



TEACH THE TEXT
COMMENTARY SERIES

James, 1 & 2 Peter, *and* Jude

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Welcome to the Teach the Text Commentary Series

Why another commentary series? That was the question the general editors posed when Baker Books asked us to produce this series. Is there something that we can offer to pastors and teachers that is not currently being offered by other commentary series, or that can be offered in a more helpful way? After carefully researching the needs of pastors who teach the text on a weekly basis, we concluded that yes, more can be done; the Teach the Text Commentary Series (TTCS) is carefully designed to fill an important gap.

The technicality of modern commentaries often overwhelms readers with details that are tangential to the main purpose of the text. Discussions of source and redaction criticism, as well as detailed surveys of secondary literature, seem far removed from preaching and teaching the Word. Rather than wade through technical discussions, pastors often turn to devotional commentaries, which may contain exegetical weaknesses, misuse the Greek and Hebrew languages, and lack hermeneutical sophistication. There is a need for a commentary that utilizes the best of biblical scholarship but also presents the material in a clear, concise, attractive, and user-friendly format.

This commentary is designed for that purpose—to provide a ready reference for the exposition of the biblical text, giving easy access to information that a pastor needs to communicate the text effectively. To that end, the commentary

is divided into carefully selected preaching units (with carefully regulated word counts both in the passage as a whole and in each subsection). Pastors and teachers engaged in weekly preparation thus know that they will be reading approximately the same amount of material on a week-by-week basis.

Each passage begins with a concise summary of the central message, or “Big Idea,” of the passage and a list of its main themes. This is followed by a more detailed interpretation of the text, including the literary context of the passage, historical background material, and interpretive insights. While drawing on the best of biblical scholarship, this material is clear, concise, and to the point. Technical material is kept to a minimum, with endnotes pointing the reader to more detailed discussion and additional resources.

A second major focus of this commentary is on the preaching and teaching process itself. Few commentaries today help the pastor/teacher move from the meaning of the text to its effective communication. Our goal is to bridge this gap. In addition to interpreting the text in the “Understanding the Text” section, each unit contains a “Teaching the Text” section and an “Illustrating the Text” section. The teaching section points to the key theological themes of the passage and ways to communicate these themes to today’s audiences. The illustration section provides ideas and examples for retaining the interest of hearers and connecting the message to daily life.

The creative format of this commentary arises from our belief that the Bible is not just a record of God’s dealings in the past but is the living Word of God, “alive and active” and “sharper than any double-edged sword” (Heb. 4:12). Our prayer is that this commentary will help to unleash that transforming power for the glory of God.

The General Editors

Introduction to the Teach the Text Commentary Series

This series is designed to provide a ready reference for teaching the biblical text, giving easy access to information that is needed to communicate a passage effectively. To that end, the commentary is carefully divided into units that are faithful to the biblical authors' ideas and of an appropriate length for teaching or preaching.

The following standard sections are offered in each unit.

1. *Big Idea*. For each unit the commentary identifies the primary theme, or “Big Idea,” that drives both the passage and the commentary.
2. *Key Themes*. Together with the Big Idea, the commentary addresses in bullet-point fashion the key ideas presented in the passage.
3. *Understanding the Text*. This section focuses on the exegesis of the text and includes several sections.
 - a. *The Text in Context*. Here the author gives a brief explanation of how the unit fits into the flow of the text around it, including reference to the rhetorical strategy of the book and the unit's contribution to the purpose of the book.
 - b. *Outline/Structure*. For some literary genres (e.g., epistles), a brief exegetical outline may be provided to guide the reader through the structure and flow of the passage.

- c. Historical and Cultural Background. This section addresses historical and cultural background information that may illuminate a verse or passage.
 - d. Interpretive Insights. This section provides information needed for a clear understanding of the passage. The intention of the author is to be highly selective and concise rather than exhaustive and expansive.
 - e. Theological Insights. In this very brief section the commentary identifies a few carefully selected theological insights about the passage.
4. *Teaching the Text*. Under this second main heading the commentary offers guidance for teaching the text. In this section the author lays out the main themes and applications of the passage. These are linked carefully to the Big Idea and are represented in the Key Themes.
5. *Illustrating the Text*. At this point in the commentary the writers partner with a team of pastor/teachers to provide suggestions for relevant and contemporary illustrations from current culture, entertainment, history, the Bible, news, literature, ethics, biography, daily life, medicine, and over forty other categories. They are designed to spark creative thinking for preachers and teachers and to help them design illustrations that bring alive the passage's key themes and message.

