. He is a pastor, or was a pastor. And at the same time as all this was going on, there were difficulties at his church.

There was a bit of division. The staff weren't quite aligned. And he said, for about three years, he really wondered, God, I don't know if I can do this anymore. Maybe I need to find another job.

I'm not cut out for this. And yet, he said, I learned some things about God, and I learned some things about myself. And in that period, I learned how to pray. And then at the end of the interview, he says this.

He says, as hard as that time was, it was completely worth it. I wouldn't change it for anything. I was diagnosed with cancer, my wife going through trials, work difficulty.

I wouldn't change it for anything. Because I discovered some things about God. Friends, when God brings trials and challenges, and they'll come, don't run away from it.

[13 : 30] Don't feel sorry for yourself. Engage the God who wants to do something in you and through you. Seek out the good that God wants to do in your life. And that's what he says in verse 3.

Now here, James has a very specific outcome. Look what he says here. He says, Count it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you meet trials of various kinds. For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness, resoluteness, endurance, stamina to keep going.

And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. So James tells us that when, not if, trials and difficulty come our way, when life is hard, we have a

choice how to respond.

We can either get bitter and defensive. We can feel sorry for ourselves and ask, Why me, Lord? We can get angry. We can blame others. We can retreat into a cocoon.

We can engage in escapist behavior. But all of those will short circuit the process, the work that God wants to do in your life. To shape you and mature you and grow you to the kind of person that he wants you to become.

[14:47] To develop a steadfastness, a resilience, an endurance, that is necessary to become a mature and wise person. And so he says, Let steadfastness have its effect in you.

Let it do its work in you. Don't bail out and short circuit the process. Let it do its work in you to make you a wise and mature person. Friends, God tells us that often, one of the only ways that we grow up and mature in life is by going through and engaging with the difficulties and the trials that he brings.

And so that's why he says, Submit to the process. Yield yourself. Let God do his work in you. Kind of like when you go to a physio. I don't know how many physios we have in Watermark.

I know Mandy, one or two. But when you go to a physio, sometimes you're lying there and you're feeling like, What on earth have I done? Why am I letting this person abuse me?

And you cringe and you think, How much longer can this take, right? It's painful. But as you submit to the physio's strength and work, what are they doing?

[15:57] They're bringing an element of healing and health to an area of weakness or insufficiency in your body. As you submit to the painful process of them working on you, actually healing and growth comes.

Friends, that's what God says here. He says, Don't resist God's physio work in your life. When trials and difficulty come, don't play the victim. Don't say, Why me, God? Don't run away and avoid it. Submit yourself to his work and let him grow you through the process. When life is hard, engage with God's process. Now, all that I think is good and true.

And I think that's why it's in God's word. But there are two problems with this. I don't know if you experience any problems with this. I find two problems with this. The first one is, it can sound very much like, When life is hard, keep calm and carry on.

Right? Or it can sound like, What doesn't kill you makes you stronger. And if that's the case, then where does Jesus Christ come to this?

[17:07] What's the point of a Christian worldview? Why not just be secular and say, Keep calm and carry on. What doesn't kill you only makes you stronger. The other problem I have with what James says here is that when we go through these trials, one of the challenges is, you can, it can be really hard to process.

It can be confusing. You can feel like you're lost in a mist and you don't know the way out.

Sometimes the very problem that trials bring is that you can't think straight.

I actually had this recently. I was, not too long ago, I was going through a difficult time. Weighed really heavily on my heart. I was a bit, I felt like I was in a bit of a slump, both emotionally and even spiritually.

And I didn't know how to handle it. But part of what was so confusing was that I felt so guilty about it. I felt so confused about it. I felt, God, I'm a pastor.

I'm not meant to feel like this. I'm meant to give my own heart wise counsel. I'm meant to quote some Bible verse. God, I shouldn't feel like this. And I felt confused about the fact that I wasn't in a great space.

[18:15] And so there was kind of this double confusion. Not only was I unsure about what was going on in my life, in my heart, I then felt guilty and confused about the situation. I wonder if you can relate to that.

And so how do we handle it? Where do we find the tools, the wisdom, to navigate the trials and the challenges that we face? And once again, this is where James' wisdom is so different from modern culture.

You see, modern culture says, just be true to yourself. Just look inside your heart and do what you feel is good. All right. One culture tells us to just be true to your own desires.

But that seems to me to be no less confusing than just keep calm and carry on. That doesn't seem to really help in the trials and the difficulty. Friends, when you're lost, what do you need?

