

Season 2, Episode 2: James: Grace that shapes Trials & Temptations (1:2-18)

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Sarah: Hello, everyone, and welcome to Two Sisters and a cup of Tea. My name is Sarah and I live in the UK and my sister is Felicity and she lives in the US.

Felicity: Hi, everyone. It's great to be here, Sarah. I feel excited, as always.

Sarah: I'm always excited, actually. Although I was a little tired a minute ago and I feel like ready to go.

Felicity: Because you've had a bite of a biscuit? I think I have.

Sarah: I've got an American style biscuit today.

Felicity: Interesting. What would that be? A cookie? Would you call it a cookie?

Sarah: Yes, we'd call it a cookie. So me and the kids baked, we used up our leftover Easter egg to bake some cookies, and we actually put Easter eggs, like little ones, in the middle of the cookies before they went.

Felicity: Oh, nice. Yeah, that does sound good. I actually have a classic chocolate finger here, which I feel like that is something that will not translate in the transatlantic way. I have never seen chocolate finger biscuits in America, but thanks to you, Sarah, your package of tea and biscuit joy, I'm very grateful for this chocolate thing. Actually, as I'm speaking, I'm smelling the waft of my cup of tea, which is an interesting one because the waft yeah, you sent me as well as chocolate finger biscuits, you also sent me a Yorkshire tea, toast and jam flavor.

Sarah: So what does it smell like? Start with that.

Felicity: Well, I mean, it actually does smell like totten JAMA. That strawberry jam. Kind of nice, but interestingly. That doesn't make me want to pick a cup.

Sarah: Why not?

Felicity: I do actually have a backup cup of tea with me because I'm fairly skeptical as to whether I'm going to like it. I mean, for a start, like, will I suppose to put milk in it? You wouldn't put milk in jam? No.

Sarah: And should you drink it alongside actual taste in jam as well?

Felicity: Yeah. I mean it's. Okay. It doesn't taste like tasting jam.

Sarah: Do you feel like you want to drink it or do you feel like the backup is the best option? Clown on?

Felicity: Yeah, actually it is better than I thought it would be. I'm not sure I would be recommending it to people, but maybe I'll drink both. One sip of one or the other.

Sarah: I sent you a whole box, so you've got to get to it.

Felicity: It's going to be one of those that will be sitting in our cupboard for a fair amount of time anyway. Should we get into James?

Sarah: Yes. So we're starting James chapter one today and we just thought it would be helpful to just outline what we're not doing on this podcast before we get stuck into what we are doing, if that makes sense. So I think the first and most important thing to say is that we are not experts and we feel very aware of that as we read James and as we study it for ourselves. I feel quite nervous, actually, because this is a really powerful book and all the books of the Bible are powerful, but this feels very hard. And we just want to say from the outset, we're not experts, we're just beginning the conversation between one another and we hope this will be a great beginner for everyone else listening. And that's why we've got the questions and the show notes to carry on your conversations after our chat.

Felicity: Yeah, and I mean, we love aiming for 20 minutes episodes, and in 20 minutes, we definitely cannot say all there is to be said about 18 versus James in our conversations before we've spent much longer talking about just two verses. So we really are thinking this is a starting point. And that's why we've really been encouraging you to ask someone else to listen along, read it with someone else. And actually, even if you're not going to, if that friend or person at church is not going to listen along or read along, just be speaking to other people about what you're hearing and thinking and how the Lord is doing work in your heart, as I'm sure he will be. Because we have been finding that God is definitely doing business with our hearts through James, isn't he? It's been a wonderful thing, but also, it is big, what James is saying.

Sarah: We're going to get stuck into James and we're both reading from the NIV version, just so people know what version we're reading from. So would you like to read it? For sure.

Felicity: Absolutely. Okay, here we go. So this is James, chapter one, verse two, and we're going to go through to 18. Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance, that perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. 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. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double minded and unstable in all they do. Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position, but the rich should take pride in their humiliation, since they will pass away like a wild flower. But the sun arises 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. 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. When tempted, no one should say, God is tempting me, for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone. But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death. Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruit of all he created. Notice it again. I love how he says, my dear brothers and sisters throughout this whole letter. It's so pastoral, isn't it? He's so loving towards the people he's.

Sarah: Speaking to and it's so important that, isn't it? Because actually he kicks off the letter with such a big command, doesn't he, to consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds. So this isn't just if you face trials, this is whenever you face trials of many kinds. He's assuming that you will be going through different kinds of trials in your life and wow, it's a really big man, this is crazy language to consider trials joy unless we start to see it from God's perspective and that's what he starts to unpack for the rest of.

