

Dr. David Bauer, Inductive Bible Study, Lecture 16, James 1:1-4

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This is Dr. David Bower in his teaching on Inductive Bible Study. This is session 16, James 1:1-4.

Okay, we're at a point now where we want to apply in a very rigorous and I might say systematic way the method that we have been describing to the book of James.

And we're going to move segment through segment through James. In each case, begin with the survey of the segment. Of course, we've done that already with James 1:2-27.

And then use the survey of the segment, especially the main units and subunits as a broad frame upon which to hang the detailed analysis or thought flow. The thought flow is employed both to engage in observation, a kind of close reading of the text, an observation of the text, and as a basis for interpreting the text. And I want to be method transparent in all of this.

I want to be very clear as to the process that I am engaging in order to come up with these conclusions, these observatory and observational, I should say, and interpretive conclusions. Well, you remember from the segment survey that we identified in James 1:2-27 two main units. The major break, as I saw it at least, is between verses 15 and 16.

And that in 1:2-15, we have the triumph of the Christian life over and through. Not just over, but also through by means of trials and temptations with an emphasis upon wisdom. And, of course, especially wisdom is the means by which the Christian can triumph over and through trials and temptations.

We noted that within the first main unit of this segment, and the first main unit here, as I say, is verses 2-15, we have four subunits. And it begins, it begins really, and these really, it so happens here, that these subunits correspond to the paragraphs that we have here. That this first main unit within chapter one, that is to say 1:2 through 2-15, begins and ends with reference to trial or temptation.

Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials. Now, the word that is translated trials there is peirasmois, peirasmois comes from peirasmos, which can be translated either temptation or trial. It is, I think, quite properly translated trial here in verse 2. Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various peirasmois, various trials.

You have that same word though in the fourth and last paragraph of this first main unit in chapter one, that is to say in 1-12. Blessed is the man who endures trial, we read there. And there again, you have the word peirasmos, who endures trial.

For when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, that's verse 13. And there you have the verb form of that noun, peirazomenos, let no one say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, peirazomenos.

For God is not temptable of evil, and he himself tempts no one, but each one is tempted by his own desires. That's the same word. You notice then that the same word is translated trial in verse 2 and then also in verse 12, but tempt or tempted in verses 13 and 14.

This is extremely important, of course, to recognize. And that's why I say that really this entire first half, verses 2-15 of chapter one is framed by this whole business of trial, testing, temptation. We're going to see in a few moments that there is a difference between trial and temptation, between peirasmos, understood as trial, and peirasmos, same word, understood as temptation, that there is a difference, but also that there is a profound connection between the two.

And this, as I say, is one of the things that links verses 2-15 together, that it begins and ends with peiraismos, trial and temptation, but also that each of these paragraphs mentions endurance. And the Greek word there, by the way, is hupomone, or hupomoneo would be the verb form. Each of them mentions endurance or the lack of steadfastness or endurance, which you have in verses 9-11, endurance or its opposite.

Again, these two recurrences bind together, verses 2-15, into a coherent main unit within James chapter one. But within that, of course, you have subunits. Within that main unit, you have subunits.

And so, he begins then with the response to trials, and the response to trials is rejoice. Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness, and let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. Now, again, we're doing a detailed analysis of this.

So, it's helpful to begin by doing something of a survey of verses 2-4. And what you have here, of course, is a major break between verse 2 and verse 3. Verse 2 involves the exhortation, count it or consider it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials. Then he goes ahead to say in verse 3, for, whenever you have for as a conjunction, you know you have substantiation.

He goes ahead and gives a reason for this. For, he says, you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness, and let steadfastness have its full effect. That's the way the RSV translates this.

It really, literally reads it's perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. Now, we begin with the reference here to my brethren. Count it all joy, my brethren.

This address of the readers as my brethren is found throughout the book, and it actually serves two purposes. Here we're answering the question, what is the meaning of this? What is its significance? Why is it here? For one thing, it serves the literary theological purpose of helping the writer identify with his readers and with the situation of his readers. My brethren, of helping the writer identify with his readers and with the situation of his readers.

