

Introduction: Marathons, Psychopathy, and Perseverance

People don't run marathons just for health—moderate exercise would suffice. In fact, marathons can harm the body. So why do we run? Because endurance shapes us. As Haruki Murakami suggests:

“Pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional. Say you're running and you think, ‘Man, this hurts, I can't take it anymore. The ‘hurt’ part is an unavoidable reality, but whether or not you can stand anymore is up to the runner himself.”¹

The Bible uses the Greek word *hypomenō* (υπομενο) (hoop-om-en'-o) to describe this—steadfastness under trial. Jesus says:

“...*but the one who stands firm [hypomenō] to the end will be saved.*”
- Matthew 10:22b/24:13 & Mark 13:13b -

James echoes Jesus in urging believers to hold firm, promising a crown of life for those who persevere. When our lungs burn and our knees ache, that's when faith is formed. This week, James warns us not to trust money or blame God in trials; but to stay the course and persevere.

Excursus: What to Do When it Hurts:

If we were to take James' summary statement on its own, it could sound harsh. James writes:

“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.” - James 1:2-3

James is not telling us how to feel but telling us to consider it joy. James is giving us a new perspective on our trials and sufferings. The Scriptures—in Psalms, Ecclesiastes and Job—make plenty of space for feeling difficult feelings in the life of faith.

The Scriptures make space for us to feel difficult feelings, but James is encouraging us that our difficulties can be incorporated into God's redeeming work—like a single picture can be incorporated with many others to make something greater.

I. Endure: Don't Trust Money

James 1:9-11 can be surprising in the context of James chapter 1. We go from staying faithful in trials to a saying about the wealthy and poor.

¹ Murakami, Haruki. (15 October 2007). *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running, a Memoir*. Anchor Canada. Translated from the Japanese by Philip Gabriel. Translation copyright 2008.

But if James’ main idea is that our trials can be a good thing, it seems to me and a few other commentators that James is now turning to one of the ways we can try to deal with our trials that is less than copacetic.

James is most likely written to Jewish believers suffering persecution from the Jewish elite. They are fulfilling what Jesus predicted:

*“...everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or **fields** for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.”*

- Matthew 19:29-30 -

There were economic consequences to their faithfulness, and this could lead them to be tempted to turn back to Judaism for worldly wealth.

We face similar temptations to put our trust in money rather than in God. Not just for financial security, but because our world values the opinions and perspectives of those who are wealthy—just because they are wealthy.

James embraces the upside-down logic of Jesus who said:

“But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.” - Matthew 19:30

And when He (Jesus) said:

*“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.”* - Luke 6:20

How can the poor be ‘blessed’?

Money can become an idol that demands sacrifice. We can sacrifice our values, our families and our ethics all for wealth. We should not quit following Jesus to start serving money. Why? Because money is transitory. James is riffing on Isaiah 40:6-9 where Isaiah says that all humanity is like grass, but the Word of our God endures forever. Alongside this, James has in mind the saying of Jesus in Matthew 6:19-21 where He tells us not to ‘store up...where moths and vermin destroy.’

To invest your life in making wealth for yourself is to invest foolishly. It is to invest in something that will not make it into the new world, money.

When trials come, when your lungs burn and knees ache, don’t turn off Jesus’ path to follow money.

II. When You Want to Quit Don't Blame God

In James 1:13–15, James warns believers not to blame God when facing trials or temptations. Just as nervous teenagers may perform poorly when they assume their driving examiner is out to get them, we too falter when we assume God is harsh or unkind. Some early Christians viewed God as a cruel examiner - deliberately making life harder. James refutes this view and instead calls believers to take radical personal responsibility, much like Jesus does in Matthew 7:3–5. Our sins and failures are our own, not God's fault.

James insists that God is not out to make us fail. Rather, God is generous, unchanging and good. He gives “...every good and perfect gift...” (James 1:17). The word ‘perfect’ can also mean ‘mature’ in Greek, linking back to James 1:4. Some of the gifts God gives are hard—trials and suffering that shape us to be more like Jesus (Romans 8:29). These are not arbitrary punishments but purposeful tools for growth.