Abbreviations

Old Testament

Gen.	Genesis	2 Chron.	2 Chronicles	Dan.	Daniel
Exod.	Exodus	Ezra	Ezra	Hosea	Hosea
Lev.	Leviticus	Neh.	Nehemiah	Joel	Joel
Num.	Numbers	Esther	Esther	Amos	Amos
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Job	Job	Obad.	Obadiah
Josh.	Joshua	Ps(s).	Psalm(s)	Jon.	Jonah
Judg.	Judges	Prov.	Proverbs	Mic.	Micah
Ruth	Ruth	Eccles.	Ecclesiastes	Nah.	Nahum
1 Sam.	1 Samuel	Song	Song of Songs	Hab.	Habakkuk
2 Sam.	2 Samuel	Isa.	Isaiah	Zeph.	Zephaniah
1 Kings	1 Kings	Jer.	Jeremiah	Hag.	Haggai
2 Kings	2 Kings	Lam.	Lamentations	Zech.	Zechariah
1 Chron.	1 Chronicles	Ezek.	Ezekiel	Mal.	Malachi

New Testament

Matt.	Matthew	Eph.	Ephesians	Heb.	Hebrews
Mark	Mark	Phil.	Philippians	James	James
Luke	Luke	Col.	Colossians	1 Pet.	1 Peter
John	John	1 Thess.	1 Thessalonians	2 Pet.	2 Peter
Acts	Acts	2 Thess.	2 Thessalonians	1 John	1 John
Rom.	Romans	1 Tim.	1 Timothy	2 John	2 John
1 Cor.	1 Corinthians	2 Tim.	2 Timothy	3 John	3 John
2 Cor.	2 Corinthians	Titus	Titus	Jude	Jude
Gal.	Galatians	Philem.	Philemon	Rev.	Revelation

General

AD	<i>anno Domini</i> , in the year of our Lord	etc.	<i>et cetera</i> , and others
BC	before Christ	ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> , there the same
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare	i.e.	<i>id est</i> , that is
chap(s).	chapter(s)	pl.	plural
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example	sg.	singular
esp.	especially	v(v).	verse(s)
		//	parallel passages

Ancient Versions

LXX Septuagint

Modern English Versions

ESV	English Standard Version	NASB	New American Standard Bible
GNT	Good News Translation	NEB	The New English Bible
GW	<i>GOD'S WORD</i> Translation	NET	The NET Bible (New English Translation)
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible	NIV	New International Version
KJV	King James Version	NLT	New Living Translation

Modern Reference Works

BDAG	Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000
TDOT	G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H.-J. Fabry, eds. <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . 15 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006
TWOT	R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, and B. K. Waltke, eds. <i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i> . 2 vols. Chicago: Moody, 1980

Introduction to James

The Epistle of James presents a multifaceted picture of what it means to be a mature Christian, a doer of the Word and not a hearer only—one who demonstrates their faith through actions.

Importance of James

James is widely prized and taught because its theology is so practical. While definitely a letter, James has some affinities to Wisdom literature in the Old Testament, like Proverbs. The subjects that James covers and the way that he covers them have made James a beloved and important book. Topics such as trials, money, words, favoritism, fighting, pride, planning, and prayer fill this epistle with useful instruction. For the individual believer and for communities of faith, James does what the epistle says ought to happen in Scripture in general: it provides a mirror by which Christians can take a long, hard look at themselves and then go away and make changes.

In practical matters, James has rightly exerted incredible influence. The statements about caring for widows and orphans as the essence of religion (1:27) have inspired many Christians to help the poor and oppressed. If a church has elders pray for the sick, it is because of 5:13–16. Most who experience spiritual warfare find James’s injunction to submit to God and resist the devil as essential to the battle (4:7). The phrase “Lord willing” and the idea of holding future plans loosely come from 4:15. Many Christian employers pay appropriate wages to their employees because of 5:1–6. Christians who seek wisdom from God to deal with the trials of life find explicit urging to do so in 1:5. And these are just a few examples of James’s influence.

Despite the emphasis on practical matters (or maybe because of it), James makes significant theological contributions to the doctrines of faith and works, sin and temptation, God's Word and the understanding of the law, and the purity and goodness of God.

In so many areas of theology and life, James provides a unique and useful perspective within the New Testament.