He is thus speaking to them as one who also meets various trials. Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials. By calling them his brethren, he indicates that he shares their situation.

He speaks to them as one who also meets various trials and who must meet his trials with the same kind of joy that he enjoins upon his readers. He does not speak from above, from a distance, but sympathetically. Now, here is where the background statement in James 1.1; remember James 1:1; we said his background, preparation, and realization for the whole book.

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. If in fact, this James is James, the Lord's brother, as is almost certainly the case. There is really no other James who, like James, the son of Zebedee, is pretty much ruled out because of his early martyrdom and the like.

There is really no other James that we know of from the New Testament that fits well the authorship of this book, other than James, the brother of Jesus. If, in fact, as is almost certainly the case, and for what it is worth, the scholarly consensus is here that this James is James, the brother of the Lord. It is extremely significant that this James is not speaking from above, chooses not to speak from a distance, but sympathetically.

Because this James was the exalted leader of Jewish Christianity. And by the way, this reference to the 12 tribes of the dispersion almost certainly refers to Jewish Christians throughout the world, hence truly a general epistle. He was the exalted leader of Jewish Christianity and in fact, in some ways, was the leader of the Christian church itself, not just Jewish Christianity, but the Christian movement in general.

The New Testament is quite clear. You find this expressed in the book of Acts, as well as in Galatians, for example, that James was really the primary leader of emergent Christianity, earliest Christianity. If you were to ask a first century Christian, say, who lived around 60, who was the leader of the Christian movement? That person would not say Peter.

He would not say Paul. He would say, James. There is no over-emphasizing or over-estimating the great status of leadership that this man had, as well as the great reverence with which he was held, not only in the Christian church, but also among non-Christian Jews.

Josephus mentions James, this James, in very glowing terms by the way. As a matter of fact, Josephus says more about James than he says about Jesus and talks about Jesus in at least one passage in terms of his connection with James. Josephus was more concerned with James than he was with Jesus in at least one passage of his work.

So here you have a person who had great status and was held with great veneration but who refuses to speak to his Jewish Christian readers from a position of authority, or authoritarianism to be sure, but rather on their level, on their plane, as one of them, my brethren. Now this actually does pertain to the whole issue of pastoral care and preaching. Insofar as we may take James to be something of a model in what he does for pastoral care and for pastoral instruction, this may apply to our understanding of pastoral care and of preaching and teaching.

When we stand before the congregation or engaged in other acts of preaching or teaching to the congregation of God, it's not a matter of our preaching to or our teaching to them, but actually our standing along with and together with those we address under the Word of God so that we are addressed also along with the congregation, along with the class that we are teaching. We find ourselves addressed in the same way that our hearers are addressed by the Word of God that we are proclaiming. It's not a matter of my preaching to you. I preach first of all to myself and then to you.

Now, the second thing that's involved in this reference to my brethren is that the theological, that it has, I think the theological purpose, we talked about the literary theological purpose just now, but it also has the theological purpose of indicating that what he says regarding the redemptive possibility of trials here is true only for the Christian believer, at least the claim that he makes with regard to the potentially redemptive potential of trials, he, that claim he makes only for the Christian believer. He is not claiming that it obtains for the unbeliever. It is not a universal principle.

He does not put it forth as a universal principle. This positive potential is not inherent within trials as such, but is a divine principle at work in trials as Christian believers

experience them. Christian experience, the Christian experience, and perhaps also participation in Christian community provides the unique resources for trials to have this kind of redemptive advantageous result.

Now, the exhortation to consider it all joy, we move next to the exhortation itself. What is involved here? To consider it all joy. By the way, in Greek, it's very interesting to note the word order. The word order in Greek really begins with all joy considerate.

All joy consider it foregrounds really the phrase, the statement with all joy and considerate. There are several major elements here in this exhortation. The first is the inclusive scope.

