

I. Introduction

- A. Welcome to Neighborhood. I appreciate that you have joined us today. I am especially glad today, because you are on the ground floor of a new series. We are going to work through a book of the Bible, called James.
- B. And our series is called, How to Be A Grown Up.
- C. I'll explain why I picked that title in a minute.
- D. First, I want to wind it way back. Stick with me.
- E. Church, this is a Bible. It is God's message, God's story, God's truth. Everything we believe as Christians comes from the plain teachings of this book.
- F. When you open your Bible to the very beginning, you find this high-tech piece of equipment called a Table of Contents. Here you will make a discovery that surprises a lot of people. The Bible isn't simply one book, though it really is one book with one divine author... it's more than that. The Bible is actually 66 books combined into one.
 1. Sixty-six books.
 2. Forty different authors.
 3. Written over 1,500 years.
 4. Covering countless years of cosmic history.
 5. Yet all one, singular, coherent story of God, creation, sin, and us, all woven together into a beautiful tapestry of the wisdom and grace of God.
- G. If you look toward the bottom of the Table of Contents, you will find the book of James. It is a short book. Five chapters, 2,620 words in English. It may be short, but it's a wild ride. You'll see.
- H. The author is a man named James. He was a leader in early Christianity, and he was the son of Mary and Joseph, which makes him the little half-brother to Jesus.
 1. How would you like to grow up being compared to Jesus all the time?
 - a) James, why can't you multiply bread and fish like your brother?
 - b) I wish you could be like Jesus and turn this water into wine!
 - c) Too bad you can't be like your big bro, and walk across the pond to grab our sandwiches. Too bad your brother's not here.
 2. James was not happy to be the half-brother of Jesus. In fact, he resisted the message of Jesus for a long time, and then he was saved.
 - a) You may be like that. You've resisted the message of Jesus for a long time, and then you were saved. Resistant for a long time, but finally coming to faith in Christ. James gets you.
- I. I put this book into our preaching schedule about a half a year ago. The timing is, well — let me just say that James is writing to people who are in trouble. They are having hard times. So this is God's Word to people in tough times.
- J. Let's dive in.

II. *James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings. (James 1:1)*

- A. This is a standard greeting in a letter like this.
- B. James calls himself a bondservant of Jesus — he's being humble, and not pulling rank. Listen up, Jesus is my big bro, so pay attention. No, he humbles himself.
- C. The twelve tribes means the readers were Jewish Christians, which doesn't make a difference, because they were still believers in Jesus, so this message is for all of us.
- D. And then you have the trouble: they were scattered abroad. They were dispersed, meaning driven from their homes and homeland by persecution.
 1. Things are not as they should be.
 2. Life is harder than it needs to be.
 3. Their new normal is nothing like they ever imagined.
 - a) Do you know anybody who might feel that way?
 - b) In verse two, he dives right in.

III. *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (James 1:2-4)*

- A. When I was young, there were these big meals when everybody came over. Lasagna, garlic bread, juicy meatballs, spicy Italian sausage, red sauce, Alfredo sauce, fresh baked bread, antipasto, jugs of cheap Gallo wine... Wait...
- B. I'm back.
- C. Many times, there wasn't enough room to fit everybody at the table. So they grabbed the folding table from the garage, set it up over in the corner, and jammed some chairs around it.
- D. Who sat there?
- E. That's the Kiddie Table.
- F. I loved sitting at the kiddie table. Because I was a kid, and that's where the other kids were at. Plus, no adults meant no vegetables. It was kid heaven.
- G. But one day, I was old enough, and mature enough to change tables. It was time to be a grown up, and here's something I discovered: it's better at the grown up table.
- H. Way better.
- I. I am suggesting that this is the theme of the book of Jesus. It is an invitation to you to push away from the spiritual kiddie table and come and join the grown ups.
 1. The reason I am saying this is the word that appears twice in this little paragraph. I underlined it. It's the word "perfect."
 2. James wrote this book so that you could become perfect.
 - a) But no pressure.
 3. This word shows up a bunch of times in James:
 - a) Perfect work (1:4)
 - b) Perfect sin (1:15)
 - c) Perfect gift (1:17)
 - d) Perfect law (1:25)
 - e) Perfect faith (2:22)
 - f) Perfect man (3:2)

