



TIME OF GRACE®

Choose Gratitude Over Grumbling: Even if You're Living With Pain

Study Notes

Summary

Some say, “You don’t know what you got ’til it’s gone.” But what if we did? What would happen in our hearts if we realized that nothing is guaranteed in this life (besides GOD and his love)? If we opened our eyes to see that sunshine and breakfast and hot showers are uncertain, how grateful would we become?

- **James 1:16,17:** ¹⁶ Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.
- Everything good is from _____.
- Everything good is a _____.
- Everything good _____ (except _____).

Points to Ponder

1. What is the longest you have ever suffered? How did that chronic pain affect your faith? Were you, as James warns against, deceived into thinking that God was no longer good? Why or why not?
2. Read the story of Job’s suffering in Job chapters 1 and 2. How do these chapters connect with today’s message about chronic pain?
3. Evaluate: Christians can thank God through chronic pain if they remember the spiritual blessings they have now and the eternal blessings they will have forever.

Homework for Next Week

Google "Bible passages about hope," and write down three things you have learned.

Time of Grace Ministry
Choose Gratitude Over Grumbling: Even if You're Living With Pain

James 1:16,17
November 28, 2021

Pastor Mike Novotny

I had a really good message for you today. Maybe you caught the past tense - I had one. We have been talking in this series about grumbling, and gratitude, and God, and I thought I would end these messages with one of my favorite passages on gratitude. It is honestly a classic in the Bible, James 1:17. If you are not familiar with this great passage, it says this. "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."

Everything you love about your life, everything that makes you dance, or smile, or laugh, everything good and perfect is from above. That was the message I wanted to preach to you. In fact, as a pastor, I even had a cheesy little rhyme to go with it. I was going to have you fill in the blanks and write this down, that everything you love comes from above. I was going to preach that, but then, I made a mistake. My mistake was in preparing James 1:17, I also read James 1:16, which says this. "Do not be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters." It is like James is pleading with his brothers and sisters, his Christian family. He is begging them not to be tricked, or duped, or lied to, to believe the fake news. "Do not be deceived," he says in Verse 16, and then, Verse 17, "Every good and perfect gift is from above."

And something about my previous interpretation of those passages did not quite fit. And then, if I was not in enough trouble, I made another mistake. I read the rest of James 1. In my Bible, the heading for James 1 is, "Trials and Temptations." And I will not read the whole thing to you, but James talks about trials of many kinds, and the testing of your faith, and not doubting God, and not being double-minded and kind of flip-flopping what you believe about God. He talked about trial again, and testing again, and tempting again, that we should not believe that God is tempting us.

And then, finally - finally, he gets to these words, "Do not be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above." And so, I had one of those moments, maybe you have had this before too, where you thought you knew what a Bible passage meant, but then when you read it and you read what is around it, you had to question your own interpretation. And so, I had to start over. That good, happy, cheery, Christian message about gratitude and counting our blessings, that had to go out the door.

But in the end, I was not too disappointed, and in the end, I think you are going to be glad that you are tuning in today. Because the message that James, in context, is preaching is for those of us who have been through pain, and specifically, those of you who have been through pain that

lasts. If you have lived with chronic pain, with pain that shows up on a Monday and is back on a Tuesday, and then returns on a Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, this is the chapter for your faith. As a pastor here, as a guy who gets to hear the stories of lots and lots of dear brothers and sisters, I know that pain is a reality for many of you.

Lots of you, in your Christian life, have felt a lot like Job. Do you remember that story from the Old Testament? Job was this really good, grateful, and godly man. He has a good life and he praises God, but then - then the pain comes. And Job, because he is a good man of faith, even in the midst of the pain, he praises God. But then, the pain gets worse. But because Job is not your average believer, even in the midst of intense pain, he keeps on praising God. Ah, but then - then, the pain does not go away. Then Job starts to doubt, and he gets double-minded, and he feels like God is testing him, maybe even tempting him. He wants to bring God into court. It was not the pain that was the problem for Job, it was the pain that persisted. That is what deceived him and that is what tricked him, and maybe you get that.