Consider it all joy, he says. As a matter of fact, the first word of this epistle is *passan*, all joy considerate. Inclusive scope is being emphasized here.

They should respond, he says, to trials with joy and only with joy. Joy unmixed with any other emotion or contrary reaction. Now, think about it.

This argues against any ambivalence or ambiguity in response to trials. Rather, it is a holistic, unified response. This business of encountering trials should not be the occasion of division within the person or, for that matter, within the Christian community, within the brotherhood.

Consider it all joy, joy unmixed with any other emotion or contrary reaction. Thus, the element of wholeness, of completeness, of lack of admixture so prominent in this epistle is introduced in the very first word of the body of the epistle. All joy considerate.

Now, the second, of course, and this is obvious, is the meaning of joy. Consider it all joy. I would always attempt to identify the precise and specific meaning of key terms in passages that we interpret.

As Paul Rees, a great preacher of a bygone generation, said, a biblical interpreter must be a lover of words and prepared to pursue the precise and specific meaning of key terms in the passage. Of course, we would note here especially the determinants of context, word usage, and scriptural testimony.

And if you look at context, word usage, and scriptural testimony, these various types of evidence, and I don't have time really to map all of that out. You have to trust me that I've done it. Joy is, in the New Testament, the emotion that springs from the achieving, the realization, the meeting of ultimate desire and need.

This stands over against at least modern notions of happiness. And this is why this word should not be translated happiness. Not consider it all happiness, but rather consider it all joy.

Because happiness really involves, as it's generally used in our parlance, and by the way, this is reflected incidentally in the very etymology, that is to say, the development of the word itself. Happiness, of course, is linked to happening, but happiness is relatively superficial and is dependent upon external circumstances. Happiness is dependent upon what happens or happening.

But rather, joy, as I say, involves an emotion that springs from the achieving of ultimate desire and ultimate need. Now, more specifically, there is a book by William Morris, M-O-R-R-I-C-A, titled *Joy in the New Testament*, where I think he quite properly points out that joy is almost a technical expression in the New Testament. It has to do with the affective or emotional response to the experience of salvation.

Again, that ties in with what we say because clearly, as far as the New Testament is concerned, the ultimate desire and what ultimately is needed is the salvation of God through Jesus Christ. Now, the third thing we note here is the general character of this exhortation. It has to do with evaluation as well as with emotion or attitude.

Count it or consider it all joy. Consider, really, the exhortation is how to think about trials. Consider it, that's the evaluation, all joy, that's the emotion or the attitude, which, of course, has implications for action; as he will say in verse 4, let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

These trials, in other words, should be evaluated or understood in terms of their potential, and therefore, as the occasion of joy. Now, beyond that, fourth, we note the element of surprise here at the outset. You have kind of an implicit contrast here.

The exhortation calls for these people to do the very opposite of what would be expected. The semantic field, really, as I say, the field of thought, the field of meaning, of *peirasmos*, of trial, or temptation, for that matter, is negative. It was at that time in that culture as it is today.

So, what you have is a contrast here. He's calling upon them to respond in exactly the opposite way as would be expected, to react in an entirely different than normal, reacting to trials with joy. This points, of course, to the reversal of values in the Christian life and to the distinctively Christian understanding of trials.

Now, he goes ahead and substantiates this exhortation. Incidentally, he mentions here when you meet with various kinds of trials, well, as a matter of fact, considering all joy, and then within even the exhortation, you have a kind of substantiation,

considered all joy when you meet with various trials, really, because you meet with various kinds of trials. So, the occasion, which, as I say, involves substantiation, you have a participle here, and it may be as usually translated as it is here, a temporal participle when you meet with various trials, but it may also be a causal participle because you meet with various trials, and actually, these often bleed into each other, and I think that's what you have here.

The occasion of this joy is when you, or because you, fall into various kinds of trials. Now, these trials are described in terms of their type and in terms of their frequency. These are logical observations.