Felicity: Yes, I think that's right. It's helpful, the word consider, because that is like a deliberate, like really deliberately think like this. It doesn't come naturally to us to think joyfully amidst trials. And as you say, the only way we would get that is to see as he shows us the logic of what God is doing through those trials. I think it's worth saying that these trials are literally anything. So there's no kind of gauge of trial in this. In a sense. You don't have to be in the greatest suffering category. But a trial can literally. I think in James's terms. Literally mean just whenever we're facing temptation not to go the Jesus way. Like not to behave according to who we are in Christ. There are trials of so many different sorts and I think in this time we are just coming out of this kind of pandemic kind of time. There have been numerous sorts of trials that people have been going through and so in all of those trials, consider it pure joy.

Sarah: Yeah. And how can we consider it joy, he says, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance, that perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete. And I think that's the only reason we could ever consider something

enjoy, isn't it? If there's a bigger game, there's a bigger picture than our immediate situation. And that is what James is saying to his readers, that actually your trials are part of a bigger picture that is making you mature and complete in Christ and that is a precious thing. And so you can start to well, it's interesting because he then goes on to say if you lack wisdom and of course, actually, who doesn't lack wisdom to see trials that way? I look at it back over the last year and actually as I've been sitting in this passage in James for the last month, even my prayers have become more and more, lord, help me to see our trials your way so that I can see the perseverance, I can see the precious nature of what you're doing in my heart. That is only asking for God's wisdom to see that, isn't it? To see his perspective.

Felicity: I think then, as we see it from his perspective, seeing that it's so desirable to be mature and complete, because ultimately that's the process of sanctification, isn't it? Which ultimately ends in us being in God's presence as we're made more holy, made more like Jesus. I heard someone talk about it as being fitted out for God's presence and I just thought that was such a great way of putting it. So the trials are the means by which God is progressively sanctifying us and in that we give ourselves over to that process. That is like almost kind of embracing the trials. Not that we would seek them out, not that we would look for suffering, but knowing that trials will come when they come. Actually trust that God is at work through that. And as you say, we have the God who gives generously in order to give us wisdom.

Sarah: You can't leaning into them, isn't it? Because we know what they are producing in us. And I guess that's the opposite of the person who he then talks about, the person who's doubleminded and who doubts. Now, this isn't just kind of like a doubt on a whim, this is like considered doubt of leaving out, I guess, and thinking actually I'm just going to have my foot in another camp, things are hard and I'm going to trust in my money or I'm going to trust in my security, I'm going to trust in something else. So kind of leaning out of God's promises rather than leaning in.

Felicity: Yeah, or trying to be in both places at once. It's just straddling or hedging your bets kind of idea. And I think that happens throughout James, isn't it? This double mindedness comes up again and again. That seems to be one of our greatest kind of dangers is to be doubleminded and so he then gives an.

Sarah: Example of that straight away, doesn't he? Actually goes from the double mindedness to talking about riches, those in humble circumstances and those in rich circumstances and actually that is something that can cause us very easily to be double minded, isn't it? Yeah that is something that we think that we can maybe rely on that in times of trial yeah and I.

Felicity: Think so then he says verse nine believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position and that's part of the mindset, isn't it? The kind of seeing things from God's perspective like we have a high position because we are in Christ and that's not dependent upon whether we're poor or we're rich in some ways and that's true throughout the Bible the riches are often a temptation it's hard if you've got riches it's hard. I think. To be wholeheartedly dependent on Jesus or to know that we need to be dependent on Him.

Sarah: And I think that's why it's so helpful I don't know whether you found this but flitty but I found it so helpful that James links trials and temptations together because actually when we do go through trials we are tempted to doubt God we are tempted to think, Lord, what's going on here? I do not understand this and I'm tempted to doubt his character and doubt his goodness in that situation so I just think it's so helpful that he's kind of like run that through already for us to see the process of where we naturally might go and then he assures us of God's character through that, doesn't he?

Felicity: Yeah and assures us of the end game I love Him. Verse twelve this kind of blessed is the one who perseveres or is steadfast under trial because that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love isn't that just a glorious promise? And then he says it again in verse 18 I think he chose to give us birth through the word of truth that we might be a kind of first roots of all he's created and that is the end game of what's going on and then the temptations and the trials that lead us to feel the temptations all the more I think that is where the danger points are but this crown of life is what's being held out and it's not just being held out it has actually been given to us. Hasn't

it? He has given us birth through the word of truth so in Christ we have this life that he's talking about but now we face trials and in that we face temptation and it's a dangerous place to be it's a dangerous.

