



FOUNDATIONS OF TRUST

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Humans are sufferers. Life is not the way it is supposed to be. Sin that originated in the Garden has affected everything. Life on planet Earth is often broken, while we seek times of peace. Often relationships are strained, and loved ones die. The Scriptures are brutally honest about all of this. James, the biological half-brother of Jesus, addressed it head-on.

Count It Joy

James 1:2-4 NLT

“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 grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.”

Let’s start at the end and work backward, to unpack this passage, deductively.

Real Perfection

What is the Holy Spirit’s objective here? That we would become perfect and complete, needing nothing. That means our wholeness. The full outworking of the purpose for which God made us.

And how will that be accomplished? ONLY through our union with Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 1:23 *And the church is His body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with Himself.*

Colossians 2:10 *So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the Head over every ruler and authority.*

We know that our unity with Christ begins with a step of faith, in which we put our full trust in what He has already done FOR us, rather than trusting in what we might do for Him. But that’s only a beginning.

How can we reach complete unity with Christ? When our endurance is fully developed. Without this, we will be less than complete.

This pressed Paul to say:

Philippians 3:10 I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised Him from the dead. I want to suffer with Him, sharing in His death,¹¹ so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!

Note the parallel construction of this verse. The second sentence restates the first for clarity and emphasis. To “know Christ” is to “suffer with Him.” This is what develops our endurance and brings us toward completeness. So, endurance is developed through the testing of your faith—and your persistent trust in God.

And what tests your trust in Him?

- When life is difficult.
- When life is baffling, or unjust/unfair.
- When circumstances or people’s behavior make you ask, “Why?”

Grumbling Is Not the Way

We learned last week, from the example of the nation of Israel in the wilderness, that persistent grumbling and complaining displease God, for they show no faith in His wisdom or providence. So, what are we to do? Fake it? Hide our feelings and pretend everything is just okay, while secretly condemning ourselves for feeling otherwise?

People—including you—were not made to bear life alone but to be in relationship with our Creator. That’s the gap that Jesus came to bridge. So, we may cry out to God in our times of need, as the Scriptures urge: *“Let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive His mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most”* (Hebrews 4:16).

An Outlet for Pain

The men and women of the Bible were as real as anyone today. They danced and sang, rejoiced and laughed, argued and confessed, lamented and mourned. They expressed emotions to God in prayer just as we do today.

Our gracious God has given us an emotional outlet: the gift of lament before the throne of the Almighty. Crying out to the Lord is modeled by the writers of Scripture and is encouraged by the Lord Himself. There is actually an entire book about lamenting called Lamentations, written by Jeremiah, who was known as the “weeping prophet.”

What is lament? Lament can be defined as, “crying out in grief,” “expressing sorrow,” or “mourning aloud.”

We have permission to lament. Whether your misery is the result of your own sins, or a physical calamity, mistreatment by others, or the suffering of others, or discouragement over the current condition of your life, you have permission from God to lament.

The Bible even gives us a language for lament. When we encounter difficult struggles and need God’s rescue, salvation, and help, the psalms of lament are a good place to turn.

Scriptures for Lament

Lament is a major theme in the Bible and particularly in the book of Psalms. The psalms of lament are beautiful poems or hymns expressing human struggles. The psalms of lament comprise the largest category of psalms, making up about one third of the entire book of Psalms.

The psalms of lament are poetic hymns meant to be sung to God. They deal with issues that were and still are central to the life of faith for individual believers and the whole community of faith. The lament psalms express intense emotions, real human struggles, and the anguish of heart experienced by people as they attempted to live out their faith individually and corporately.

There are two types of lament psalms: community and individual. There are 42 individual psalms of lament and 16 community or national psalms of lament.

Community psalms of lament deal with situations of national crisis—they describe problems faced by all the people of God. Psalm 12 is an example of a community lament, expressing sadness over widespread sin: *“Help, Lord, for no one is faithful anymore; those who are loyal have vanished from the human race. Everyone lies to their neighbor; they flatter with their lips, but harbor deception in their hearts”* (Psalm 12:1–2).

The great Protestant Reformer Martin Luther treasured the psalms of lament. Of them, he said, “What is the greatest thing in the Psalter but this earnest speaking amid the storm winds of every kind? Where do you find deeper, more sorrowful, more pitiful words of sadness than in the psalms of lamentation? There again, you look into the hearts of the saints, as into death, yes, as into hell itself. When they speak of fear and hope, they use such words that no painter could so depict for your fear or hope, and no Cicero or other orator has so portrayed them. And that they speak these words to God and with God, this I repeat, is the best thing of all. This gives the words double earnestness and life” (*Word and Sacrament*).

Lament is vital because it helps us while we are in the pit of our pain and difficulty. It's a cry to God, begging or petitioning God to rescue us from our agony. In essence, lamentation is much like the "ouch" we utter when something hurts us physically, only it's directed toward God.

Lament psalms teach us that it's never wrong to cry out to God. God hears us in our pain and welcomes us close. He's a good, good Father.

Like the whole book of Psalms, the psalms of lament follow a pattern that begins with suffering and ends with glory. Usually, these songs start on a negative, complaining note, but they always end on a positive, faith-filled note.

As we see learn from Jesus, who, dying on the cross, expressed His own anguish in lament when He echoed the words of Psalm 22:1: "My God, My God, why have You abandoned me?" God is strong enough to handle our questions, our anger, and our doubting thoughts. God loves us deeply—and He is always with us. We are never alone.

Lamenting Effectively

A psalm of lament, or a prayer of lament, usually has these 5 components:

- Addressed to God (Psalm 44:1 says simply, "O God")
- A complaint (Psalm 44:2 says, "*Yet for Your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered*")
- A request for help (Psalm 44:23 says, "*Awake, Lord! Why do You sleep? Rouse Yourself! Do not reject us forever*")
- An affirmation of trust (As in Psalm 13:5 - "*But I trust in Your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in Your salvation*")
- A vow of glorious praise (Psalm 13:6 - "*I will sing the LORD's praise, for He has been good to me*")

If you think about it, our faith is built on trauma (not only ours, but our Savior's). Consider His:

- virgin birth (plans interrupted, reputation stained, future uncertain)
- desert temptations (common human temptations, but most intense)
- wrestling in the Garden of Gethsemane (this is a passionate prayer, but a common one)
- cross (intense agony of mind and body)

Jesus confessed His fear to God and to His disciples: "*My soul is sorrowful, even to death.*" He expressed His own preference ("*Let this cup pass from Me.*"), without whining or grumbling.

How can such challenges, such difficulties, such grief, be "an opportunity" for great joy? Wisdom may be needed in order to "consider" it such an opportunity as James suggested, and God gives it generously, if we ask Him.

Light at the End of the Tunnel

What kind of joy is that? What makes it “great”?

If we express our pain—if we talk it out (with a trusted friend or, especially, with God, who understands us intimately and loves us deeply), not abandoning our faith, but *setting it in the context* of tension and hardship and confusion, we will come to the discovery that the psalmists found: God is still on His throne, intricately involved in all human affairs, and is willing to help us, to lead us through, to lead us out, to bless us—ultimately and everlastingly.

And at its core, lamentation, when directed to God, is an act of faith, for God is the only One who can do something about our pain. When we lament, we acknowledge that God is everything. In our weakness, we call out to our God knowing He is there. In our pain, we acknowledge that He alone can bring something good from something bad.

Out of our confidence in Him, however shrouded in confusion at the moment, we offer praise—perhaps weakly at first—until our foundation becomes clear again: God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. This is the strong and durable foundation of our trust.