In terms of type, they are varied, and in terms of frequency, whenever. Now, in terms of type, all sorts of trials, trials of various types, this probably indicates the kinds of trials that are endemic to life in general, as well as those that belong to the Christian life. In other words, both those that belong specifically to Christian existence, for example, suffering for the faith and the kinds of misfortunes that persons in general experience.

Now, the rest of the book really indicates what some of these various types of trials are. James may have in mind specifically the trial of poverty. This is a major theme within the book, the distress of poverty, chapter 1, verses 9 through 11, 1:27, 2:1 through 7, 2:15 through 16, the trial of economic oppression, not simply of being poor, but being oppressed because of poverty, chapter 2, verses 6 and 7, 5:1 through 11.

Also, the trial of the results of bitter speech or selfish ambition of others within the church, 3:1 through 4:10, picked up again in 5:9. Physical sickness, the trial of physical sickness, chapter 5, verses 14 through 18, and the like. Also, Christian, but also Christian persecution, 2:7, it is not, is it not they who blaspheme the honorable name which was invoked over you? Now, these various kinds of trials, as I say, you have suggestions of what may be more specifically involved in the rest of the book. The various kinds of trials must not be restricted to these, but beyond, presumably beyond, these specific ones that he mentions in the rest of the book.

The verb here is worthy of note. Whenever, when you meet, he says, the verb here is in the Greek is *periptō*, which literally means fall into. Whenever you fall into, he says, various kinds of trial.

The Christian does not seek these trials. He or she stumbles into them. There is, therefore, here no martyr complex, no masochism, no self-flagellation.

As a matter of fact, it's very interesting that in the New Testament as a whole, and this involves scriptural testimony, in other words, how the concept of this business of facing trials is described, is discussed in the rest of the New Testament. The New

Testament is pretty clear in two points. One is that trials do provide the possibility for real growth, for real nurture in our passage, for steadfastness, for good.

They have that potential. This is not unusual. This is not a unique point of view.

In James here, this ties in with early Christian thinking that is found throughout the New Testament in general. But the second one is that one must be careful to avoid trials and including persecution in as much as one can do so with integrity because there is also real risk. There is also real danger.

As well as the potential for good, there is a danger for harm in trials as well, so one does not seek trials, but as much as possible, one seeks to avoid them. Remember Jesus' instruction to the disciples there in the missionary discourse in the 10th chapter of Matthew when he begins to talk about the kinds of persecutions that the disciples can expect to face as they engage in mission in the world. He says to them, be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

Of course, the innocent as doves makes quite clear: if you're going to suffer, make sure you suffer, as Peter will say, for doing right rather than for doing wrong. But this business of being in that context of being wise as serpents means quite manifestly to be shrewd in terms of avoiding persecutions insofar as they are avoidable. Now, the reason or cause for the exhortation here, and this leads really to the substantiation, is knowledge.

He says, because you know, this is verse three, because you know, this involves really revelation of the true knowledge or revelation of the true character of trials. Because you know, he says, that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness and the like. Now, how do you know this? How do we know that the, how do they know, how would they expect to know that the testing of their faith produces steadfastness? Well, in terms of broader book context, probably through God's Word.

Chapter 5, verses 10 and 11, note the importance always of interpreting individual passages in light of the broader book context. 5:10, he will say, as an example of suffering and patience, brethren, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we call those happy who were steadfast.

You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. So that if you ask yourself, how do we know that the testing of faith produces steadfastness? It has to do with the holy record. It has to do with the witness of the Word of God, that this was, that this is what consistently happened with the prophets and with Job, for example, in the Old Testament.

He's not arguing here. Therefore, I think that we know this on the basis of empirical observation. Now, when he talks about, when he says, because you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness, this actually implies contrast with a misunderstanding of trials. A misunderstanding of trial, not knowing the potential trial, may lead to no joy or to only, at best, only mixed joy as we encounter trials.

