**The Testing of Your Faith**

**The Word**

Read together James 1:1-4 and 12-18

**The Big Idea**

James gives us a lens through which to view our trials that can help us approach our trials with joy and enable trials to do the good work God intends for us.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. Consider the idea that what is being tested in a trial is not primarily your patience, character, willpower, etc., but rather your faith. How would that change how you approach trials in your own life?

2. To what extent does the lens of eternity factor into your approach to trials in life? How specifically might you make that a more powerful lens moving forward?

3. On Sunday it was argued that God not only allows trials but actually brings trials. If someone asked you, “What is the source of painful experiences in our lives?” How would you answer? God? Satan? Life? All the above? How would you defend your thoughts with Scriptural examples?

4. Take some time to share any trials you are currently going through (and if you can, identify the temptation within that trial), and spend some time praying for each other.

**Digging Deeper**

Read together 1 Peter 1:3-7 and Romans 5:1-5. Note as many similarities as you can find between these passages and the James passage. And what new ideas do these passages contribute to our thoughts about trials?

**Sermon Outline**

I. James gives us a lens through which to view our trials

 A. He refers to “various” trials of all kinds

 B. He calls us to consider it “pure joy”

1. “Joy”: Not that joy is the only thing we experience in trials, but it is something we can experience.

2. “Consider”: it’s all about our mindset/perspective/the lens through which we view our trials

a. Two people can go through similar trials and come out the other side very different (one bitter, angry, anxious, withdrawn and the other humble, compassionate, trusting, loving) based on the lens they bring

b. “Those who have a 'why' to live can bear with almost any 'how.’ Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedom—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances.” - Victor Frankl

II. The lens of maturity (v. 2-4)

A. God’s desire is to form us into image bearers who are mature/whole/complete

- Isaiah 61:3: You will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his glory

B. Trials test our faith

1. Test = “to try to learn the nature or character of something by submitting it to thorough and extensive testing”

2. What is being tested is not primarily our patience, character, or willpower, but rather our faith. The essential question in any trial is NOT “do I have what it takes” BUT “will I continue to trust God.”

3. Faith tends not to grow in seasons of comfort and is. Like a tree whose roots grow deeper during the droughts.

 C. Tested faith produces perseverance/steadfastness

1. This word means the ability to hold up under a heavy weight for a long time

2. When your faith is tested, and you pass through the fire, come out clinging to God, You develop perseverance = “My God will never leave me or forsake, so I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

III. The lens of eternity (v. 12)

 A. The crown of life would probably evoke images of the Olympic games

1. The gift: The crown of life

a. This is a metaphor for the gift of eternal life itself

b. Fullness of life in the new heavens and new earth reigning with Jesus forever

 c. And this gift is only given to those whose faith has stood the test.

2. The giver: Our Lord’s approval, pleasure, “well done, faithful servant”

a. 1 Peter 1:7: We will actually receive glory and praise at the coming of Jesus.

b. For “those who love him” nothing could be more joy-producing than to have his gaze of pride, approval, praise, and delight for all eternity.

c. And what pleases him is not perfection but a faith that has been tested.

IV. The lens of God’s love (v. 13-18)

A. Every trial carries with it temptations

B. One of the greatest temptations in trials is to begin to doubt God’s love and good intentions towards us

 1. If God actually brings trials our way, then maybe he is out to harm us

2. This is precisely what Satan convinced Adam and Eve of. He turned the trial (a tree in the middle of the garden) into a temptation (God is withholding good things from you because he doesn’t love you and you can’t trust him)

C. James wants to be perfectly clear on this. God never tempts us to evil. He is never out for our spiritual harm.

1. Temptation comes from within from our own sinful desires (v. 14-15)

2. God is always only perfect goodness with good intentions towards you

 a. He is never tempted by evil and will never tempt you to evil (v. 13)

b. He is the father of lights who has no variation or shadow within himself and within his intentions towards you (v. 17)

c. He is constantly giving his children good gifts from heaven. In fact, every good thing you have in your life comes from him (v. 17)

D. The most important thing some of us need to hear in trials is this: God is only always for you. He is not out to harm you or mess with you. He desires good things for you and is at work in this trial not for your harm but for your good (= to make you more like his Son, Jesus).