



## 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:** <sup>16</sup>Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. <sup>17</sup>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.

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

**Homework for next week:**

Hebrews 2:14-15

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Gratitude over Grumbling: Even if You're Living with Pain**  
James 1:16-17, Job 1, Job 2  
December 3, 2023

*Pastor Mike Novotny*

I had a really good message for you today. Maybe you caught the past tense, I had one. We've 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's honestly a classic in the Bible, James 1:17. "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." 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, "Don't be deceived my dear brothers and sisters." In my Bible the heading for James 1 is, "Trials and Temptations." And I won't 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 shouldn't believe that God is tempting us. And then finally, finally he gets to these words, "Don't 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've had this before too, where you thought you knew what a Bible passage meant, but then when you read it and you read what's 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 wasn't too disappointed. And in the end, I think you're going to be glad that you're 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've lived with chronic pain, with pain that shows up on a Monday and it's 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. You remember that story from the Old Testament? Job is 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's 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. But then, then the pain doesn't 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 wasn't the pain that was the problem for Job, it was the pain that persisted. That's what deceived him and that's 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. So, for those of you who live with headaches or migraines, you know, you're reaching for the Aleve this day, and that day, and then this day again. Those of you who have severe food allergies or GI issues, and your stomach just doesn't feel good and you're nauseous on this day, and then that day, and then another day. For those of you who have bad ankles, or knees, or a bad back, arthritis in your hands, and just pain. Pain isn't like the mail man who knocks on your door, the Amazon guy who drops off a box and then leaves, it's this roommate that you didn't invite, that brings all of his stuff and just makes your home, your life worse.

And what's sobering about the CDC statistic is that if 50 million Americans, one in five American adults lives with chronic pain, I think -- 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're on disability, or living paycheck to paycheck and you're just afraid that one more medical bill, or a car accident, or something breaking is going to break you. If you're estranged from your sister, or your son, or your dad, and just day after day, you live with the fact that you don't have this happy functional nuclear family, it's broken and it's hard. If you live with depression or anxiety, if you're in a marriage that just feels stuck. I mean, imagine if we added the chronic painful situations that people lived with, it wouldn't be one in five, would it? It would be one in three, one in two. 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's day 107, day 2,003, that's the test. Right?

And so, if you're there right now -- if you've been there, if you know and love a dear brother and sister who is there, here's what James would say to you. He would say in verse 16, "Don't be deceived my dear brothers and sisters." You can hear his heart, right? "My dear brothers and sisters, I love you. We're family through faith in Jesus, so don't be deceived. I know you're hurting, and I know you prayed -- you prayed a hundred days in a row for this to change and it hasn't, but don't be deceived. Don't be lied to, don't give up your faith. The things you used to believe when the sun was shining, and don't believe now that it's been raining for a hundred 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're living with chronic pain, you might have been tempted by these words too. This scroll says, "God's not good." It's 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. Oh, I know you're saying it when you're a little kid. But how can God be good? Let me think of it, if you were a parent and your baby girl couldn't sleep because her stomach was so upset, and you had the power, it wouldn't cost you anything, it would be easier for you, turning off her light switch to fix that pain. What kind of parent would you be if you didn't? But God could, God can, and yet he doesn't. Maybe God's not good. If your best friend had depression and it was just like this journey and there was medication and there was ups and there was down and suicidal. Maybe he thought about it, maybe he even attempted it, and you could fix that. That chemical imbalance in his brain, what's 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 didn't? 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, we called upon him in the day of trouble, we cast our anxiety on him, and then, nothing.

And James gets that. 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're 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're taking notes at home, I'd love for you to write these down, they're worth remembering. Here's the first one, according to James, everything good is from God. He says here, "Every good and perfect gift is from above." 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 watch Netflix. It might be D, your daughter who texted and said, "Mom, how you doing?" It might be the empathy of a friend or a coworker 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 can 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's point number two, everything good is a gift. Did you catch that word in James' teaching? He says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above." Actually, in James' original Greek he used the word twice. He said, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above." Which makes this deceptive lie even less believable. Because those A-to-Z blessings that you and I are thinking of, they're not just good things, according to James they are good gifts.

