

You Need a Meaning for Your Frustrations

Go ahead and turn in your bibles to James chapter 1. While you are turning there...

We are nearing the end of our Work series. Throughout this series we have looked at multiple places in the Bible that talks about work and got 1 week more after this one. One of the things we're trying to accomplish with this series is show you how the Bible's teaching should eliminate any doubt you have in the value of your work. That as long as you do work that fits with God's intentions in where He wants the world to go, your work is valuable. We don't want anyone in our church saying the words "I just" when asked about their work. "I just sell insurance." "I just wait tables." "I just watch children." "I just do administration." No, it's more than that. Your work is partnering with God to take the world someplace.

From there what we've tried to do is put tools in your tool belt for the future - how you'll think about and approach all the many aspects of the work you do and to give us common language for how we approach our work together.

- We talked about the ability in Christ to see our work as a calling. And therefore to put our whole hearts into it.
- We've talked about the disciplines of working hard and the blessing of being tired, and the discipline of resting and enjoying God and what He's given us.
- We talked about centering our identities in Christ so that we can have stability and work with integrity.
- And last week we highlighted our mission to bring renewal and reconciliation in all its forms to the spaces in which we work.

Today, I want to add one more tool to our toolbelt as we navigate our work together.

To start us off, I want us to do something together. Pull out something you can write on, or something you type into. I'd like for you to take just a minute and just think (and not write) about your work. All of your work. The things God has called you to do to take the world someplace. So your job if you have one, but also think of your work that you don't get paid for. Your survival work. Cooking, cleaning, washing, grass cutting, house repairs. I want you to think about the ways you give your energy to serve your household, your neighbors, the church. Here is what I want you to write down:

- What are your frustrations with your work? Don't just put it's hard. Why is it hard? Difficult boss. The work is tedious or monotonous. You are not as good at your work as you want to be. You're not growing as quickly as you want to be. It could be you are under-appreciated or underpaid.

That's our question for today, that all of us experience some sort of frustrations with our work, so what do we do with those frustrations? And I think it's an important one

because these things are the ways that you day-in and day-out live in the effects of what we talked about a few weeks ago from Genesis 3 - the reality that while work is a part of God's good design for humanity, it's also cursed - it produces thorns and thistles. It's difficult and tiring and, at times, absolutely frustrating. So, how should we think about and handle those frustrations? Some of you are like "this. This right here is what I needed—we should've made the whole series about *this*, because that's how many frustrations I have with my work. We could have done one of my frustrations every week.

So let me do just a little bit of exposition here and then I want to take it and talk about how we handle our frustrations with work.

James 1:2

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,

So James said we will meet trials. Trials of what kinds? Various kinds. Big and small. Trials of all sorts. Serious consequential things. Smaller nuisances. Trials of various kinds. The word there for trial is sometimes translated as test. Trial can mean temptation. It can also be used to refer to the circumstances around that temptation. Any adversity, any trouble, any frustration. I don't know what's on your list but it qualifies. And James says something so lofty, so ideal, that it almost comes across as impossible to us: he says that there is a way to meet those things with a sense of joy. Now, not calling bad things good. But a way of viewing God and our lives in such a way that we have a unique perspective on frustrations, big and small. So at this point, those of us who have not already written James off are cautiously thinking, "ok, James - you got my attention - how in the world can I view them in that way?" And he gives us the key that unlocks in v. 3:

3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

He says that trials - in whatever form they come in - though painful, can actually accomplish something for our good. Your frustrations and trials have a potential that ease and comfort in life do not. They unlock something in our lives, something produces maturity.

Something James calls steadfastness. Steadfastness is a power and a strength to handle anything that comes your way without it crushing you. It was a word used for Christian martyrs that died while singing hymns to God. The Bible uses the word "patience" for dealing with difficult people. In the same way, the Bible uses the word "steadfastness" for working through life's difficult situations and circumstances. It's an internal, Holy Spirit enabled power and strength of character and faith that can withstand and endure anything that life might bring. And we can do this without deteriorating into a

weak, anxious spirit. It's the ability to say "no matter what comes my way, my God runs the world and He loves me and I belong to Him. He will get me through it, use it for my good, and I know what awaits me on the other side of eternity."

