



GPS GUIDE: JANUARY 29, 2023 G r o w . P r a y . S t u d y .

Series: Three Remain

Sermon: Faith is a Muscle

MONDAY: Read James 2:14-18

The great reformer Martin Luther did not like the letter of James. He (mistakenly) believed the book taught that human works earn salvation. In fact, James offered an important reminder of what a faith-filled life looks like in practical terms. For example, he said, we do not feed the hungry to gain God's favor. We feed the hungry because our faith in God's saving favor leads us to help others be resilient in the loving spirit of Jesus. The apostle Paul taught the same idea as James. He wrote, "You are saved by God's grace because of your faith. This salvation is God's gift....It's not something you did that you can be proud of. Instead, we are God's accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things" (Ephesians 2:8-10). The "good things" we do grow out of God's unearned gift. Have you ever felt as if you were working to earn favor with God? Do you need to change any of your thinking to put faith and action in the proper order?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to fully accept your love and grace so that it empowers and energizes me to keep resiliently serving all the people that I can in your loving spirit. Amen.

TUESDAY: Read Genesis 15:1-6

Abram's life might seem simple if you haven't studied it. God promised to make him a great nation, and then gave him and his wife a son named Isaac. Easy, right? Not really. Today's reading shows Abram struggling to wait, telling God, "I still have no children." (In the end, Genesis 12:4 and 21:5 show a 25-year wait for the promised child.) Genesis 15:6 provides the key to Abram's resilience—he "trusted the Lord." That trust kept him going. Today's story wasn't just about one couple who lived long ago. The apostle Paul quoted Genesis 15:6 in a letter to non-Jewish Christian converts in the province of Galatia (cf. Galatians 3:6-9). He said God blesses all who believe as Abraham (AKA Abram) did. In what ways have you learned to see your resilient journey of faith, not as an isolated, individual journey, but as part of a great procession of faithful people reaching back at least to Abraham? Are there ways in

which you need to trust God because you do not see particular promises or life directions “paying off” immediately?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, teach me how to view life through the lens of eternity, as you do. Help me to trust that there are vast spheres that lie way beyond my immediate ability to see or understand. Amen.

WEDNESDAY: Read Genesis 37:17-28, 39:20-23

Joseph was a spoiled son of privilege. His bitterly resentful brothers sold him to be a slave in Egypt. How would that story play out? Maybe surprisingly, instead of being depressed or bitter, Joseph showed capable integrity for Potiphar, his Egyptian master, and then when he was unfairly jailed. In both cases, we find that everything was “put under Joseph’s supervision.” But Genesis didn’t just say, “Joseph was amazing.” The historians believed his secret of resilience was that “The Lord was with him.” Partly because it’s told in broad brushstrokes, the story makes Joseph’s resilience sound almost effortless. Do you think that was the case, or did Joseph need to work hard and wisely to make his Egyptian master’s household, and then the prison, run smoothly? Does God’s blessing relieve us of the need for effort and wisdom, or does God tend to work through those qualities in our lives?

Joseph’s brothers betrayed him. Joseph’s Egyptian master had little choice but to believe his wife’s charges (even if he didn’t believe her—cf. Genesis 39:11-19) and sent Joseph to prison. Yet Genesis said amid all the letdowns Joseph found a loyal friend: “The Lord was with Joseph and remained loyal to him.” How much do you trust that the Lord always remains loyal to you?

Prayer: Lord God, I thank you that you are always loyal to me. In whatever I do, I ask for faith in your presence to guide me and make my efforts effective in serving and blessing others. Amen.

THURSDAY: Read Acts 14:11-22

When the apostle Paul preached about Jesus in a city called Lystra, his enemies took extreme action. “They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing he was dead.” Luke didn’t explain how it happened, but wrote, “When the disciples surrounded him, he got up and entered the city again.” He didn’t pack up and go home but went on to the city of Derbe to preach. Then, going home, he amazingly went back to Lystra as well as other cities, encouraging the Christian converts in each city. Paul and his friend Barnabas didn’t tell their converts, even in Lystra, where things had gotten especially violent, “Lay low, keep quiet about your faith and stay out of trouble.” Luke wrote that their message was, “If we are to enter God’s kingdom, we must pass through many troubles.” And they were echoing Jesus’ message to his followers (cf. John 16:1-4, 31-33). How can it increase your resilience to know that difficulties are not unexpected, but part of the journey of faith?

Prayer: Lord God, keep me humble about my own standing, yet full of courage to bear faithful witness to your grace and glory. Amen.

FRIDAY: Read 2 Corinthians 11:23-33

Scholar N. T. Wright states why this passage is unusual: *In Roman culture one of the*

standard things every public figure could do was to list his achievements....the teachers who have influenced the church in [Paul’s] absence have been going in exactly that direction....they have wallowed in a culture of fame and success and showy rhetoric. To answer them, Paul lists his own ‘achievements’, all of them things any normal person in the Roman world would be too ashamed even to mention.

Roman culture was not radically different from ours. Monuments, civic buildings, and other sites bore inscriptions praising wealthy donors. Civic assemblies featured the voices of the powerful; public culture revolved around power. Boasting in weakness challenged the very values on which most boasts were founded— values antithetical to the good news of a crucified savior. Wright posed the profound challenge of Paul’s message: *Somehow the church in Corinth, and the church in the world of today, have to learn to stand normal cultural values on their head, to live the upside-down life, or rather the right-way-up life, of the true servants of the Messiah.* What draws you to follow the good news of a crucified savior rather than the lure of power or wealth? How can letting Jesus rework your values give you greater resilience than basing your life on trying to gain power or applause, which can easily slip away?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you changed the world more than all the self-important emperors, then or since. Teach me how to follow faithfully in your powerful footsteps. Amen.

SATURDAY: Read James 1:2-4, 12

James didn’t write about “if you face trials.” He wrote about “the various tests you encounter,” for he knew trials are an inescapable part of life. He even urged us to consider trials an occasion for joy. Really? Some trials hurt so much we may find it next to impossible to even imagine joy in them. Author Glennon Doyle offers this wisdom when facing life’s inevitable trials: *If you are uncomfortable –in deep pain, angry, yearning, confused—you don’t have a problem, you have a life. Being human is not hard because you’re doing it wrong, it’s hard because you’re doing it right. You will never change the fact that being human is hard, so you must change your idea that it was ever supposed to be easy.* God did not and does not promise easy. God promises God’s abiding presence as we become mature followers of Christ. And it was in that maturing sense of endurance, or resilience, that James found joy, not in the trials themselves, but in God’s promise. How do you most often respond to the trials of life? With joy? With distress? The next time you face a trial, step back and remember that it’s okay to be uncomfortable. This is what it means to be human. God is with you in your sadness or discomfort.

Prayer: God of wisdom, help me, even in difficult seasons, to find ways to grow in the resilient maturity of faith that you offer to give me. Amen.