You need somebody who knows the way that can lead you out. You need somebody who knows how to get you where you need to be. When you're lost, you need more than just keep calm and carry on.

[19 : 21] You need more than just what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. You need the wisdom of somebody who knows how to guide you out of the confusion into clarity. James says that in the trials and the difficulties of life, and particularly when you feel lost and confused and not sure which way to go, look at what we should do.

Look at verse five. Verse five, if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God and it will be given to him. Friends, are you in a difficult season at the moment?

Are you lost, confused? Are you facing some trial that is overwhelming? What are you turning to in this season? Who are you turning to in this season?

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God. But what does that actually mean? I mean, does that mean God, I've got this deal on the table, I don't know which way to go.

Go option A or option B. God, give me your answer. And God, you know, the option B just kind of highlights on the screen, right? Or maybe, God, I've got a university to choose.

[20 : 34] Should I go to HKU or CUHK? And suddenly, an angel appears at the end of your bed and says, go HKU. Is that what he means? You know, if anyone lacks wisdom, ask God and God will give it to you.

Well, I don't think that's the way that God works. Certainly not in my life. I don't know if any of you have had that. Sometimes God speaks directly. We mentioned this earlier a few weeks ago. God can speak in dreams.

He can speak a hundred ways. But seldom is God's answer, seldom is God's wisdom just a direct piece of information. Do A, not B. In fact, in the Bible, wisdom is not just knowledge or information. It's something altogether different. In the Bible, wisdom is not simply having the intellectual smarts, having street knowledge, or being savvy.

Wisdom is a character trait that has developed or grown within you as a result of walking with God, thinking carefully about His will and His ways. Wisdom is a character trait that's developed or grown within you over a period of time after thinking carefully about God and His will and His ways.

[21 : 47] If you've got a Bible, flip over the page to James chapter 3 with me. I want to show you. Look at how James thinks about wisdom. Look at verse 13. James says, Who is wise and understanding amongst you?

By His good conduct, let Him show His works in the meekness of wisdom. In other words, let Him show what wisdom looks like. Let Him show the fruit of it. Verse 14. Because if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about this.

This is not the wisdom that comes from above. No, this is earthly wisdom. This is unspiritual, even demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and all sorts of vile practices.

But the wisdom that comes from above, the wisdom that you need in trials and challenges, though this is different. The wisdom from above is pure. It's peaceable.

It's gentle. It's open to reason. It's full of mercy and good fruits. It's impartial. It's sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is produced.

[22 : 53] Friends, James is telling us here that he's saying when you go through trials and difficulties, we need a wisdom that's going to guide us. But it's a unique kind of wisdom.

It's not just the wisdom that's going to help you get ahead in life. It's not just the kind of wisdom that is going to make you look after yourself or progress your career. There are many people that are very smart, very savvy, very streetwise, that know how to get ahead in their careers, know how to look after themselves, know how to look after themselves.

But what's the consequence of that kind of wisdom, that kind of street smart? It's often broken relationships, right? It's people walking over one another. It's a trail of destruction.

It's what James calls here selfish ambition and jealousy, brokenness. James says that's not the kind of wisdom we need when life is hard.

there's another kind of wisdom. And surprise, surprise, it turns out that this wisdom looks a lot like Jesus. Look at how he describes it.

[24 : 00] It's pure. It's full of peace. It's gentle. It's open to reason. It's full of mercy. It's the wisdom that comes from knowing him and walking with him and having your life shaped by him is the

wisdom that will get you through the trials and the challenges of life without the trail of destruction behind you.

James says that if anyone lacks wisdom and will know it by the fruits of their lives, broken relationships, broken homes, broken marriages, maybe it's because we've been living life on our own terms.

Having never come to Jesus to ask him to lead us and guide us. Never having had our lives shaped by him. If any of you lacks wisdom, ask God for it.

Let your life be shaped by God. That doesn't mean ask God to bail you out of this difficult situation and solve all your problems. It means ask God to have his way in your life.

Why should we do that? Why should we come to God? Well, in verse 6, James gives us a reason. Every reason to let God shape our lives and lead him.

[25 : 19] Friends, maybe you're here this morning, you're not a Christian. I'm trying to urge you that you cannot get through life on your terms. When trials and challenges come, you need your life to be shaped by Jesus.

But why Jesus? What's so special about him? Well, look at what he says. James here reminds us of the nature and the character of Jesus.

Look at what he says. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God. Let him come to God, asking God to have his way in his life. Let him ask God and look at how he describes God.

God who gives generously. This God is not stingy. He never says, that's enough, I think you've had enough good things for one year. Time to suffer, right?