The basic point James makes is that there is a force at work in trials, or at least that there may be a force at work in trials and it is a divine force. So, what appears on the surface to be painful and destructive contains within itself marvelous, transcendent, and unique potential. Knowledge of this potential is necessary for this response of joy.

But conversely, joyful response is necessary for trials to perform their benevolent function. So, you actually have a kind of cycle here. The knowledge of the potential, the positive potential of trials, leads to the realization of that positive potential, which in turn leads to greater knowledge or assurance of the positive potential of that, those trials.

I should say, actually, knowledge of this leads, first of all, we should say, to joyful response, and it's this joyful response then that leads to the realization of positive potential, which in turn, as I say, leads to greater knowledge of the positive potential. You have this very positive and beneficent sort of cycle that takes hold of the Christian life. But the point here is that trials will not necessarily or automatically bring about this kind of good.

Such results will come only as the exhortation of verse 2 is obeyed. Alternative possibilities for response to trials, as well as the dire consequences of these other responses, are indicated in 1:13 through 15 and in 5:9. What are the alternatives for meeting a trial, for coming, for meeting trials with joy, and for knowing that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness? One alternative is found in 1:13 through 15. Let no one say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one.

But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire, when it is conceived, gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. In 5:9 is another possible response to trials, where James says there, do not grumble, in the context of experiencing trials, do not grumble, brethren, against one another, that you may not be judged.

The first alternative that we found in 1:13 through 15 relates to an inappropriate attack upon God, responding to trials by questioning God's motives. And the second, 5:9, to an inappropriate attack upon others, grumbling towards others in the community. Here you get, of course, the psychological, sociological response of

extreme frustration, taking out the extreme frustration of relating wrongly to trials, taking that out on others within the community.

Trials then, in themselves, are spiritually neutral but with the potential both for good and for evil. But James implies that the encounter of trials will not leave the person the same. The person will either be better or worse after having met with trials, depending on how the person responds to them.

Now, that which is known here, according to our passage, in the potential of that which is known in the potential of trials, is described in the process of 1.4. He says, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness, actually works steadfastness. Here, the notion of works, which you'll describe and discuss in detail in chapter 2, is introduced already in chapter 1. The testing of your faith works steadfastness, and let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. Now, he begins this chain here by the testing of faith, the testing of your faith.

This points to the true significance of trials. Trials test, the Greek word as we point out here is dokimion, trials test faith. That is, trials produce a challenge to faith, which can either strengthen faith or destroy it.

Both possibilities, as I say, of strengthening or destroying, both possibilities are implicit in the word dokimion here. Now, the word testing, dokimion, points to the process of testing in this passage, the process of testing, and relates to the realm of refining. As a matter of fact, this very same language is used in 1 Peter chapter 1 verses 6 and 7, and it draws upon dokimion or testing language and relates it to the realm of refining, the process of refining metal.

In this, you rejoice, Peter says, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold, which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. This testing then is intended to lead to purification and is related to purification and actually related to purification to strengthening. The idea is that an impure metal is a weak metal, that the result of refining, the purification of refining, is making the metal stronger, hence more resilient, more steadfast, and enduring.

Now, the reference to purification here leads again to James' concern for the whole and the pure in religion, in this case a faith unmixed with anything that is contrary to faith, so that the testing of faith actually leads to the purification of faith, the removal from faith of everything that is unlike faith and that will weaken faith. Now, the Old Testament contains three prime types of examples of testing. Abraham, in Genesis 22 and Genesis 22, remember that God tested Abraham there.

This is the account of the Akedah, the binding of Isaac, but it all begins with God testing Abraham. And by the way, the word *perperazo*, from which we get the word *trials* here, is used in the Septuagint there in Genesis 22:1. God tested Abraham, but three prime examples, Abraham in Genesis 22, Job, and Israel, Israel during the wilderness wandering of 40 years, described especially in Numbers 14, 20 through 24, and Deuteronomy chapters 6 through 8, and especially Deuteronomy where Israel's wandering in the wilderness during those 40 years is described as God testing Israel in the wilderness. Abraham and Job, of course, are mentioned elsewhere in the book of James, Abraham in chapter 2, and Job in 5:11. They passed the test.