I think a great example is the apostle Paul, Philippians 4. Writing from a jail cell. Paul says

"I've been hungry and well fed. I have learned the secret to being content in any circumstance. Christ gives me strength." You couldn't stop Paul. He was telling everyone about Jesus and they didn't like it, so they threw him in jail. So he starts up with the jailor, singing hymns and telling him how Jesus rose from the dead. He was like "yall can do whatever you want to me. God is gonna give me what I need to glorify him so I'm good. If I'm out of jail, I'll tell people about Jesus. Throw me in jail and I'll tell the jailor about Jesus. Kill me and I go to be with Jesus. Either way, I win and you can't stop me." Modern day theologian DJ Khaled would describe Paul's mentality as "All I do is win win win..."

James says that trials have the potential to unlock this in our lives. To develop and form character in us that ease and convenience cannot build.

In order to grow, we actually need things that are challenging and difficult and hard and stressful. And James is saying, when it comes to our faith and maturity as followers of Jesus, this is what trials do for us. Pain is part of how God breaks through our pride and selfishness. Learning to bear a burden is preparation for life.

3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

I love that James says "you know this". Because it's everywhere. It's a principle found everywhere.

- Think about a butterfly trying to break out of its cocoon? Ever watched it struggle and fight. Do you know what happens if you help it out of the cocoon? It doesn't have the muscular strength to fly. So it dies. It needed the struggle to survive.
- Military boot camp. Put you through hard things. Trials. Because where they are about to go is hard.

This is the motivational poster industry.

- If you wanna get strong you have to lift something heavy.
- There is no elevator to success. You have to take the stairs.
- Success is never owned, it's rented. And rent is due every day.

Ok so that's the big idea from James 1. Trials can be a tool in the sovereign and loving hands of God to bring about depth in us, maturity in us, character. Unswerving faith in us.

Alright, now let's take all that and apply it to your work frustrations.

Look back at your list, your particular frustrations with your work. You have 2 options. You can let those frustrations destroy you. Or you can let those frustrations serve you. **You can let your work frustrations destroy you or you can let them serve you.**

A lot of people, their frustrations end up destroying them.

- They become disillusioned and discouraged. Because they aren't as effective in their work as they want to be. They aren't making as much difference in the world as they thought they would. They lose heart, and lose ambition. No longer putting my heart into it. No longer trying to develop expertise and skills to do well in your work. It's not worth it and I'm tired and nothing is ever going to change.
- Sometimes people become entitled. Because they work so hard for so long and the pain builds up and they begin to think they are entitled to cut corners or do unethical things to make something happen. They become entitled to some type of relief. Their job has been frustrating for too long, people have been ungrateful for too long, and they can't handle it anymore.
- Others become domineering. I'm going to force this to happen. I will just bully my way through. They become dishonest and unethical. They overwork. They become controlling.
- Some people just keep switching jobs every time they are frustrated, and keep looking for the one job that won't be frustrating, sabotaging connections and relationships and stability in their life as a result.

Their frustrations destroyed them. Tore them apart, tore their life apart. Or. You can make your work frustrations serve you. See when Jesus defeated death and rose from the grave, He used the Devil's greatest weapon and turned it for good. Jesus defeated death by dying. He conquered sin by using death. Jesus put his foot on the devil's throat and said what you meant for evil I will now use for good. Now the burdens and trials of life become a tool in God's hand to shape us and build us.

In Christ, the things on your list...the frustrations that you wrote down, are the very things that God intends to use to grow you.

Let me tell you how. 4 things

How To make Your Frustrations Serve You

1. See Them Coming

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,

When. not if. That's an important detail. Trials are inevitable. Trials are coming. They are unavoidable. Trials of all kinds. And there's nothing you can do to stop it from happening. You can wear a helmet, install an alarm or load up on yoga and yogurt or whatever. All of that is fine, but none of that is going to prohibit frustration from coming into your life. All work is cursed, our first parents got kicked out of the garden and the way back in is

blocked. The bible actually says warrior angels called “cherubim” were set to guard and block it.

Wanted to make mention out of this because in my experience we are often caught off guard when trials and frustrations come our way and we increase our pain because of it. It seems we tend to operate as though life - whether that be our career or otherwise - are supposed to be trial free. We believe that if something is hard, then something about it must be wrong. If I were doing it right, it would be easy. If God were really with me, it would be easy.

- My work is hard...I must have the wrong job.
- My friends are annoying... I need better friends.
- My marriage is difficult... I must have the wrong spouse.
- My kids are going crazy... it must be the gluten.