I was just thinking, when I was preparing this brief confession, I was eating a chocolate at the time. And I was just thinking about how I treat my kids when they ask for chocolate or ice cream, right?

[26 : 21] Very stingy. That's enough, that's enough. I think you've had enough for one day. I'll say things like, no more, okay? God is not like that with his good gifts.

I don't know if you remember the story Oliver Twist, right? Very famous Oliver Twist written by Charles Dickens. Oliver Twist is this orphan. He's growing up in an orphanage and they're given this measly bowl of food each mealtime and they're always grumbling, complaining because they're hungry and one day his friends dare him to go to the master and ask for some more.

And Oliver Twist goes up to the master and the whole orphanage is in silence. Nobody's ever done this before. And he says, please sir, can I have some more food?

And the master freaks out. What? You want more food? After all I've done for you? Friends, that's not how God is. God is generous, lavish, extravagant with his kindness.

God loves to give of himself. When you're navigating trials and challenges, ask God who gives generously of himself to help you through the storms.

[27 : 32] Look what else he says. He says, God who gives generously to all, not those who have it all together, not to the wealthy or the privileged or the few, not to the respectable, to those that have read all of the Watermark Bible reading plan this week, those who have never missed CG, those that have been good boys and girls.

God generously gives to all who will come to him. Friends, are you a high schooler this morning and you're facing a challenge or trial? You can look to God and he will give his grace to you.

Are you a stay-at-home mom? A young mom with infants? That's a challenge. You can cry out to God and he gives to all who need him. Are you in the business world and it's cutthroat and it's challenging and there's high pressure?

You can cry out to God. Friends, are you looking after your elderly parents? Are you a fresh graduate? Are you middle-aged and you're finding that hard?

Have you got teenage kids? God doesn't give his grace to those that have earned it and deserved it and merited it. He generously gives to all.

[28 : 48] And then look what he says. He generously gives to all without reproach. The word reproach means finding fault or reprimanding somebody or correcting somebody.

Now to be honest, I always thought that what this meant was God gives his grace to all those that he doesn't find fault with. That he has no reason to correct.

Right? So if you've got all your ducks lined in a row, God's got nothing to hold against you. I mean, none of us are perfect but by and large. Then he will give his grace to you. But that's not what it means.

It actually means the opposite. It means God will generously give of himself his grace, his wisdom, generously to all people without finding fault.

So God doesn't look at his book and say, Jeremy, I see you haven't quite read the Bible very often this week. I think you better come to me next week. God doesn't point out our faults.

[29 : 50] If you're in need of his grace, he generously gives to all without finding fault. Friends, isn't that amazing?

How gracious and kind our God is. He doesn't come to us when we call out to him and say, oh really, now you want me? After all, you've done. That's very brave of you.

He's so generous, so kind, so gracious. Friends, are you in a trial and a difficulty this morning? Do you need wisdom to navigate the challenges of life?

You can come to this God who is gracious and kind and generous and he gives of himself his grace and his wisdom without finding fault.

How do we know this is the case? Well, because it sounds a lot like the gospel, doesn't it? God gives generously for God so loved the world that he generously gave of his one and only son to broken sinners like us.

[30 : 56] Jesus gave of his life on the cross so that people like you and I can encounter his grace. God gave to all, not to the privileged, to the wealthy, to the educated.

God gives himself to the educated, the uneducated, the privileged and the unprivileged, the rich and the poor, those that have got it together and those that don't have it together, those whose lives are neat and tidy and those whose lives are down and out.

God gives himself to all on the cross and friends, he gives himself without finding fault. We get what we don't deserve because our very faults and failings have been wiped away by the blood of Christ. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him come to God. Let him come to Jesus who gives generously to all without reproach and it will be given to him.

Friends, James is telling us here that Jesus' word is a far better word than just keep calm and carry on or what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. James is telling us that when the trials and the challenges and the difficulties of life come, you can draw near to a good and gracious God who gave himself for you and will still give himself to you in the trials to get you through.

[32 : 12] There's one last qualification. Look at verse 6 to 8 with me. James gives the qualification and it sounds but challenging. He says, if anyone lacks wisdom, let him come to God.

Let him ask God. Let him come to Christ who gives generously to all without reproach and it will be given to him. But, let him ask in faith without doubting. For the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

That person must not suppose he will receive anything from the Lord. He is a double-minded man or woman unstable in all their ways. Now, does James mean here that if you're in trouble and you need God, what you've got to do is you've got to really, really, really, really ask God and trust him and not have any doubt in your heart that he's going to help you.