4. Instead of perfect, we can use the word mature. Grown up. Someone or something that has reached full growth, full maturity, and full potential. To be perfect does not mean to be flawless. It means that you have pushed away from the spiritual kiddie table and taken your place with the grown ups.
5. That is why James wrote this book.
6. That is why I am preaching this book.
7. That is my prayer for myself and for you and for us all.
8. There has never been a greater time in our city and our nation, when the unsaved people around us need to see you and me and all of us rise up to our full stature as royal, equipped, courageous, loving, compassionate, self-giving, generous children of Almighty God
9. It doesn't take a village, it only takes one — one Daniel, one Esther, one Joseph, one Ruth — to stand up in middle of a swamp of tough times and declare:

a) *"Therefore we will not fear, Even though the earth be removed, And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea" (Psalm 46:2)*

10. That maturity is a testimony of God's grace nobody can argue against.
11. Be mature.
12. But how? What does that mean?

J. "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials."

1. For a long time, I hated this verse. In Christian love. Don't judge me.
2. When I'm hurting, don't tell me to slap a fake smile on my face. That's how I had this verse presented to me. Even though you have a nail in your head, be happy.
3. Ugh.
4. I've always struggled with James for a lot of reasons. A lot of people do:
 - a) They say it is anti-grace, which it is not.
 - b) They say it contradicts other places in the Bible, which it does not.
 - c) They say it is hard to outline, which is absolutely true. It is hard to outline. In fact, I think it is impossible.
 - d) If you were to ask me the literary genre of the book of James, I would say:
 - (1) James is a stream-of-consciousness RANT by a Christian Curmudgeon targeting believers in Jesus who have settled into their tiny seat at the kiddie table, and are content to stay there forever.
 - (2) It's like James is saying, what is wrong with you. You are offered chicken parmesan, but you're settling for chicken McNuggets. There's something wrong with you.
5. Count it all joy when you fall into very trials. That does not mean to slap on a fake smile.
6. What it does mean is wonderful and empowering and liberating all at once. As we go through James, I want to develop some clarifying statements with you.
7. I'm calling it the Royal Family Honor Code. A bunch of statements that explain How to Be A Grown Up.
8. So now it's time for the Royal Family Honor Code statement number one:
 - a) I take full ownership of my emotional state by the grace and power of God.
9. This fallen world is a morally broken pain machine. Bad things happen. So, what are you going to do about it? You are either going to cave in, or you are going to turn cynical or be stoic, or your are going to rise above, and not let the pain machine have the final say.
10. Either your traumas run your life, or you do.
11. Under grace, you have the tremendous capacity to rise above...
 - a) Your failures
 - b) Your labels
 - c) Your lies
 - d) Your heartbreaks
 - e) Your burdens
 - f) Your bad news
 - g) Your troubles
 - h) Your woes
 - (1) You can rise above. You are more than a conqueror. You are not a victim. Theses things do not control you. God has given you dominion.
 - (2) In the mature Christian life, your emotional state is more tuned to God and his supply than to the the pain machine and whatever it's vomiting out.
12. I take full ownership of my emotions and emotional state by the grace and power of God.
13. Does that mean you can switch off the sadness? Just turn off the anger? Yes and no.
14. It's a matter of growth.
 - a) God is not telling you to suppress your emotions. Never. No. He is telling you to feel your feelings and express them. He is telling you to channel your emotional energies in ways that bring healing and health, and to never see yourself as a victim of your emotions.
15. Grow toward maturity, emotionally.
 - a) If you struggle with chronic negative emotions, taking ownership means not accepting the status quo. It means getting the help you need.
 - (1) That help includes prayer (coming up in chapter 5)
 - (2) It might include Celebrate Recovery
 - (3) or Grief Share
 - (4) It may mean therapy
 - (5) or counseling
 - (6) or a change of diet
 - (7) or meds
 - (8) It always means digging more into the Bible (v. 21), because that's the main way to stabilize your emotions.
16. If you are trapped in a spiral of negative emotions, this is for you. God is calling you up.
 - (1) Don't just sit there and fiddle with the cold peas on your plate when a piping hot feast of grace is over there at the grown up table and you're invited.
 - b) Part of being a grown up means taking ownership of your emotional state and not making excuses and not casting blame on others.