“If I just do the right things, in the right way then my frustrations will go away.” No they won’t. The world is broken, we are fallen. There is no going backwards to the pre-curse garden. You are not kicking down the door to the tree of life. And I don’t know much about your fighting skills but if you try to fight a cherubim, you aren’t winning. The way out is forward, not backwards. Jesus came and died to pay for sin and break the power of the curse. He works through us to mitigate the impact of the curse and make his blessings flow far as the curse is found. And one day with him is where our work is no longer cursed.

But until then, see it coming.

Don’t be surprised when work is frustrating and don’t freak out. The bible told you this would happen. When something goes wrong, don’t panic. It was expected. We talked about this in our 1 Peter series a couple months ago. The Bible told you this was how it would go. Now it’s a matter of faith, as to whether or not you will trust God in the middle of it and believe him when he says he has good purposes in the middle of the difficulty.

Some of us have experienced how we were raised. Some of us, our parents out of love for us, addressed all of our problems without us facing them head on. We were raised with the philosophy of “preparing the path for your child.” instead of “preparing your child for the path”. Some of our parents were snow-plow parents, removing any and every obstacle in our childhood. That does more harm than good because a trial free life actually prohibits our development.

And we have seen the cumulative effect of this. Younger people we’ve pastored with over the years, one of the patterns that emerge. Too many of them cannot handle being given responsibility for something: when their supervisor puts appropriate pressure on them to get their job done at the correct quality level and correct length of time, they despise their supervisor.

They are unable to handle normal pressure and normal burdens. And when that happens, one of the trends is that they had parents who removed pressure instead of creatively applying it. Their parents did not teach them how to handle responsibility. Children should have chores because they are a part of our family. And these will need to be age-appropriate. But they need work so that they learn the skills of doing what they're told to do. Able to show up on time and stay at it until the job is done.

If they learn the skill of doing what they're told and doing it well with a good attitude, they will be highly employable for the rest of their lives. And if they ever find themselves in a role where they carry some authority they will be a trustworthy authority and not an arrogant authority because they will possess a character trait of humility.

So hear me: work is cursed and that's true of all work, then when you choose a job you're just choosing your set of problems. Every job has problems, they are just different. Every job has different ways it will press you. Every job has different obstacles. The obstacles and the pains may be different, but they are still going to be pains and obstacles. See them coming.

2. Go to God

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

God I don't know how to handle this, will you help? God I need wisdom for how to proceed, please help. And listen, "Counting it joy", doesn't mean "enjoying the trial." You can be sad that work is hard. You can be sad that your job presents you with unique and trying problems. We're not called to act like everything is always fine. The biblical category is lament, where we go to God with our pain and grief.

- You got passed over for that promotion for political reasons...Go to God.
- You're feeling pressure to do "whatever it takes" to meet the bottom line, but feel like the quality of your work is being compromised....Go to God.
- Your boss chews you out for things that aren't your fault... Go to God.

"Show, then, your wound to the Physician that he may heal it." - Ambrose, the early church Father

So James says go to Him with it. Go to God and ask for wisdom. Go to God and ask him to use the trials to build you up and shape you and turn you into the kind of person he wants for you to be.

**"The Lord helps the fallen and lifts those bent beneath their loads."
Psalms 145:14 NLT**

Let me finish this point by saying it more aggressively. Too many people in our church skip going to God and lamenting, going to God and seeking wisdom and asking for help and all they do is tell other people their work frustrations. Other people who can't do anything about it. You didn't talk to the one who can actually help you, the one who can work in the frustrations and even use the frustrations for your good. If you have complained to people about your work this week but you have not prayed to God about it, you've gotten it precisely backwards. When you don't talk to God and jump straight to telling others, that's called whining and complaining. I'd use another term but our other pastors would have to fire me.

But after you go to God, step 3 is...

3. Invite Others in

Once again, we go to God first. If you don't then you are expecting things from people that they can't deliver. But, after going to God, bring other people in. That way we're going to others not primarily to vent or complain but to ask for their help, guidance and input on how we should respond. In Christ, we are a family. And part of our role is to help each other grow in Christ. God placed people filled with His Spirit around us to give us wisdom, discern, and help us. To bear one another's burdens. To mourn with those who mourn. To pray for each other. In chapter 5, James will say that the prayer of a righteous person, meaning righteous in Christ, is powerful and effective.