Israel, that third prime example of testing in the Old Testament, did not pass the test. Israel failed the test. Now, the faith, this faith, of course, has to do with faith in God, the trust that one places in God for well-being, the testing of your faith.

Really faith here means living a life that is shaped by a recognition of who and what God is. Let's repeat that, living a life that is shaped by a recognition of who and what God is, especially that He is one. 2:19, do you believe that God is one? You do well, and God is good and giving.

1:5 and 6, let him ask in faith with no doubting, well, first of all, 5, who gives God, who gives to all men generously without reproaching it will be given him, but let him ask in faith with no doubting, for he who doubts is like the wave of the sea. So, as I say, shaped by a recognition of who and what God is, for example, and especially that He is one and that He is good and giving, out of a firm conviction that to do so will result in well-being, that is to say, in salvation. 1:21, therefore, put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls and freedom, talking about really the perfect law of liberty and so on and so forth.

Thus, the trust one places in this kind of God for well-being, the trust that one places in this kind of God for well-being, a God who is one and especially one as being perfectly unified in His absolute commitment to bring us good, an absolute commitment that God is on our side, completely and unqualifiedly on our side. It is precisely this kind of faith that is challenged, that is put to the test by trials because trials challenge that kind of faith by leading one to wonder if God does mean only good for us, whether in fact, He is one in His goodness. Now, persons who respond to trials with joy because they know the true character and potential of trials will find that this testing of faith will produce steadfastness.

The word is *hupomine*. James is clear, of course, that this steadfastness cannot come about without these trials. This steadfastness can come about only through these trials.

This is the only way. Trials are necessary for steadfastness, which in turn is necessary for final salvation. Again, to anticipate what He will say there in 5.7 through 11.

Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious food of the earth, being patient over it until it receives the early and late rain. You also be patient.

Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Do not grumble, brethren, against one another, that you may not be judged. Behold, the judge is standing at the door as an example of suffering and patience.

Brethren, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we call those happy, and really, the word here is makarios. I don't think happy is a good translation.

It's better to say we call those blessed who were steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. And, of course, compassionate and merciful in terms of bringing about final salvation.

Blessedness in terms of bringing about final salvation. This steadfastness, which comes as a result of meeting trials in the right way, is necessary for final salvation. That's why he'll go ahead to say in 1:12, blessed is a man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him.

Now, this process from testing of faith to steadfastness reaches its climax with the third element of the chain, let steadfastness have its full effect. And the word here really is ergon telion, it's perfect work. This is a first reference to work in the book of James, it's perfect work, which is actually in the form of exhortation.

Here in the substantiation, you notice that the substantiation actually ends with an exhortation, let steadfastness have its perfect work. That, in order that, you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. The ultimate goal of trials is not steadfastness, but perfection.

The ultimate goal in the Christian life is perfection, that is to say, at least in terms of Christian character, as far as Christian character is concerned. Now, this climactic exhortation indicates that none of these things is automatic and that the writer has an active versus passive model in mind. Let steadfastness have its full effect.

In other words, continue to act in ways that accord with belief in God's sovereign goodness. That's how you let steadfastness have its full effect. Continue to act in

ways that accord with belief in God's sovereign goodness, that gladly takes the risk of faith.

This kind of faith, of course, is active, not passive, as he'll emphasize in chapter two. In order, he says, that in order that you let, in order that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. Now, a glance at the use of this word perfect, which in Greek is teleos in James, and it's used quite often in James, indicates that it has to do with comprehensive righteousness, which, by the way, is often the way it's used in the Septuagint as well.

Comprehensive righteousness, we might put it this way, a well-rounded righteousness. This passage invites us to ask, how does endurance produce this comprehensive righteousness that you may be perfect and complete? How does one allow this kind of endurance to have this effect? The answer is persevering faith. Allow this unfaltering dependence upon God to pervade all of life so that every area of life is oriented around this one central reality of confidence in the goodness of God no matter what.