Author, Setting, and Date

The author of James is traditionally believed to be James the Just, Jesus's half brother (Matt. 13:55).¹ He was not one of the twelve apostles (this James is not James son of Zebedee or James son of Alphaeus). James was not a believer during Jesus's public ministry (John 7:5) but became a highly influential leader in the early church in Jerusalem after coming to faith (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Gal. 2:9, 12), presumably when Jesus appeared to him after his resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7). His brother Jude was likely the author of Jude (Jude 1).

James is writing to the "twelve tribes scattered among the nations" (1:1). Though many see this as a literal reference to Jewish Christians, it is probably better to take it as a metaphorical reference to Jewish and gentile Christians living in a world that is not their home. It would be highly unlikely that the leader of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 would single out Jewish Christians from gentile ones with this letter (see the comments on James 1:1). So while James is writing out of a Jewish background, he is addressing all believers.

As for the date of James, nothing in the epistle allows for any way to date it with any certainty.² What we know of James the Just requires only that, if he was the author, it was written before his death sometime in the 60s. Therefore a date in the 50s seems as reasonable as any.

James's purpose is for believers to live out their faith in concrete ways and to demonstrate the maturity that true faith brings.

Theological Themes and Suggestions for Teaching

James is noteworthy because of the absence of any explicit theological emphases related to Jesus or the Holy Spirit. Jesus is directly mentioned in 1:1; 2:1; and 5:7–8. The Holy Spirit is not mentioned at all (see the comments on James 4:5). However, the ethical undertone of James's epistle resonates with Jesus's teaching in such a way that it is fair to say that an important theological theme of James is the ethics of Jesus.

Central to James's Epistle is the relationship of faith and works. Genuine faith demonstrates itself in good deeds. All of James's ethical admonitions are grounded in this theological understanding. The person who believes

that God will respond to prayers for wisdom cannot waver back and forth on whether or not God will do so (1:5–8). Genuine believers in Jesus must not show favoritism (2:1), and they must do concrete caring actions for those who are in need (2:15). If someone believes that humans are created in the image of God, then they must not speak evil of others (3:9–10). If someone believes that God answers prayer, then they should go to the elders for prayer when they are sick (5:13–15).

Tied to this concept is a robust theology of God’s Word, meaning the Scriptures. To simply hear the Word and not do it is to not truly believe that it is the “word of truth” (1:18) that can save you (1:21). The Word of God brings freedom and blessing (1:25). God’s Word reveals the royal law of loving one’s neighbor (and loving God) and expresses the will of God.

Mercy is another important theme for James. Care for the poor and oppressed, treating all without favoritism, paying workers proper wages, refraining from cursing or speaking evil of others, and endeavoring to turn sinners from the errors of their ways all point to the mercy of God and his people.

Paradoxically, given the theme of mercy in James, it is worth noting that James can be a difficult book to teach and preach because of its seemingly harsh tone, which is so foreign to many modern readers. However, in this seemingly harsh language there are also great words of encouragement for those whom James is looking out for. Orphans, widows, the poor, oppressed workers, those being slandered, and others are encouraged as they hear James’s blunt language used to protect and serve them. Those who are suffering will be encouraged to know that God is working through them to accomplish good and that those in need of miraculous help from God have it available to them through prayer. Teachers can and should go out of their way to show the kindness and mercy of God expressed in part through the denunciation of oppression and apathy.

Most important, to do James justice, the teacher must constantly think how to help people to be doers of the Word and not merely hearers.

The Trials of Life

Big Idea

By having the proper attitude and asking God for wisdom, we are able to endure the trials of life, which are designed to bring us to maturity.

Key Themes

- Enduring trials and tribulations brings blessings now and in the future.
- Trials and tribulations are necessary for Christian maturity.
- Believers are to ask God for wisdom to enable us to endure trials and tribulations.
- Not having abundant financial resources or not being able to use financial resources to avoid trouble in life can actually be a blessing.

Understanding the Text

The Text in Context

Given that James’s goal is to help his readers to be mature in their Christian faith, it is not surprising that he begins by discussing enduring trials and tribulations in life. The idea of becoming more mature through suffering is a common theme in the New Testament (e.g., Rom. 5:3–4; 8:17–18; 2 Cor. 4:7–18; Phil. 3:7–11; Heb. 2:10; 1 Pet. 1:3–9). James not only explores the theme of trials and tribulations but also introduces other topics to which he will return later, such as true faith (chap. 2), wisdom (chap. 3), and poverty and wealth (chap. 5).