I think overall we have a really healthy culture here. One of the comments I hear all the time from folks who are new is that they cannot believe how honest and transparent and open everyone is. That's a beautiful thing. That's a freedom found in Christ. So let me give just a little bit of coaching to make sure we are stewarding that culture of honesty well.

LG setting. Someone brings up frustrations. It's appropriate to express some form of sorrow. "I'm sorry, that sounds really hard. Thanks for sharing." And, let's make sure we remember that to be honest with each other but also we are to help each other grow.

Here are the next questions we might ask, so that we actually help each other grow in Christ.

- How might God intend to use this to make you more like Jesus?
- What are the necessary steps you need to take to make sure that frustration serves you instead of destroys you?

Our role is not simply to be there for one another, it is to be there for one another as the Holy Spirit filled members of the family of God with a calling and responsibility to help one another grow in Christ. The people in your life can't fix your work problems but they can help understand how God might use your work problems to grow you.

To prevent our frustrations from destroying us and instead have our frustrations serve us, we need hugs and we need help. Both. Some people are all hugs and no help. You don't actually help me grow in Christ. Others of us are all help and no hugs and that's a different problem.

4. Remain steadfast

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

Crown of life refers to the laurel wreath given to winners in athletic games. It was what you got at the end, to say "you did it!" God sees what you put up with. He sees how hard it is. He sees how much pain it brings you. He sees how it grieves you. He sees. He cares... and promises that none of it will go unappreciated.

Your faithfulness will be rewarded. Keep your eyes fixed on that day.

- So look, maybe you are not paid enough. and that might be true. And you might need to look around at other jobs. But in the meantime, don't miss the chance to learn that God is the one who actually takes care of you. Make your frustration serve you.
- Maybe in your work, you're not appreciated enough. You know, you probably aren't. If you're home with kids then you definitely aren't. And for now you have the chance to grow in performing your work with God as your only audience. Learning for his smile to be enough for you.
- You might find your work boring or monotonous. And to be honest, some work can be boring. And God can use it to help you master yourself in such a way that you are able to become excellent at something you don't particularly enjoy doing. Bearing a burden shapes your character. A lot of life is about making peace with things you don't particularly enjoy. Learning to do things well when you aren't passionate about them.
- Someone less qualified than you got that promotion instead of you because of political reasons. Let that be an opportunity to activate within you a reminder that there is a future world coming where things like that do not happen. And it can create a gratitude in you because you know what's coming.
- I have a friend who said she had a bad boss at a previous job and looks back on it as a lesson for her that that's who she could become if she cares more about success than character and faithfulness.
- Maybe you've got a boss and he or she is fine, but you've just always wanted to be the boss. It's a chance for you to learn how to be content doing as you're told, submitting to authority so that one day when you are in authority you are trustworthy.

- Maybe the people you work with are awful, maybe the work is too hard, maybe you aren't as good at it as you want to be and you're not seeing the results that you want, maybe your commute is too long.

Whenever work frustrates you it can serve to angle your heart towards heaven, detaching your fingers from their grip of earthly things. It can help you develop strength and perseverance as you continue to carry something heavy.

And look I totally understand in the middle of our frustration, there is something within us that says "Why would God take me through something like this, why would God let me through anything that is uncomfortable. I *know* God wants me to be happy. I did all the right things so therefore frustrating things should not be happening!". Now some of us would never ever articulate what we're feeling like that, because then we'd know it was wrong to believe. But if we were just completely honest, that is how we feel a lot of the time. And it is in those moments to only focus on those responses to our frustration and miss out the big picture: the big picture that your Heavenly Father is for you, He is so for you that he sent his beloved son to die for you. He used the ultimate thing that is broken in our world, death, to overcome death, he used his death to adopt us into his family. All of it: for our good. So don't miss this in the middle of your frustrations, you have a Heavenly Father that is trustworthy, who is with you, who is for you, and is working through your frustrations for your good.

I'm not telling you to not be frustrated. I'm saying don't let your frustrations destroy you. Instead, make your frustrations serve you. So to close out our time today here is what I want us to do. Take a look at the list you made at the beginning of the sermon. I want us to spend some time right now bringing those before Jesus. Pray "God I don't know how to handle this, will you help? God I need wisdom for how to proceed, please help. God help me see how you are working through these frustrations in growing me to look more like Jesus." So let's do that right now.