James insists that the Christian must allow this unfaltering dependence upon God in hostile situations to impact every dimension of life, not just a Christian's relation to trials and opposition, but it expands to the whole of life, to character in general, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing, to make it the center, this confidence in God of His goodness, to make it the center of existence so that every good and positive impulse is thereby brought into life, and so that all these virtues are integrated and cohere around this center of unfaltering dependence upon God, this faith. This kind of holistic, comprehensive, genuine faith that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing, this kind of holistic, comprehensive, genuine faith will shape the very character of the person and will necessarily result in works, chapter two. Now, this kind of perfection gives unity and coherence to persons.

Here, you're talking about real integrity of life, coherence, and unity. In this way, the person, him or herself, will be truly perfect. That is, that person's life will be a unified, integrated, whole.

Tobelius puts it this way, let steadfastness have its perfect work in order that you might be perfect. You are that perfect work, Tobelius goes on to say. You are that perfect work.

Now, for this idea of perfect, teleos, in James, involves both comprehension, consistency, and coherence. Those are the three major factors of James' theology of perfection, I think. It involves, as I say, comprehensiveness, consistency, and coherence.

The element of consistency and coherence is emphasized by the word *teleos*, perfect, while the element of comprehension is especially brought out by *complete*, *halakleros*, be perfect and complete. And by the phrase, lacking in nothing, which may be a particularization of *halakleros*, really a negative particularization of it. Lacking, being perfect and complete, and complete involves, more specifically, by way of contrast, lacking in nothing.

There is an integrity that has no mixed motives or conflicts of interest. As far as James is concerned, this faith is the only reality that is large enough to form the unifying center of life. It is a human character shaped into conformity to the divine character.

As God is one, again 2.19, do you believe that God is one? As God is one, we now become one also, unified even as God is unified. Perfect, not to the same extent, to be sure, but in a major, to the in the same way that God is perfect. Holistic goodness really involves, more specifically, holistic faith, answering to holistic goodness, growing out of a conviction of God's holistic goodness.

Now, in the biblical understanding of trials or suffering, there are two major ideas. The first is that in the Old Testament especially, there is often a connection between suffering and sin. Suffering in many portions of the Old Testament is a result of sin, while well-being is a result of righteousness.

You find this in many portions of the wisdom tradition and also in so-called Deuteronomic theology in the Old Testament. Do right, and you will be blessed. Do wrong, and you will suffer.

There is a connection then between suffering and sin. Suffering is a result of sin, while well-being is a result of righteousness. James seems to accept that there may, in fact, be times when suffering, especially illness, is due to sin.

Remember 5:14, and 15. Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up.

And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. But note, really, the conditional, if he has committed sins. So James recognizes, in one and the same sentence, that there may be, at times, a connection between sin and sickness, but not necessarily so.

But that is not an emphasis in James, anyway, and does not seem to be present at all in this passage. But the second major aspect of biblical understanding of trials or suffering is that suffering is the arena of testing. And here we note especially Abraham and Job, who are mentioned explicitly in the book of James.

These two are mentioned later in James in precisely this way. Abraham's testing is described in James 2:21. Was not Abraham, our father, justified by works when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? Of course, an allusion to Genesis 22 and Job's testing, 511, an allusion to the book of Job.

James emphasizes, really, this second understanding and includes examples. Note the blessed examples of Abraham. Abraham was a blessed example in that he came out of this testing as a friend of God.

And the scripture was fulfilled, which says, Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness, and he was called the friend of God. And Job, with regard to Job in chapter 5, we call those blessed who were steadfast. In the present passage, trials are in no way linked to sin or wrongdoing on the part of the sufferer.

Hence, he speaks implicitly to another temptation implicit in trials, beyond that referred to in verses 12 through 18, blaming God. And that is blaming the self.