- (1) No, you don't get to throw temper tantrums.
 - (2) No, you don't get to whine and complain every single time.
 - (3) No, you don't get to feel sorry for yourself forever.
 - (4) No, you don't get to abuse and exploit other people and take it out on them.
 - (5) No, you don't get to turn bitter and sullen and rude.
 - c) I am not saying that we can never vent. Have at it. Set a timer. Unleash at the devil and even at God if you want. He can handle it.
 - d) But the mature child of God has developed the inner resources to rise above the pain machine and to find even in sadness, moments of joy.
 - e) So RFHC #1: I take full ownership of my emotional state by the grace and power of God.
 - f) Now, HOW do we accomplish that?
- K. *knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. (James 1:3)*
1. Once again, God is an archer. You are the bow. Your potential is the arrow.
 - a) Your potential to change the world.
 - b) Your potential to have a happy life.
 - c) Your potential to bless the people around you.
 - d) Your potential to feel blessed and live blessed and enjoy the grace of God.
 - (1) That's the arrow.
 2. God notches the arrow in the bow, and draws back.
 3. You think he drawing you back too far. "That's enough, God. The joints are creaking here. Let her fly."
 4. He draws back more.
 5. "I'm really feeling it here God. We're ready. Just aim close. Nothing too far."
 6. But this is your potential we're talking about, so God pulls back farther.
 7. You're aiming twenty yards away, but he's aiming for the moon.
- L. This word "patience" is an unfortunate translation. The word means endurance. Any runners here? How do you develop endurance for running? By running. Cardiovascular endurance. Muscle endurance. Mental endurance. The more you run, the more you CAN run.
1. As you can see by looking at me, I am an athlete. Hidden inside me, I guess. Back in my twenties, I lived in a tiny basement apartment. This was across the street from a big park in Chicago. Portage Park. Swimming pool, tennis courts, baseball diamonds, gangs, a big city park.
 2. Portage Park was exactly two blocks long and two blocks wide. A perfect square. One quarter mile per side. One mile around.
 3. Every day, I ran a couple of miles around the park.
 4. One night, I came home late. I was in a button up shirt and blue jeans. It was dark, and a light rain was falling.
 5. I parked my car on the street and was about to go inside and go to bed, but a little voice inside said, "But you haven't done any running today."
 6. Sometimes, I hate that voice.
 7. I knew that if I went inside I wasn't coming back out. But I was in jeans. And it was raining. And it was dark and late and not so safe and I'm all alone.
 8. So I decided to just run.
 9. And I did. It was easy to time, because it was a square, so I ran two minute quarter miles, eight minute miles.
 10. As I finished two miles, I thought, that's enough. You're all wet. Your jeans are heavy. Your shoes are soaked. You're done. Go inside.
 11. But I felt so good. My breathing was steady, my heart rate was great, the air was cold but I felt plenty warm.
 12. So I turned for mile three. And then mile four. And then... I had never tried running five miles before, so I turned for mile five. And I really felt great. It was a runners high, and I felt great.
 - a) That was the stretching of my faith, and that produced joy.
 - b) But the only way to get there is to push through again and again until you've got the endurance. It is to get stretched again and again till you have the flexibility. It is to add weight to the bar, to pages to the manuscript, or shots to the practice.
 13. So how do we take ownership of our emotional state?
 - a) The first way is...
 - (1) 1. By view every trial as Grace Capacity Training.
 - (a) This is a chance to expand how much grace I get to enjoy in this life.
 - b) The stretching of your faith produces endurance. Let it happen. That's the next verse.
- M. *But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (James 1:4)*
1. Here is your potential. This is why Jesus came into the world for you. This is why he shed his blood for you. This is why he died and rose again. This is why he saved you. When Jesus died and rose again, he was thinking of you by name. He knew you before you were ever born.
 2. And he saw the person you could be come. He saw you radiant. He saw you glorious. He saw what you could be if only somebody would dig you out of the avalanche of crud the pain machine has deposited on you (v. 21).
 3. Jesus foresaw your graduation day, that glorious moment when you push back from the kiddie table, and take your seat at the everyday feast of amazing grace.
 - a) The second way to taking ownership of your emotional state is this:
 - (1) 2. By pursuing my massive potential as a mature child of God.
 4. Let endurance have its maturity-producing work. Perfect and complete lacking nothing.
 - a) Able to give of yourself without losing yourself
 - b) Tied to a mission on earth that transcends earth
 - c) Noble in hardship
 - d) Patient in tribulation
 - e) A courageous love...
 - f) And a loving courage
 - g) You can make a difference for time and eternity. Christ can live through you. His courage and love and humor and joy can flow through you. This is your massive potential as a mature child of God. Go after it. Grow up.
 5. Don't be a spiritual underachiever. Put down the corn dogs and go get some short ribs braised in marina so tender they're falling off the bone.
- N. *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (James 1:5)*
1. Let's decode it.

