

## ***“Weathering the Storms of Life—Building Endurance, Discovering Joy”***

I almost feel kind of stupid saying it, but our part of the country is known for some pretty harsh storms. Our infamous ice storms, or raging thunderstorms, an occasional snow storm, and of course the deadly tornados that rip through this area. There are physical storms that blow through leaving all kinds of damage in their wake. And there are other kinds of storms we face in life that are not weather-related.

Here are some other storms that have hit in the lives of people I know in the last 12 months. Job losses. Death of a spouse. 2 suicides of coworkers. Miscarriages. Theft. Beatings. False accusations. Spouses walking out. Children running away from home. Cancer diagnoses. Storms come in lots of different ways. They can alter the course of our lives, they can test our faith, they can make us wonder where God is. They can make us doubt that God is even real.

The storms are real; the trials we face are very real. How do we face them? Because how we face them, how we prepare for them, makes all the difference. You know it's true about weather-related storms. If a tornado is coming and you've prepared by having a plan, a place to go and you know how to get there, it may mean the difference between life and death. Just like it's a good thing, a smart thing, a wise thing to prepare for weather-related storms, it's good, and smart and wise to prepare for life-storms. Preparing for them, won't keep them from happening. Preparing means you will survive them and come out the other side stronger.

Let's dive it by looking a key verse about tests and trials—about storms. This comes from James 1:2-4. **“My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, <sup>3</sup>because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; <sup>4</sup>and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing” (NRSV).**

There are several key things mentioned in here. There's this big one—**joy**. It says, “Consider it nothing but joy.” Then there's something in this verse about **trials**—the storms of life, when your faith gets tested. James mentions **endurance** twice in there. And then there's something about being **complete** or mature, lacking nothing.

If you're looking at this for the first time, you just might be thinking, “I don't know about this! Filled with joy over the trials and tragedies and storms that come into my life. Joyful about losing a job? Joyful about a death. About a loss? Come on!”

The truth is that if I asked you, how many of you, right now, are going through one of the most difficult trials of your life, we'd be shocked at how many people would stand. Some people in this room right now are in the middle of it. They are in the middle of a storm. And they are afraid for their lives.

And maybe you came today because you need help to know how to make it through the storm that's hitting you right now. The good news is there are ways. God's given us resources and this text has a lot to teach us. But we're not going to start with how to be joyful about the storms. We're actually going to start at the bottom and work backwards. It will make more sense.

**Let's start with the concept of endurance.** Back in World War II, Hitler and the Germans were dropping tons and tons of bombs on Great Britain, day in and day out, month after month. Towns and cities were leveled. The skies were blacked with And it was said that so many bombs were falling that often the midday sky looked black. Churchill sent word to the Germans: “We will endure! You'll never see a white flag fly over Britain.”

In fact, in one of his famous talks he said, “We will fight on the seas and on the oceans. We will fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air. We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches. We shall fight on the landing grounds. We shall fight in the fields and in the streets. We shall fight in the hills, and we will never, ever surrender!” Those words would be Hitler's worst nightmare.

Words like that send a chill down an adversary's spine. It's virtually impossible to conquer a nation filled with people who just won't quit. Can you see the power, then, in this thing called endurance?

If you can get an enduring spirit going in your own life, if you can get it in an army or in a society or in a whole country, adversaries beware. There is power in this thing called endurance. Bill Hybels calls endurance

the crown jewel of character traits. When you have it in your life, it works for you in life. It sends a signal out to other people. It sends chills through your adversaries, which is why it's important to develop it in our lives. You see the adversaries in our lives are often not people. Most of the time they are circumstances that test us and endurance in the face of those will give you what it takes to overcome.

I try to teach endurance to my daughters. When they're trying to do something new or difficult and it's not working for them, they want to cry and get angry and sometimes give up. I remember Zoe learning to ride a bike a few years ago. It was tough. We worked and worked and I'd tell her not to give up. Lots of skinned knees and elbows and tears. "Don't give up, you can do this! I promise I'll be here and if you keep at it, you'll be riding a bike on your own and you will love it. Hang in there it's worth it." And man there's nothing like watching one of your kids succeed after they've tried and endured.