Jeffrey Meyers points out:

“...[S]uffering is not a gift simply because it ‘builds character’ (as our culture might say), but because suffering and death (physically, spiritually, emotionally) is the Christ-appointed path to vindication, maturity, and a new empowered life.”²

So yes, James suggests, the game is rigged—but it's rigged in our favor. God is not a cosmic examiner hoping we'll fail, but a generous Father committed to our growth. The trials we face are allowed to form us into the image of His Son. The universe, as one writer put it, is bent on a slow arc toward your growth.

III. When You Want to Quit Learn to See the Gifts

James is calling us to a theological reality that can change our perspective in times of trial. He is calling us to the Scriptural idea that everything is a gift. He argues for God's goodness, and for evidence James offers *every good thing that has happened to anyone ever*.

God is behind all the good in your life; and not just when you're being good, either.

“He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” - Matthew 5:45b

Unfortunately, positive experiences don't stick to our brains as easily as negative ones. We need to learn to be grateful and practice being grateful. James, like Paul, is helping to remind us to focus on what is true, noble, beautiful, good and commendable. To learn to see the gifts of life we usually need to engage in the following steps:

² Myers, Jeffrey J. (30 June 2022). *Wisdom for Dissidents: The Epistle of James Through New Eyes*. Athanasius Press. pg. 39.

- Focus on strong positive emotional experiences.
- Connect those experiences to our Heavenly Father.
- Dwell in that space for at least fifteen seconds.^{3 4}

It is this thanksgiving and gratitude that will build endurance in the dark seasons of life.

IV. When You Want to Quit: Keep Growing

James 1:12 promises a ‘crown of life’ to those who persevere under trial, evoking the image of ancient Greek runners who, after enduring intense challenges, were crowned in victory and celebration. Similarly, God delights in our perseverance—not as a distant observer, but as an active participant. He runs beside us by His Spirit, leads us as the Son and awaits us at the finish line. Yet, this finish line is not the end. It is the beginning of eternal life, a ‘forever line’ marked by joy and reward.

Perseverance, as James sees it, is not about flawless performance. It's about enduring when we want to quit. Like runners who collapse over the finish line, blessed are those who, even broken and weary, keep going. The local Kamloops Run Club captures this beautifully—celebrating progress over perfection, effort over image. It's not about looking good in your thirties, but about staying upright in your eighties. This is the life of faith: perseverance over performance.

Jesus said, “...**the one who endures to the end will be saved**” (Matthew 10:22 ESV). He isn't timing us; He's watching our direction. Are we still on the path? Still growing, still following? That's what matters.

When the trials feel overwhelming, keep growing. Trust that your heavenly Father gives ‘maturing gifts’—even hard ones—to shape you into the likeness of Christ. Communion is a reminder of this: Jesus, who persevered through suffering, gives Himself to sustain us. At His table, we find the nourishment to keep going.

³ Wilder, Jim. Hendricks, Michel. (4 August 2020). *The Other Half of Church: Christian Community, Brain Science, and Overcoming Spiritual Stagnation*. Moody Publishers. ch. 3 pgs. 51ff

⁴ Hanson, Rick. Mendijs, Rick. (23 Feb 2017). *Train Your Brain: Positive Emotions and Taking in the Good*. [Blog]. Rick Hanson: <https://rickhanson.com/train-brain-positive-emotions-taking-good/>

Discussion Questions

Open Up:

What are or were some seasons of your life you had to ‘persevere’ through? What did you do well, what would you do differently?

Dig In:

- What are the subtle ways you may follow money over God’s Word?
- What happens if we ‘blame God’ for our troubles rather than seeing them as a good and ‘maturing’ gift?
- What are some ways we can incorporate seeing God’s gifts into our lives?
- If you’ve had to persevere in the past, what was most helpful to you in that season?

Prayer:

Go around the room asking two questions to guide your prayer time:

- What are you grateful to the ‘Father of heavenly lights’ for?
- Where do you need God’s help to persevere?

In light of James’ reminder about God’s predisposition to generosity, spend a good amount of time in your prayer in thanksgiving together before going forward with requests about perseverance.