- a) If any of you lacks wisdom... The difference between wisdom and knowledge is this: knowledge is information explained, wisdom is information absorbed. When I first started skiing, I read a book. I had knowledge, but I had never skied before. I didn't have wisdom. It's the same whether your playing an instrument, practicing scales or paradiddles or footwork on the court or baking a masterpiece.
- (1) How do you take full ownership of your emotional state by the power and grace of God?
 - (a) 3. By saturating my heart with the wisdom of God's almighty Word.
- b) Let him ask... Not pay, not strain, not perform, not earn, not buy, not merit. Just ask.
- c) Of God... As he is the only one who can answer the deep needs of your heart.
- d) Who gives to all liberally... freely, no strings attached.
- e) And without reproach... You know how your kids can ask you the same question over and over again till you're losing your mind? God's not like that. God never gets annoyed at how many times you ask for the same thing when you asking to go deeper into the knowledge of his work. That is a prayer he always answers.

- (1) I would like to point out that this is the first time God is mentioned in this book after the greeting. And how is he presented? As a giver. It's subtle, but this is how grace is taught in this book. There's more to come.

O. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:5-8)

1. This section of the Bible has been misused to beat up Christians a lot over their doubts.
 - a) See, God didn't answer your prayers because you had doubts.
2. No. That's now how he works. The reason God answers your prayer is not because you have no doubts, but because you have Jesus.
3. What's going on here?
4. James is saying, do not knit a cloth one minute and unravel it the next. You can undo by your actions what you asked of God in your prayers.
5. This is like standing in line at the grocery store with a cart full of Ben and Jerry's Chunky Monkey and Chubby Hubby, and five packs of Oreos as you pray, "Dear Lord, please help me fit into my skinny jeans."
6. Your choices are unravelling your prayers.
7. You are double minded. Your soul is fragmented. You have two souls — a giant yes and a giant no at the same time. You become erratic, like the waves of the sea. Unpredictable.
8. And you are this way because you are driven by the wind and tossed. Which is to say your external circumstances are running your life, not you. You're stuck at the kiddie table.
 - a) You cannot pray away immaturity.
 - b) You have to grow it away.
9. The fourth way to take full ownership of your emotional state and become a grown up is this:
 - a) 4. By overcoming habits that contradict grace, one habit at a time.
10. There's two more, which I want to cram it in, and then land this ship.

P. Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits. Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. (James 1:9-12)

1. If you want to take ownership of your emotions, here's the fifth way to do this;
 - a) 5. By setting my affection on heavenly rewards more than on earthly stuff.
2. If your emotional anchor can be stolen, rusted out, suffer foreclosure, lost, or burned, your emotional status will be unstable. Make sense?
3. But if your emotional anchor is beyond the reach of bankers, thieves, fire, and flood, then your emotions can be stable.
4. We are pilgrims. Our live here is short and uncertain. The things of this world will pass away. Our true home is heaven. We're just passing through.
5. You will never be more of a spiritual grown up than when you can let go of earthly things because you know you have a greater and more enduring treasure in heaven.
6. Heaven is a gift. Absolutely free, paid in full by Jesus.
7. Heaven is a gift, not a reward.
8. But in heaven, there will be rewards. The Bible called the crowns. We will go deeper later on in this book, God is so excited when you start pushing back from the kiddie table, that he has promised a whole bunch of incredible rewards in heaven if you will only do that.

IV. Conclusion

- A. Ending it with this.
- B. I said this book is a rant. There's a harsh tone to James, but I want to explain why.
- C. The only thing that makes James mad is seeing grace left on the table. Seeing what could have been! And seeing the passivity and indifference of God's complacent children.
 1. Whenever the Bible seems harsh it's always because God's blood-bought grace has been offered, but treated with disrespect.
- D. So grow up, become mature, and take your seat of honor at a table fit for royalty.
- E. Oh that God will ignite in us a passion to grow strong and deep in him.