While 1:13 carries on the discussion, James shifts the focus of the Greek word *peirasmos* from “trial” to “temptation,” and therefore 1:12 provides a helpful point at which to end this section. The next section addresses the question of whether God tempts believers to sin.

Structure

One way of approaching the text is to follow James’s thematic development. After the greeting, the passage can be broken down into five sections. There are two statements about blessings of trials (1:2 and 1:12), which serve as an introduction and conclusion to this theme. In between James addresses

three themes commonly associated with trials: enduring suffering as the road to maturity (1:3–4), needing wisdom from God to endure suffering (1:5–8), and the relationship of trials to poverty and riches (1:9–11).

Another helpful way of viewing this section is through the lens of the five major imperatives (in Greek) that James uses in this section: (1) *consider* it pure joy when you face trials (1:2); (2) *let* perseverance *finish* its work (1:4); (3) *ask* God for wisdom (1:5–6); (4) *do not expect* to receive if you doubt (1:7); and (5) *take pride* in your high position (1:10).

Interpretive Insights

1:1 *James, a servant of God.* On James, see the introduction to James.

To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations. This is a reference to both Jewish and gentile Christians. The language of exile (“scattered”) is an acknowledgment that this world’s governments, systems, and values are not those of believers (cf. 4:4). The members of James’s Christian audience are the spiritual heirs of those Old Testament saints who wandered the world (cf. Heb. 11:13–16) and of truly believing Jews forced to live outside the promised land because of the sin and disbelief of others.¹

1:2 *Consider it pure joy.* The word “consider” has the notion of making a deliberate, conscious, and rational choice (see 2 Cor. 9:5; Phil. 2:6; 3:7–8; Heb. 11:26). The Greek word order emphasizes the words “joy” and “trials.” It is not intuitive that trials should cause joy, so James asks his readers to make a deliberate effort to set aside their natural inclinations of fear, discouragement, and anger and choose to be joyful in the midst of trials.

whenever you face trials of many kinds. The word for “trial” (*peirasmos*) can mean either “trial, tribulation, trouble” (see 1:2) or “temptation to sin” (see 1:13). The key to distinguishing meanings is the origin of the trial or temptation. In 1:2 it is trials “you face,” meaning that they originate outside of us and happen to us. Likewise, the parallel phrase “testing of your faith” in 1:3 implies something being done to us from the outside. On the other hand, in 1:13–16 James is speaking of the temptations to sin that come from within us.

Trials that originate outside of us could include being dragged into court (2:6), lacking material resources (2:15), verbal abuse (3:9–10; 4:11), being the victims of divisiveness and quarreling (4:1), structural economic injustices (5:4–6), sicknesses (5:14), and any general kind of “trouble” (5:13).

1:3 *the testing of your faith produces perseverance.* We should be joyful in the midst of trials because enduring trials is producing something—perseverance—of inestimable value *right now*. The focus shifts from the present to the future benefits of trials in 1:12.

1:4 *so that you may be mature and complete.* The word for “mature” (*teleios*) can also be translated “without defect, perfect.” However, the sense

here is being mature in this life, not a state of sinless perfection possible only when Christ returns. One can be mature and still need to grow, as Paul says of himself in Philippians 3:13–15 (using *teleios*).

1:5 *If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God.* The word “lacks” picks up the mention of “lacking” in 1:4, and so in this context 1:5 instructs the reader to ask God for wisdom for dealing with trials of life, something that even the most mature still need.

What kind of wisdom does James have in mind? James is writing to “the twelve tribes” (1:1) and has peppered his letter with examples of Old Testament people (Rahab, Abraham, Job, Elijah), so the first place to look for examples of God’s wisdom for the trials of life is the narrative portions of the Old Testament. Many Old Testament characters inquire of God seeking guidance from the Lord, something to make sense of what is happening to them or how to best respond. Rebekah asking God why her pregnancy is so difficult (Gen. 25:22), David wanting to know what is causing the famine in Israel (2 Sam. 21:1), and Jeroboam needing wisdom about whether or not his son will live (1 Kings 14:2–3) are a few of the many examples. In addition, perhaps James is thinking of Jesus asking the Father for guidance in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36–46) as to whether there is another way other than the cross, or his own situation from Acts 15 where the early church needed counsel from God to help settle the dispute regarding gentile inclusion.²

who gives generously to all without finding fault. James is anticipating the two most likely objections to the idea of asking for wisdom from God. The first objection is that God gives wisdom only to people like Rebekah, David, or James—those who seem special or important in salvation history. But James says, God “gives generously to all.” This is reinforced in chapter 5 when James insists that Elijah is no different than we are—his prayers were answered, and ours will be answered too (5:17–18). The second objection is that God will be angry, annoyed, or disappointed with believers who seek wisdom in the midst of trials. James wants to reassure his readers that this could not possibly be the case (see also Matt. 7:9–11).

