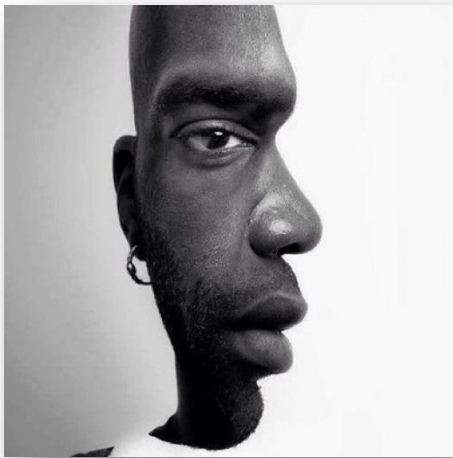


Subject to Change / Week 3

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it [your endurance] grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing (James 1:2-4 NLT)

The last two weeks we talked about how life is constantly full of changes and how God is always with us through all changes good and bad. Take a moment and look at the two pictures below. What do you see?



Now, look at the pictures again and see if you can see another image in the same picture? Each image has two different ways to look at it. The first image shows a man's face looking forward and to the side depending on how you look at it. The second image shows leaves on a tree or a bird standing on a branch depending on how you look at it.

So how does this relate to change? There is more than one way to look at change! However, sometimes we need to shift our perspective.

Today we're going to look at a passage of Scripture from a letter written by James.

James was the half-brother of Jesus, but he didn't always believe Jesus was the Son of God. And to be fair, it's tough to believe that kind of claim when you shared a bedroom with that person as a kid. But after Jesus died and then came back to life, James knew Jesus really was God's Son. He soon became a prominent leader in the early group of Jesus followers.

But before we get to what he said in his letter, let me give you a little background.

During one of Jesus' last talks with His followers, He told them that they would be His witnesses in their hometown and beyond—that they would take His message of grace, forgiveness, and the Gospel to the very ends of the earth.

Jesus was telling them to make a change—to move beyond their comfort zones and out into the world. This was a big vision that could make a big impact. But at first, that didn't happen.

Jesus' followers were on board with the Gospel, but the idea of carrying that message around the world was intimidating. So, most of them stayed right where they were. And then something changed . . .

The early Christians started to be persecuted for their beliefs. Some were even being put to death. And this crackdown on the Church caused people to scatter from their city and homes—which is exactly what Jesus had told them to do in the first place. This dramatic change in their lives propelled them to share the Gospel in new places, while also growing their faith and dependence on God.

This is what was happening in the world when James wrote to new Jewish Christians in his letter. One of the things he said was this:

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy (James 1:2 NLT).

Okay, hold on a minute. Consider it joy when you experience trouble? That sounds crazy. Especially because this wasn't just *any* trouble. This was the kind of trouble that could lead to *death!*

But James isn't finished. Check out what he says next:

For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow (James 1:3 NLT).

We're all familiar with endurance, but we usually associate that word with athletics. When we train and push past our limits, over time, our bodies will acclimate to meet those new limits. You may struggle to bench a certain weight, but eventually it becomes easier. And then you need to add more weight, which challenges you to grow even stronger.

James' words mean endurance isn't just for the gym; it works in every area of life. **When we push through the pain and struggle of any kind, including the struggle to change, we don't just become better at that specific thing, we develop *personal* endurance.** We develop an inner strength that can help us in other areas and challenges.

And then James says this:

So let it [your endurance] grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing (James 1:4 NLT).

Essentially, James is saying that practice makes perfect. In other words, pushing through the pain and hard stuff, *enduring*, doesn't just make you better at the thing you're working on, but you're actually learning *how to change*. It's like you're developing a muscle of endurance that will help you when you face any kind of change. And when you have this perspective, every change you face is another opportunity to grow, not just personally but spiritually.

Think of it this way . . .

GOD CAN CHANGE THE WAY YOU SEE CHANGE.

When it comes to change, our tendency is to focus on all the negative parts—all the trouble that comes with it. **But when we see change as something that has a trickle-down effect into every area, we see that it's more about becoming better than it is about being *uncomfortable*.**

When we view change this way—the way God does—we recognize that it's all about growth. It's a positive thing, because it's all about . . .

- Growing as a person, friend, daughter, or son.
- Getting stronger and tougher.
- Developing better character.

I realize that this idea doesn't get everybody excited about tackling goals, improving grades, and exercising. Like we've already said, it's a tough sell for all of us. But it probably felt that way for the reader of James' letter as well (keep in mind that they were trying to avoid being murdered for their faith!). **But James is telling them that, when we trust who God is and what He's like, we can be sure that God is doing something *in us*, no matter how uncomfortable the change may be.** So, whatever we have to do to endure and persevere through the change, it's worth it because there's a bigger picture God is painting!

And the strength you develop now will be the strength you take with you into your future. So, when you pursue endurance in the face of change now, you'll be better prepared for even bigger challenges in the future.

And ultimately, developing personal endurance will build and deepen your faith.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What's the craziest thing you've ever challenged yourself to do?
2. What makes personal change so difficult?
3. What's something you've been meaning to change, but haven't gotten around to?
4. Why do you think most people resist change even when it's good?
5. Which of the following typically keep you from making a change?
 - a. You're afraid to fail.
 - b. You're afraid to stand out.
 - c. You don't want to seem judgmental.
 - d. It seems overwhelming.
 - e. Something else: _____
6. What's one benefit of challenging yourself to change, even if you fail?
7. What's one area of your life where you feel like God might be challenging you in order to grow you?