Well, I don't think that's what James means. Remember, this book is written by somebody who was wracked with doubt once upon a time. I don't think James means that if you are sincerely wrestling and grappling with God and scripture that God won't answer you.

James doesn't mean that if you really want God to answer your prayer you've got to clench your fists, squeeze your eyes and really, really, really, really raise your voice so that God will hear your prayers and prove to him how sincere you are.

[33 : 34] Now, what he's talking about here is someone who has split loyalties. They come to God when it helps them. When they're in trouble, they cry out, God, I need you. But actually, most of their lives, they're quite content to live life on their own terms.

When they're in trouble, they quickly cry out to God, God, I need your wisdom. But all they're really interested in is God just helping them to get through their problems so that they can get back to life on their own terms.

And James says that such a person is double-minded, two-faced in a way. They've got one foot in God's camp when we need it, but actually, largely, our weight is living life on our own terms.

James says, that's not faith. That's superstition. That's falsehood. Friends, James says that the wisdom that God gives, the wisdom that comes from above, the wisdom that actually grows and matures us through the trials and the challenges, isn't something that you just pick up by crying out to God in a moment of difficulty or reading in a book or listening to a podcast.

It's developed and grown within you from walking with God and coming to Him and entrusting yourself to the one who is utterly trustworthy.

[34 : 49] And so, friends, this week, you are going to face some trial. Maybe today, you are going to face some trial. Maybe this week, you are going to face some trial that's going to be so difficult, you are going to be left confused and unsure how to respond.

How are you going to respond? Are you going to look within yourself and think, what doesn't kill me only makes me stronger? Are you going to tell yourself just to keep calm and carry on? Are you going to numb yourself by binging on social media and food and Netflix?

Are you going to go to the gym and just work twice as hard? Or are you going to consider what God wants to do and take comfort from the God who is utterly trustworthy, the God who gave himself for you and will you draw strength from him knowing that if you draw near to him, he will give you the wisdom and the grace.

He will give you himself to navigate these trials but to grow and to mature you. friends, will you consider it all joy when you face trials of many kinds knowing that God is at work in you to make you a wise and mature person?

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the practicality of James. God, thank you for the testimony of James, this humble pastor who had to deal with his own doubts, his own concerns, and yet came to be convinced that you, Jesus, really are who you said you are, the Lord of glory, the glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

[36 : 31] Father, James is so real, it's almost like he reads our mail, he knows what's going on in our life. It's amazing to think that this book written 2,000 years ago can speak to our own lives so clearly.

Father, I pray for us as a church and I pray for us individually this morning. many of us here, God, are facing trials, difficulties, challenges.

God, won't you give us the grace to turn to you, to invite you in, to come to you, to yield ourselves to you, and to let you guide us through the trials and to do your work in us.

God, you promise that you won't just deliver us, but actually you'll work in us through the trials, and I pray that that'll be true. God, this morning, some of us, God, it's hard to trust you.

We are wrapped with concerns, wrapped with fears. It feels, God, like letting go of the reins of our life is so scary. God, I pray, won't you, Holy Spirit, give us faith?

[37 : 37] Won't you help us this morning to open up our hands and to trust you, knowing, God, that you are utterly trustworthy, knowing, God, that you generously give of yourself your grace.

God, won't you help us, I pray. Friends, maybe you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, not a follower of Jesus.

God's word to us this morning is not just when difficulty comes, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. It's an invitation to come and know him, to entrust your life to his hands.

What are you trusting? Who are you trusting? Where are you turning when the trials and challenges come? Jesus Christ, who was the same Christ who was alive and real to James, is alive and real today.

And he's offering an invitation for you to come and entrust your life into his hands, to surrender, to yield yourself to him. He is so good.

[38 : 53] He is so gracious. He is so faithful. He won't take advantage of you. He will graciously walk with you. Friends, if you're not a Christian this morning, why don't you come to him?

Why don't you acknowledge that you've so often done life in your own terms? Come and let him have his way in your life. Let him be your Lord and your king. Come and surrender to him.

Christ, I pray that in our church you will help us to be a steadfast church. Lord, I pray for the many young adults in our church. I pray for the youth, God, the teenagers, the high schoolers, the university students, the fresh graduates.

God, I pray that you will give us a faith that is steadfast, that in 30, 40, and 50 years' time, we will still be following you, still trusting you, that we will be wise and mature men and women because our faith is steadfast, rock solid, that the roots of our faith have gone deep into you.

God, I pray do that in our hearts. In your good and gracious name we pray. Amen.