1:6 *believe and not doubt.* Or, “Ask in faith, doubting nothing.” Doubt is often portrayed as the antithesis of believing (Matt. 21:21; Mark 11:23; John 20:27; Rom. 4:20; 14:23). Just as in Romans 4:20, “not doubting” is being “fully persuaded” that God will do what he has promised, even with seeming evidence to the contrary. So readers must be fully persuaded that God will answer every request for wisdom. But more is in mind here.

In James 2, true faith demonstrates itself in good works and obedience to the law of God. Asking in faith, then, probably includes the idea of asking from a place of obedience to God. In Ezekiel 20 God will not allow the leaders of Israel to ask him for wisdom because of their rebellious ways. So too,

asking God for wisdom in a trial of life while refusing to obey God's commands for sexual purity, for example, is not asking "in faith." Furthermore, in 5:15, James speaks of the prayer offered "in faith," which will make the sick person well. Praying in faith means that we are not demanding healing from God but submitting our requests to God with the acknowledgment that he knows better than we do whether healing is the best path. So too, to ask God for wisdom "in faith" means approaching God with the attitude of allowing him to provide whatever kind of wisdom in whatever way he wants and believing this wisdom to be the best possible advice for the given situation.

1:9 *Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high positions.* The same counterintuitive logic that allowed his readers to rejoice in their many trials appears in 1:9–11. Believers in humble circumstances should "take pride in" their "high positions." If more trials bring more maturity, then the poor should consider their poverty as an asset rather than a liability, since poverty brings with it a whole host of trials that the rich never experience. "To take pride in" doesn't mean to be arrogant (Gal. 6:4). This means not arrogantly bragging to others but thinking about and drawing encouragement from God's work through these humble circumstances. Other positive examples of pride include 1 Corinthians 1:31; 2 Corinthians 10:17; 12:9; and Galatians 6:14.

1:10 *the rich should take pride in their humiliation.* Wealthy Christians should rejoice when they experience being brought low, that is, when they experience suffering through trials. This includes not only a reversal of fortune where the rich become poor but also the humbling that can take place through sickness, betrayal in personal relationships, or persecution for being a believer—in other words, any trial from which their financial resources cannot rescue them.

1:11 *its beauty is destroyed.* The image of grass and flowers standing for the fragility of human life draws on Isaiah 40:6–8 and Psalm 103:15. The words "its beauty" are a translation of a phrase that reads in Greek, "the appearance of its face." The thought is similar to 2 Corinthians 4:16–18, where Paul concludes his discussion of suffering in this life by talking about outwardly wasting away while inwardly being transformed because what is seen is temporal, while what is unseen is eternal. Wealth is like a flower—it is "seen" and therefore temporal. Trials produce maturity, which, though unseen, is eternal and far more valuable.

1:12 *crown of life.* In Greco-Roman culture one who successfully won a race was given a crown to signify their victory (see 1 Cor. 9:25; 2 Tim. 2:5). The crown is "life," meaning the fullness of an eternal life that has been refined through suffering. The idea is not a distinct crown earned for every trial successfully endured. Compare Jesus's similar statement in Matthew 5:11–12.

Theological Insights

The problem of suffering is one of the central themes of life and consequently of the Bible. While other passages of Scripture deal with various causes for suffering (e.g., Job 1–2; Luke 13:1–5; John 9:1–3; Heb. 12:4–11; 1 Pet. 4:14–15), James focuses on the goal no matter what the cause: Christian maturity. Likewise, the Bible has much to say about how one becomes more mature as a Christian, and James reminds us that enduring suffering is a key aspect of the theology of sanctification.