Learning to play piano is another place where Janet and I have tried to teach her endurance. One day about year ago she was getting so frustrated and ticked off and just being a big pain. I gave her her very first full-fledged lecture. I sat her down and said something like, "Zoe, we give you lots of choices in life, but this is not an option. You will learn to play the piano. You will take lessons. But more importantly this is about life. There are things in life that you will have to face and you can't walk away from them. You get to choose what kind of person you will be and it starts now. Are you going to be quitter and drop everything when it gets a little bit difficult, or are you going to be the kind of person who sticks with it, works at it, endures through hard stuff and comes out the other side stronger. We can make you learn to play the piano, but you have to choose what kind of a person you will be and it starts now."

What do you think? Was that a good lecture?! I was pretty proud of myself! But it's true for all of us! Anything worth having, any challenge worth achieving, anything great you ever intend to do for God or anybody else in life will require endurance. It's something we need to get inside of us. You've got to have endurance in a marriage. You need it when you're building a business. You need it when you're building a church. You need endurance when you are raising children, or caring for parents. You need endurance when you're facing an illness. Endurance a life-critical trait. It's a faith-critical trait.

This scripture is telling us we're complete when we develop endurance. That endurance makes our faith in God rock-solid. No matter what life throws at you, you can handle it because you have endurance.

Let's take it a little further, because in James when you have endurance you are complete. When you reach the point in life and spiritual development when you can honestly say, "there is nothing this life can throw at me anymore that will cause me to defect from my commitment to God. God has proven himself to me so many times. My trust in him is so rock-solid, nothing or no one could ever get me to bail on God again."

One of my very best friends is going through the darkest time of his life right now. And he's shared with me that this has been like an earthquake in his world, but it has not shaken his faith. You see, he's weathered other storms and seen how God has been faithful, he's made it through, and as painful as what he's going through right now, he knows he will make it through.

When you have that kind of spiritual endurance secured in your heart, it will sustain you through the darkest nights. It will sustain you through the scariest storms. It will sustain you through the most devastating losses, which is why James says, "If you have that, you're complete. You're ready for whatever life throws at you."

**But how do you get that kind of endurance?** How do you acquire it? Well, that's where storms come in. Remember, we're working backwards. That's where storms come in. It would be nice if you could go on line to [charactertraits.com](http://charactertraits.com) and order some endurance. Or get some endurance by watching a video, or reading a book. Or following somebody on Twitter. It would be great if you could build endurance by sitting in church every Sunday, or being here every Wednesday for stuff. It doesn't work that way. Endurance comes the way most things of value come—the hard way, the really hard way.

James is saying, "Spiritual fortitude, spiritual endurance, only comes from having been neck-deep in heartache and heartbreak enough times to have learned beyond the shadow of a doubt that God can still be

trusted. His promises are true. His presence is real. His love is still there.” Storms create endurance for other storms. And this endurance in your life equips you to help somebody else endure.

Maybe you've seen this in somebody before--this endurance. I sure have. They're the ones who have weathered storms in life and allowed God to guide them through and when they face other trials, they move through them with strength because they know, they know for sure, that God got them through previous trials and hardships and God will get them through whatever it is that they're facing now. You know these people when you meet them because they have a peace and calm in the middle of the trials of life.

When you realize how important it is to go through life with that endurance, and when you realize that trials tend to produce that kind of battle-hardened endurance, then you see trials from a little different perspective. You'll see them, yes, as an interruption of your life, but you'll also begin to see them as the stuff from which character is formed and the stuff from which God is going to prove himself to be great, yet again. And you'll say somehow, some way, “God is going to get bigger in me as I walk through this additional test.” And you'll begin to see tests as allies and not just enemies.

Let's come at this from a different angle for a minute by looking at a guy in the Old Testament named Job. Now, you need to know that there are parts of the book of Job that I don't get; that don't make sense to me. But I do get the picture of Job's endurance. Job's story is stormy. In a matter of minutes, Job is informed that all of his livestock have been stolen or killed. That's his livelihood, his life savings. In the process his workers, and servants (some of them friends of his) were killed by local raiding parties. Then he gets word that all of his children were killed in a freak accident when their house collapsed on them. All of them...dead.