According to the CDC, there are currently about 50 million Americans who live with chronic pain. And by chronic pain, they mean the pain that you feel for most days of the week for months at a time. For those of you who have bad ankles, or knees, or a bad back, arthritis in your hands, and just pain. Pain is not like the mailman who knocks on your door or the Amazon guy who drops off a box and then leaves. It is this roommate that you did not invite, that brings all of his stuff and just makes your home, your life, worse. And what is sobering about the CDC's statistic is that if 50 million Americans, 1 in 5 American adults, lives with chronic pain, I think they were only counting physical pain.

And if we added to that 50 million all of you who are dealing with financial pain, or emotional pain, or relational pain - if you are on disability or living paycheck to paycheck and you are just afraid that one more medical bill, or a car accident, or something breaking is going to break you. If you are estranged from your sister, or your son, or your dad, and just day after day you live with the fact that you do not have this happy, functional, nuclear family, it is broken and it is hard. If you live with depression or anxiety, if you are in a marriage that just feels stuck - I mean, imagine if we added the chronic painful situations that people lived with, it would not be 1 in 5, would it? It would be 1 in 3, 1 in 2.

Lots of us have felt like Job. And we can praise God on day one of the pain and maybe on day three or seven, but when it is day 107, day 2,003, that is the test, right? And so, if you are there right now, if you have been there, if you know and love a dear brother and sister who is there, here is what James would say to you. He would say, in Verse 16, "Do not be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters." You can hear his heart, right? Like, dear brothers and sisters, I love you. We are family through faith in Jesus, so do not be deceived. I know you are hurting and I know you prayed. You prayed 100 days in a row for this to change and it has not, but do not be deceived. Do not be lied to. Do not give up your faith. The things you used to believe when the sun was shining, do not believe now that it has been raining for 100 straight days.

Essentially, James is trying to get you to not believe this lie. I keep this scroll in my office. An artist friend of mine took a lighter to it to make it look like it came from hell itself, because on

this scroll are the three words that will change your life for the worse. These three words are what the devil has been using to deceive people in James' day, in Job's day, and in our day today. And if you are living with chronic pain, you might have been tempted by these words, too. The scroll says, "God's not good." That is a pretty logical lie to believe though, isn't it? How could God be good if he lets his own kid, his supposedly beloved son and the daughter he delights in, live like that, day after...? How can he know about that and how can he have the power to fix that and still be a good God?

And so, the devil comes at us, right? With this deception. Now, I know you were saying it when you were a little kid, but how can God be good? I mean, think of it. If you were a parent and your baby girl could not sleep because her stomach was so upset, and you had the power - it would not cost you anything, it would be easy for you, like turning off her light switch to fix that pain. What kind of parent would you be if you did not? But God could, and God can, and yet, he does not. Maybe God's not good. If your best friend had depression and it was just like, this journey, and there was medication, and there were ups and there were downs, and suicidal thoughts. Maybe he thought about it, maybe he even attempted it, and you could fix that. Like, that chemical imbalance in his brain, what is happening in his heart and mind, you could push a button in a millisecond and it would all be over. What kind of friend would you be if you did not?

You see, this is what the devil does. He whispers that deception when pain sticks around - when our suffering is chronic, when we went to church, and we read the Bible, and we tried. We reached out to God and we called upon him in the day of trouble. We cast our anxiety on him, and then...nothing. And James gets that, and he pleads with you, he pleads with me. "My dear brothers and sisters, do not be deceived." And then, and then he gets to this. Now he gets to James 1:17, this classic verse, that in my opinion should still remain a classic because it is way better than before.

For people living with constant pain, those who are so close to doubting God and believing this deception that he is not really good, James says this. "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." If you are living with pain or love someone who is, I think in this one verse James gives us three things to remember to resist that deception. If you are taking notes at home, I would love for you to write these down. They are worth remembering.