In other words, the fact that James does not include at all the biblical notion of a connection between suffering and sin suggests implicitly that we are not to respond to trials by blaming ourselves. That self-blame is no more a legitimate response to trials than blaming God is, verses 12 through 15. The emphasis is not on the source of trials and what causes them, but rather what may result from them.

Moreover, although God may send these trials, Genesis 22:1, and by the way, let's just remind ourselves what we have there in Genesis 22.1, and James is clearly aware of this passage. After these things, God tested Abraham. Although God may send these trials, that's what it's meant by Genesis 22.1, he tested Abraham, one ought not to blame God, for God desires only our best, according to verses 12 through 18.

The emphasis is on ultimate results versus immediate experience. A long-range teleological view is in place here versus human and especially modern desire for immediate gratification and results. There is an inherent myopia of human vision.

But James, representing the point of view of God here, talks about the long-term positive results. It's in these, in the positive results, as described here, that emphasize the quality of the results versus the immediacy of these results. Now, there's also an emphasis on character versus comfort.

This stands opposed to hedonism and all other forms of thought, which teach that pleasure, including the absence of pain and discomfort, is the highest good. That is not the point of view of James here. That is the point of view of Epicureanism.

And you find this, for example, in Epictetus. This is a view of Epicureanism that, of course, has a long shelf life. We have, of course, forms of this in modern thinking as well, and that is the highest good in the Christian; the highest good in life, in human life, is pleasure.

And in Epicureanism, pleasure was not understood in terms of sexual gratification, this kind of thing, but in terms of the absence of pain, the absence of suffering. To a large extent, Stoicism attempted to address this as well, although from a quite different point of view. I might just say by way of theological implications that this has, that this does have implications for issues such as euthanasia and the like, especially if euthanasia is justified on the basis of relieving pain.

That is highly problematic from an ethical perspective from the point of view of the Scriptures. The absence of pain and discomfort is not a particularly high good in terms of Christians in terms of Christian theology and ethics. Also, we note that the perspective here is theocentric versus anthropocentric, God-centered versus human-centered.

The ultimate reality here is a power of God that pervades and works through all of life versus a view that sees ourselves or other persons as the center of reality. The real question that lies behind what James is saying here is what God wants to do through this process. What does God want to do through this process? The potential implicit in these trials is a divine force. It is required that persons submit themselves to this divine force implicit in trials.

That's what this exhortation means. Let steadfastness have its full effect. Allow the divine force to become operational in this steadfastness.

Now, the model here also is, though having said that, active versus passive. The concern here is not simply to survive trials, somehow to come away unscathed. That would be a passive kind of digging-in, holding the fort sort of attitude.

The concern here is not simply to survive trials, somehow to come away unscathed, but rather to respond to trials in such a way as to come away from them better than previously. For trials to have this kind of effect, persons must act. There are certain things a sufferer must do.

Verse 4: let steadfastness have its full effect. Now, we mentioned Epicureanism a moment ago, but this actually stands opposed to Stoicism, which was another major philosophy in the Greco-Roman context of James, which propounds a passive model in which one behaves as though these external afflictions do not exist, or at least do not exist as afflictions, largely ignoring them. James, by contrast, encourages his readers to take these trials with all seriousness, and so to act as to make them work for the Christian.

This also presents, as the passage does, a theology of suffering versus a theology of success. James is in line totally with the New Testament notion that true and ultimate good can come only through suffering. Again, a theology of success often adopts essentially an Epicurean sort of stance, and that is that it is a good, a good that God wants us to enjoy, to avoid pain, to avoid suffering.

Now, he moves then from the response to trials, which is to rejoice, to the response to lack of wisdom, which, of course, involves a prayer which involves a prayer of request for wisdom in verses five through eight. And actually, this is a good place for us to pause here. So, let's stop here with this segment so that we can begin fresh in the next segment with James 1:5.

This is Dr. David Bower in his teaching on Inductive Bible Study. This is session 16, James 1:1-4.