And if that weren't bad enough, shortly thereafter, he was covered with boils in a kind of skin disease, so he suffered unimaginably, day and night. And to make matters even worse the Scripture says, one night, his wife comes up to him and whispers in his ear, “If I were you, I would curse God and die.” Words of encouragement from a loving spouse—but do you know why she said it? She was like, “A human heart and body can take no more than you've taken, Job. Just end it all.”

But, Job does not curse God and die. Job stays in there, he endures. He's human, so he wrestles with the discouragement of it all. And he wrestles with, “How did God allow it, and why?” And some of his friends push him hard on that one. But at the end of the day, he hangs in there and he passes the test and he says those famous words, **“I know that my Redeemer lives” (Job 19:25)**. I'm not bailing out.

And after that horrendous series of storms, Job finds himself not just having survived that nightmare, but having grown through it. He finds himself out on the other side, closer to God, deeper in faith, and more ready than ever to trust God in everything. You see, I think Job would be the perfect person to walk with you or me through a trial this week because he's been there. And people who have been there and survived the storm, those people have a little different way about them, don't they? I notice this about people who have been through severe times of testing, and they've come out the other side with their faith intact. I notice that these people have an enormous capacity for empathy.

Sometimes when I'm going through a difficult time, someone comes up to me to help me and I can see it in their eyes. I can hear it in their tone of voice. I can sense it, that they're battle tested. They've been through some deep stuff. And they understand what happens when you get weak at the knees, and you don't know if you can weather the storms. People like Mike and Bernice Robinson. When they come up alongside of you there's something special about that. They've been through it. They've been through all kinds of difficulties. And that has made them wise about seeing when other people are going through something. It's made them wise about knowing what to do and say.

These are the kinds of people who don't get simplistic and start throwing theological answers around. “Well, here's what God's up to in this.” “Here's what God's up to.” Most of these people, they've been through it. They come up and they say, “I don't know why God would allow this or that. I don't have a lot of answers, but I'm here and I'm sorry. And if there's any way I can serve you, just call me. Count me in. I'll serve.”

These are the ones, when the time is right, they'll say gently, “You know, this will make sense to you later. God still cares.” These are the people who, at the right times say, “God is going to start to mend your

broken heart someday soon, and he'll put the pieces back together. And you'll be OK someday. You will be back to full strength someday. That's what God does."

People like that are priceless. They have a completeness. And that only comes through storms. You show me someone whose heart has been broken in half, who has had a professional setback, who has had a marriage problem or separation or divorce or something like that; you show me someone who has lost a loved one in a tragic accident and if they weather that storm and have that endurance and they have that completion, then when they come up alongside, there is a way about them and there's something about them that is truly powerful.

Now, we come to the final question. **Can I really face the storms fo life with joy?** So knowing all of this, is it possible that we could grow to the point someday where we would say, when a new storm comes into our life, "I will consider it joy to face this trial, this test, not because I like the circumstances of the trial, not because I like hearing bad news, not because I like having an employment door slam shut or getting a pink slip on my desk. I don't like any of the circumstances. I just know what it can produce in me. I know I'll never become a person of deep faith and overwhelming empathy if I'm always sailing in calm waters."

When a trial comes into your life, you might reflexively go, "Oh, God. Please, no. That's not what I wanted right now." But you can change that reflex reaction to a more reflective action where you say, "OK, God. I realize I just got signed up for another round of spiritual graduate school. I realize I just got signed up for another endurance class. I guess I just got signed up for an opportunity to show my faith in you and for my heart to be softened and for my level of empathizing to go up. And with your help, I will weather this storm and I will come out the other side a better man, a better woman."

But let me remind you again. If you are in the midst of a storm, a difficult time, don't give up. Consider it a chance to hone your endurance. When you have spiritual endurance, you're complete. You can take whatever life throws at you.

**"My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, <sup>3</sup>because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; <sup>4</sup>and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing" (NRSV).**

I've got to stop here today, but we're going to pick this back up next week as we talk about the times when we stand in the winner's circle and the times we stand in the losers circle and what we can learn from both places as our faith is tested.

And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

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