Here is the first one. According to James, everything good is from God. So, my dear brothers and sisters, to help you not be deceived, I want to give you a challenge. Just this week, I want you to try to list, before you fall asleep, blessings from A to Z. So, when your head hits the pillow, before you turn off that light, I want you to think A, B, C, D, E, all the way to Z of blessings that God gave you, good and perfect gifts, from just that day. It might be fresh air that you breathe. It might be that breakfast sandwich you had for lunch with sausage. You could count that as the S, too. It might be your cat that cuddled up on the couch while you watched Netflix. It might be, D, your daughter, who texted, asking, "Mom, how are you doing?" It might be the empathy of a friend or a co-worker who noticed that you were stressed. Go A through Z, 26 blessings in one day, and it will help your heart not be deceived. And you could put into practice James' words,

"My dear brothers and sisters, every good and perfect gift is from above." So, point number one, everything good is from God.

Here is point number two - everything good is a gift. I had a birthday just a few weeks back. I am now in my 40's. So, I texted my mom about the day of my birth and she told me that on November 18th, 1980, Clifton Avenue, Sheboygan, Wisconsin, Judith Laverne Novotny went through intense pain, and she pushed a 7-pound, 12-ounce me out of her body. Now, I still do not get the anatomy of how all of that works, but she said, "I remember you were a big baby." In our own home, not in a hospital, she pushed me out into the world, and now, 40 years later, do you know what happens? I get cake! What? How crazy is that? Literally, my mom makes me a cake! She went through the pain, she went through the sacrifice, and now, year after year after year, I have a birthday list and I expect my family, and my friends, and my mother, to get me things. Do you know what that is? That is a gift. I do not deserve that. You do not deserve anything for your birthday. You did not do anything. So, if you get something on your birthday, that is a gift.

Or, think of Christmas. Christmas is the traditional time of year when we think about Jesus' birth. The Son of God, who was in heaven, where there was no pain, no suffering, no death, no agony, where Jesus was being worshipped by all the saints and angels - how many tens of thousands upon tens of thousands? Jesus Christ, at Christmastime, left all of that and he was born into this world. Do you remember the story? In a manure-scented cave in the first century to a family that was dead broke, from a dinky town, at a time in history where there was no air conditioning, no heat, no motors, and no Netflix. And Jesus left behind all of the glories of heaven to come to this broken world, and now, 2,000 years later, what do we do? We get gifts!

Little kids make lists of all of the things that people should buy them because Jesus gave up all of that. That does not make sense...which is what makes it a gift, right? At Christmastime, I do not deserve anything. Jesus deserves everything. You do not deserve anything because of his birth or what he did. So, if you get something, it is a gift. And here, according to James, it is not just your birthday things or your Christmas things, it is everything. He says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above." The air we breathe? We do not deserve that. The breakfast sandwich we ate? We do not deserve that.

Do you see how that could help you when you are living with chronic pain? You are hurting again. You are anxious again. Your fingers just ache again. And the devil tries to tempt you, "God's not good." And then, you turn and you look at everything good in your life, at everything that you love, and realize, "I did not deserve any of it. Not a single blessing should be mine, but my Father, the one in heaven, did not let that stop him. His generous, gracious, loving, and good heart decided to give all of that to me."

In fact, if that does not sink in, think about it this way. How many times have you and I sinned against God? I do not know that number - a lot. Have you ever gotten a birthday gift from someone that you have sinned against constantly? Like, if there is that person in your family that you have really hurt and now they keep their distance, or someone at work that you just kind of clash with? You know, there is Chuck from, "The Office." "Hey, Chuck! Hey, I know you do not

like me. I think you kind of hate me, but I came up with a birthday list." No, no, never, right? We would not expect gifts from our enemies, especially those that we have deeply hurt.

So, now think about God. Even if I do not get why he does not push the button or flip the switch and end your pain, he has to be good. We have sinned against him millions of times, and he has turned around and given us millions of gifts. So, do not be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. I know you are still living with the depression, with the back pain, with the allergies, with the issues, but do not be deceived. "Every good and perfect gift is from above."