Do you know the difference between a gift and a thing? A gift is a thing that you don't deserve but someone who is good just decides to give. Alright, so if you're working at your job, it's payday, the boss hands you a check and says, "Hey, I have a gift for you." You say, "Oh, a bonus? Year-end gift? What is this?" He says, "Well no, it's your paycheck." You say, "No, no that's a thing. That's a good thing, but that's not a gift. I worked for that." No, a gift is more like what happens on your birthday and on Christmas. Do you know what your birthday and

Christmas have in common? Those are the two days when you are most likely to get something good that you deserved nothing to get.

You remember the story? In a manure scented cave in the first century, to a family that was dead broke from a dingy town at a time in history where there was no air conditioning, no heat, no motors and no Netflix. And Jesus left behind all 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 the things that people should get them because Jesus gave up all of that. That does not make sense, which is what makes it a gift, right? At Christmas time, I don't deserve anything, Jesus deserves everything. You don't deserve anything because of his birth or what He did. So, if you get something, it's a gift.

And here according to James, it's not just your birthday things or your Christmas things, it's everything. He says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above." The air we breathe, well, we don't deserve that. The breakfast sandwich we ate, we don't deserve that. The beauties of creation, a cat, a dog, the empathy of a friend, God himself, Jesus, the cross, forgiveness, every spiritual thing, every physical thing, every emotional thing, every relational thing, James is saying to us, "All of it's a gift."

Do you see how that could help you when you're living with chronic pain, you're hurting again, you're 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, everything that you love, and realize, "I didn't 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 doesn't sink in think about it this way. How many times have you and I sinned against God? "I don't know that number. A lot." Have you ever gotten a birthday gift from someone that you've sinned against constantly? If there's that person in your family that you've really hurt and now they keep their distance, or someone at work that you just kind of clash with. You know, there's Chuck from the office. "Hey Chuck, yeah, I know you don't like me. I think you kind of hate me, but I came up with a birthday list." 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 don't get why he doesn't push the button or flip the switch and end your pain, he has to be good. We've sinned against him millions of times and he's turned around and given us millions of gifts. So, "Don't be deceived my dear brothers and sisters." I know you're still living with the depression, with the back pain, with the allergies, with the issues, but, "Don't be deceived. Every good and perfect gift is from above." And if those two things weren't 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." He said it this way, "Every good and perfect gift is from above coming down from the father of the heavenly lights, who does not

change like shifting shadows." That is such a powerful word. But if I wanted to protect you from this lie I would -- I would want you to know this, everything changes, anything good, everything perfect in your life can change. One accident, one event, one pandemic, the death of the person you loved 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. In this world everything is temporary, everything. All the good gifts from A to Z they are not guaranteed, and if you remember that you'll be grateful when they're 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'm here with an open Bible and this is what I do and I'm preaching to you, this might not be here next year or next week, but it's here today. Thank you, God. 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's going to go, so if it hasn't yet, God is so good. And through it all James wants you to know God won't 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. That Jesus gave his life up on the cross, that 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're living with chronic pain, God is still right there. So, when you're 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 will be right there. So, you and I can learn to say it 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're with me. I will not be afraid. You've called me by name. You made a commitment never to abandon me or forsake me, even if my mother and father do.

And so, yeah God, I'm hurting again. And yes, I'm still asking you to end my pain, but even if you don't, I'm so grateful that you're here. So, put those three things together. Everything good A to Z in your life is from God. And all of those things from A to Z are a gift that we don't deserve. And finally, even though everything might go today or tomorrow, we will always have God through the blood, life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

That's what Marilyn knows. Some of you, you know, here at our church. I'm Pastor Mike and my colleague is Pastor Michael because we like to make it confusing. Oh, the other day I was talking to Pastor Michael and asking him about the most grateful person he knows. Who out of all 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." I mean, you put in all these years, you've worked so hard, you raise the kids, and now you're going to retire, right? And you're going to travel, and you're 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's kind of wincing and she's 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'm 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's pray.

Our Father in heaven, I haven't been there just yet. And I love you, I like you, I trust you, I respect you, but the truth is I haven't 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're good when life is good, and think you're bad when life is bad. We want to be consistent just like you are with us.

So, God, plant this truth deep in our heart and give us your Holy Spirit when we're 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're 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're good. The fact that you listen is proof that you're good. And the fact that you will answer in the right way at the right time is proof that you're 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.