In addition to the theology of suffering and maturity, 1:5–8 plays an important part of a larger discussion about prayer and seeking guidance from God. Some today view God “deistically”—that is, unconnected and uninvolved with the decisions and workings of daily life. But the Bible presents a different picture, a God who is ready, willing, and able to provide guidance and direction for all aspects of life. James 1:5–8 explicitly urges Christians to engage with God in a more personal way, inquiring of him and seeking guidance from him in all the circumstances of life, since he is our Father (c.f., e.g., Josh. 9:14; Ps. 73:24; Isa. 8:19; 30:1–2; John 10:4).³

Teaching the Text

Two very helpful ways of approaching this passage were laid out in the “Structure” section above. One approach is to orient the teaching around the five imperatives in this passage. There is very little that we can do about the trials of life that happen to us, but we can and should do five things. First, we choose to rejoice when we are going through trials. In order for true rejoicing to take place, people must understand the truth that enduring suffering brings maturity. Second, we must choose not to interrupt the trial, instead waiting for God to complete in us what he is doing in forming our character through this trial. Too often we look for ways to escape trials and tribulations rather than looking for God-given ways to stand up under them, as urged in 1 Corinthians 10:13. Third, we ought to ask God for wisdom in the midst of trials: “How am I to endure?” “What purpose does this trial have in my life and your greater purposes?” “What is the cause of this trial in my life?” “Where is your grace evident in the midst of what I am going through?” Fourth, we must not think that we will receive wisdom from God, unless we ask properly, that is, “in faith.” Fifth, we should pride ourselves in our socioeconomic struggles, recognizing these as divinely permitted trials producing perseverance and maturity. Those who are wealthy should value the times when God shapes their character through sufferings that monetary resources are powerless to alleviate.

Of these five imperatives, it is interesting to note that the only one that gives any real “action” to take is the second: ask God for wisdom. Most of

the emphasis in this passage is on having the right attitude and proper perspective on trials. We are quick to want to do something when trouble hits. This passage teaches that it is more important *to think correctly* and *pray correctly* than to take specific action.

A second way to approach this text is thematically. Verses 2 and 12 are parallel, with both emphasizing the blessed nature of enduring trials, focusing on the present and future benefits, respectively. Between these two book-ends of blessing, James addresses three topics: how enduring trouble leads to maturity, receiving wisdom from God in the midst of trials, and the role of socioeconomic troubles. In order for people to truly be able to rejoice in the midst of difficult times, these are the relevant topics to cover.

Finally, when teaching about asking God for wisdom, the teacher should realize that this passage is not promoting a general request for wisdom from God like Solomon's in 1 Kings 3. Given the context, James is talking about wisdom from God for specific situations. A teaching on the need for general wisdom from God is better reserved for James 3, which focuses more broadly on wisdom from God as opposed to the wisdom of the world.

Illustrating the Text

Trials bring maturity.

Human Experience: Consider how many times we are tempted to take the easy way out of a difficult situation. A romantic relationship hits rough waters, so we withdraw. Our boss is giving us a hard time at work, so we look for a new job. We don't get along well with our neighbors, so we start praying that they would move. Our extended family gets on our nerves on vacation, so we rent our own room to get away from them. We're feeling depressed, so we turn to food to ignore our problems. In the very big trials and the daily small trials, we can be tempted to insulate ourselves or escape from the struggles. We might relieve some of the pain, but we certainly will not learn to persevere. Trials alone do not bring maturity. It is only as we persevere through struggles that we grow. If we seek to insulate ourselves from any difficult circumstances, we'll never experience the growth God wants us to have.

In the midst of trials, we should ask God for wisdom.

Human Metaphor: Passenger jet pilots are incredibly capable people. They are people who bear a serious responsibility, tasked to carry hundreds of people through the air from one place to another. They have vast amounts of experience before they ever pilot their first commercial flight. In short, they are experts at what they do. Yet even the most gifted pilot must seek the wisdom and guidance of the control tower when they approach for landing.

If they attempted to land the flight without listening to the tower, the results would be catastrophic. How often do we try to navigate our way through life without seeking divine wisdom?

When we pray, we need to exercise faith.

Scenario: How do you approach God in prayer? Do you see God like a loving father who wants to make sure you have everything you need? Or do you see him more like a loan shark who is willing to give you what you need at 50 percent interest? Or as a boss who is pleased with you only if you do your assignments well? Or as a judge to whom we have to prove our innocence in order to receive a favorable response? What we believe about God will have a profound impact on how we approach him in prayer. If we believe he's not only able to help but also more than willing, we will come in faith.