

Sermon Series: Resilient Faith: Standing Strong in the Midst of Suffering
To be used with: Session Three: Enduring Faith
Sermon Title Possibilities:
 What to Do to Endure
 Putting the “Do” in “Endurance”
Scripture: James 1:2-12

Connection To Unit Theme: *Resilient Faith: Standing Strong in the Midst of Suffering* is a six session study from the book of 1 Peter. These theme-based sermon outlines will reinforce the main point of each small group session but with a different Scripture passage. This will allow you as the pastor to expand upon what small groups are discussing without taking all the small group leader’s talking points.

Session 3 of *Resilient Faith* is called “Enduring Faith.” The Point is “Trust God in Every Circumstance.”

This sermon outline is based on writings from James, the Lord's brother, who became a believer after the resurrection, and became leader of the church at Jerusalem. He wrote to Jewish believers that were dispersed from their homeland because of persecution against the church. These were people going through intense suffering because of their nationality and their faith. They would often get it from both sides: Jew-haters and Christian-haters.

Introduction:

Life isn’t fair. Bad things happen to good people. This world is not our friend to help us get to know God. In fact, there are few things in this world that adhere to God’s standards. And when we try to live lives that please Him, we incur plenty of opposition. In fact, we are warned in Scripture, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12 NKJV).

In December, 2013, outspoken Christian Phil Robertson of the popular show *Duck Dynasty* drew fire for sharing his biblical views concerning homosexuality as a sin. The A&E Television Network, producers of *Duck Dynasty*, briefly suspended him from filming because of his comments, even though they were shared in a separate magazine article having nothing to do with the show or their network.

So how are we to respond when we are criticized simply for saying or doing exactly what the Bible says we are to say or do? It’s tempting to just give up. But God’s Word offers some promises to those who hang in there. Let’s look at those promises today.

[Read James 2:2-12]

James wrote to Jewish Christians who were suffering because of their nationality and their faith. The more they endeavored to live for Christ, the more trouble they encountered. James wrote to encourage them to remain faithful and to endure. In the verses 2-12 he gives four essentials for endurance and victory through trials. Each phrase starts with a verb. So this passage is going to tell us what to do to endure.

1. Count – Have a Joyful Attitude (vs. 2)

James affirms the fact that trials will certainly come. He writes, “**When** you fall into trials...” Not *if*, but when! It will happen. These “various” trials will be many and varied in content, duration, and source. They will come from every direction. The Lord Jesus said, “I have told you

these things so that in Me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world” (John 16:33 HCSB).

In the midst of these trials, James encourages us to choose a joyful attitude. How can we do that when being persecuted? Essentially, we choose to live for what matters the most. “Count” in verse 2 means to evaluate or reckon something to be so. The trial itself is not joy; but the end result will be joyful victory. We are told that Jesus endured the cross “for the joy that was set before Him” (Hebrews 12:2). He chose to look ahead to the end result of His trials. When the Apostle Paul lists what he discarded and what he gained in Philippians 3:4-9, it is clear that he chose to live for the things that matter most for eternity, and not for the temporary things of this life. What we have that matters can never be taken away! Rejoice in that fact, and choose a joyful attitude even in the midst of trials, knowing that only temporary things can be lost.

2. Know – Have an Understanding Mind (vs. 3)

Faith is always tested. A faith that cannot endure testing cannot be trusted. This testing works for our good, to strengthen our faith. Imagine your faith as a muscle, like the bicep in your upper arm. The more stress and exercise given to a muscle, the stronger it becomes, because of testing and use. It is the same principle at work with our faith. As we exercise our “faith muscle” by trusting God through trials, our faith becomes stronger.

God allows testing to produce in us patience, endurance, and the ability to keep going when things are tough. “Not only that, but we also rejoice in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope” (Romans 5:3-4 NKJV). When we understand this, we can face trials with the assurance that nothing in this life is wasted, as we trust God to use it for our benefit and His glory.

Application: Think about the teachers you had in high school and college, and the kinds of tests they gave. There were some teachers who seemed to give tests designed to weed you out, trip you up, and bring you down. They wanted to test you to figure out what you didn’t know. But there were other teachers—the better teachers—who tested in order to reinforce what you did know. Those are the kinds of tests God gives us. He doesn’t test us in order to make us flunk out. His tests will always remind us of His love, His character, and His provision. He wants us to pass so that everything we already know about Him will be reinforced.

3. Let – Have a Surrendered Will (vs. 4,9-12)

God’s goal for our lives is maturity. This maturity is a process that begins with salvation (God’s work for us), continues with sanctification (God’s work in us), and further progresses with service (God’s work through us). James describes this mature person as “perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (vs. 4). This is the believer who is strong and enduring by faith.

But God cannot work this kind of faith in us without our consent! He cannot build our character without our cooperation. Our part of the work is to surrender to His will and trust Him completely. Faith grows as we trust God in every circumstance, knowing that even when we cannot see the hand of God at work, we can trust His heart of love for us. Surrendering our will to His is like signing a blank check for our lives and presenting it to God, allowing Him to fill in the date, amount, and beneficiary. That is faith!

4. Ask – Have a Believing Heart (vs. 5-8)

In the midst of trials, we are encouraged to ask for what we need to endure in faith. James specifically mentions wisdom. Wisdom is the right application of knowledge. Intellectually we

probably already know these truths about faith and endurance. But wisdom is how we can take that knowledge and live on it when the clouds gather and the bottom falls out.

The maturing believer under trials will ask in faith, trusting that God will hear and answer according to His will and in His perfect timing. We are not to be tossed about with doubts, but confident in the character and love of our God, who sees and controls everything, even our trials.

Closing:

You may be facing some trials right now. The truth is, if you aren't, you either have recently, or you are about to. That's one of the promises of the Christian life we aren't as excited about.

[Include a story of a personal trial as appropriate, or draw the lessons from the writer of this outline:

At the time of this writing, my family and I are enduring a great spiritual trial, the greatest we have encountered in our lives. It seems as if everything we have trusted in and believed in has betrayed us and left us literally homeless and jobless. People we loved and trusted betrayed us. Everything I have lived and preached and taught has been called into question. And yet, God has been faithful. We are being reminded that our trust is ultimately to be in Him alone, and not in churches, budgets, bank accounts, or people. He is ultimately and intimately in control of our lives and the events that pass through them. Our responsibility is to trust Him completely, and to walk with Him closely.]

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:6-7 NKJV).

Michael Stover is a graduate of Union University and Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. He has over twenty years of experience in local church ministry, as well as camp ministry and leading training conferences for Sunday School and VBS. He enjoys writing, computers, hunting, and fishing. Michael lives in Jonesborough, Tennessee with his wife Becky and four of their five children.