And if those two things were not enough to protect you from the deception, James has one last thing he wants you to know. First, he said everything good is from God. And second, he said everything good is a gift. And now, finally, he said everything good goes, except for God. Anything good, everything perfect in your life, can change. One accident, one event, one pandemic, the death of the person you love most in this world, all of it can go. We can lose our children, our friendships, our health. One just normal visit to the doctor can find cancer, and life can change dramatically. Like, you need to know this. In this world, everything is temporary - everything. All of the good gifts, from A to Z, they are not guaranteed, and if you remember that, you will be grateful when they are there.

I cannot assume that my wife and I will hold hands and die on the same day at age 90. I could lose her today. And so, if Kim is here today, thank you, God. I could lose my job today. So, the fact that I am here with an open Bible, and this is what I do and I am preaching to you, this might not be here next year or next week, but it is here today. Thank you, God. Now, people get hit by drunk drivers every day. They get in accidents that are not their fault. So, if I can drive from church back to home, thank you, God.

The shadows shift. Life changes. Everything is meaningless, King Solomon said in the Book of Ecclesiastes. So, if anything good has happened in your life, praise the grace of God. One day it is going to go, so if it has not yet, God is so good. And through it all, James wants you to know God will not go.

In fact, the reason that Jesus came down from heaven, the good and perfect gift that came from above, was so that you and I would have something that would never change - God. Jesus gave his life up on the cross. He was willing to give up the glory, and the honor, and the pleasure of heaven, so that through his blood, through his death, and through his resurrection, through faith in him, that you could have a God who would not change, who would never leave you and never forsake you. So, when you are living with chronic pain, God is still right there. So, when you are dealing with another medical visit, God is still right there. God himself, who is better than every good and perfect gift, he is the definition of goodness and perfection - he would be right there.

So, you and I could learn to say with King David, "I will fear no evil." I might have drama in my life. I might have enemies here. I might be in the valley of the shadow of death, but you are with me. I will not be afraid. You have called me by name. You have made a commitment never to abandon me or forsake me, even if my mother and father do.

That is what Marilyn knows. Some of you know here at our church that I am Pastor Mike and my colleague is Pastor Michael, because we like to make it confusing. Well, the other day I was talking to Pastor Michael and asking him about the most grateful person he knows. Like, who out of all of the dear brothers and sisters that he does life with, who grumbles the least and expresses the most gratitude? And he instantly answered, "My mom." And as he told me the story, and his mom gave me permission to share this, I found out that his mother, Marilyn, lives with chronic pain. In fact, just after Pastor Michael told me this, I saw Marilyn with her walker, coming into church. She one time said, "This is not how I envisioned my retirement." Now, you put in all of these years, you work so hard, you raise the kids, and now you are going to retire, right? And you are going to travel, and you are going to enjoy life and wealth. But that good gift went and now she hurts a lot.

But Pastor Michael said this. Sometimes when his mom is really in a lot of pain, and she is kind of wincing and she is right to the edge of grumbling or maybe doubting the goodness of God, he said that she says this. "But God is good." I love that. I am not feeling good today, but God is good. If he gave me you, my family, if he gave me this day, if he gave me his son, the good and perfect gift from heaven, then God must be good. That dear sister did not get deceived, even in the pain, because she knew this truth.

And so, my dear brothers and sisters, I pray that you are just like her. This side of heaven we will have trouble, and some of us will have chronic trouble. But even in the midst of the trouble, there is this truth, that God is good, and his son - his son is the proof.

Let us pray.

Our Father in heaven, I have not been there just yet. And I love you, I like you, I trust you, I respect you, but the truth is I have not been tested like some of my brothers and sisters have. So, I pray boldly today for wisdom for them, that we do not want to be double-minded and think you are good when life is good and think you are bad when life is bad, and we want to be consistent, just like you are with us.

So, God, plant this truth deep in our heart, to give your Holy Spirit when we are under demonic attack. Help us, as you say in the New Testament, to resist the devil. Cause him to flee from us, to stop with the deception and lies, so that we believe that you are good, and your Son is the proof.

I thank you, God, for hearing this prayer. The fact that we can pray to God is proof that you are good. The fact that you listen is proof that you are good. And the fact that you will answer in the right way at the right time is proof that you are good. We love you, God. We give thanks to the Lord, for you are good and your mercy endures forever. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.