Sarah: Place to be but we are totally secure in Him, aren't we? Exactly and that crown has been given to us and that the word of street has been given to us. And it's very like, I don't know whether you noticed the kind of giving birth language with sin back in verse 14:15, language of sin dealing to death. And then again in verse 18 when he talks about he chose to give us birth through the word of trees. There's two different birth stories going on there, isn't there? One leads to death and one leads to life. And we are wholly secure for everyone who is trusting in Jesus. As we said last week, he's writing to people he assumes have already understood the Gospel that Jesus died for their sins. And yeah, we're completely secure in Him as we see that birth, which is totally different to the birth.

Felicity: That's so helpful, Sarah. That's so helpful. And I think then in that like coming to verses 16 to 18, we get this glorious picture of God Himself, don't we? And his character. I love this Father of the heavens who does not change. Like he is not like the shifting shadows. He's not the one who's going to be blown and tossed by the wind. Like in verse six, there is nothing double minded about God as he looks at us and loves us and in his steadfastness he chose to give us birth. Like it's not dependent on us, it's dependent upon Him. And that praise God, because I am like shifting left, right and center. So it's really helpful to see that he's got me in his steadfastness.

Sarah: And I guess do you think then that's where the verse twelve it says, blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life. Persevering then looks like keeping your eyes fixed on who God is and what he's already done for us, as it then goes on to say because I think it's very easy, I don't know about you, but it's very easy to think just not persevere enough. Or I feel like I may be that darting person over here and it's very easy to look inwards in my trials rather than look to the steadfast nature of God and his salvation.

Felicity: Yeah, and I think that is the thing. And we'll see it as we go through James and that's why it's really helpful to read James as a whole as you get kind of dig into one passage. But we see it later on in chapter four, this idea that essentially as we see our failure to persevere, our failure to not be double minded, so we fall back on the unchanging grace of God and he lifts us up. So the means by which people persevere is through God and his steadfast grace and his love towards us. But we need to sort of almost I think that James is like exposing us and it's a gracious thing to expose us because then we see God more clearly and we see ourselves more clearly and in that we then fall back on the God who chose to give us birth through the word of truth.

Sarah: So where did the rubber hit the road then for you? As you've been sitting in this passage over the last few weeks, as we've been preparing for this, where have you seen the impact on your heart?

Felicity: I think this mindset of beginning, and I really do think just beginning to consider it pure joy, these trials. I think previously well, I wouldn't have said this. I think maybe in practice I was maybe trying to dodge trials or just questioning when trials came my way again. Really I thought we were done. I'm trialed out like I don't need anymore. But I think this has really helped me to just be in the trial and look for what God is doing in that and praise Him even that this is growing me in perseverance and that's a gift rather than something I just need to grin and bear it. But actually he is at work through it, so there's a kind of a purposefulness to it. Yeah. What about you, Sarah?

Sarah: Yeah, I think similarly, I think my prayer really has been one of I feel like I'm having a daily prayer of lord, show me wisdom, give me wisdom here to see things from your perspective. And I think he's answering that prayer like I generally think I am starting to see situations in a different perspective, in a different light and I'm so thankful for that. And I think I'm just astounded that James doesn't dodge the hard stuff from the first word he is saying to his brother and sisters speaks with something. It's just so hard, isn't it? And it's so everydayness. This is what we all go through and he's right there saying how the gospel impacts life under trials and I think that's just been so good to see the power of that. He's not dodging, this isn't out there. This is really speaking to the heart. It's speaking to me right now and that's what I've needed and so I'm just really thankful for that.

Felicity: Yeah. Do you want to pray that for us all that we would have that mindset that you're speaking of?

Sarah: Yeah. Lovely. That's great. Heavenly Father, we just thank you so much that you are the Father of heavenly lights who does not change. Thank you that you are Steadfast. Thank you that you have given us everything that we need and we thank you so much that we can ask you for wisdom so that we would see our trials in light of Your good nature, in light of Your good plan and purposes, for our hearts and for our lives. We thank you so much that there is a bigger picture to our trials and so we pray today. Lord, please would you help us, please give us wisdom to see our trials in light of the gospel. And please would you help us to draw closer to you as we begin to see them lay in that light. We pray this for your glory, Lord. Amen.

Felicity: Amen. Thanks, Sarah. I mean, it's got to be said that my toast and tea tea is still quite full, and my Yorkshire tea has been drunk.

Sarah: I'm so disappointed. I should have kept you know, I should have opened the box and kept a tea bag so we could have shared it together.

Felicity: Well, that's true. That is true. I mean, I'll give it another go. I'll offer it to others.

Sarah: Yeah, I'll give it another go by giving it to others. Okay, we need to go by the time it just got already.

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