

Love Your Loserness

Suffering, Tests, and Temptation Part 5

James 1:9-11 11-9-2014

Summary: Those who are lowly (feel like losers) should prize that because it can bring humility. Those who have earthly glory should prize the fact that it will all soon fade away, because thinking about that can also bring humility.

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James 1:9 The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. **10** But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. **11** For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.

Introduction

The Pain of Being a Loser

Of all the insults people could throw your way, one of the most painful (especially if it has some validity to it) is when they call you a loser. Anyone here ever been called a loser? Even worse than someone else calling you a loser is when your own heart calls you a loser. You look around at other people who outshine you in some way and you think, *Man, I'm so lame. What's the matter with me?* Other people get A's without even trying; I study until my brain is bleeding and I still fail the test. My boss at work is half my age and he makes double my salary. Look how beautiful she is. Look how thin she is. Look at what good shape he's in. I'm such a slob. Every time I go on a diet it ends up being the worst three hours of my life. Look at how obedient their kids are – they've got their life together. My house is chaos. Some of these guys around here can fix anything – wire an outlet, rebuild a generator, put up drywall – I tell my wife I'm going to try to fix the furnace and she just starts laughing like it's the funniest joke she's ever heard.

“Do you even know where the furnace is in this house?”

We all feel it at different points, but most of us, in some area of life, cannot escape that gnawing feeling, “I'm such a loser.” A guy pulls up next to you in his 2014 Ford Mustang, and there you are in

your '71 Pinto. How do you deal with that? How do you handle your loserness? You know you are not a loser in every area, but aren't there one or two areas in your life where once in a while it just hits you like a shot to the gut – "I'm such a failure in this area." That is your loserness. Or to use the biblical word - *tapeinos*.

Romans 12:16 ...Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with the *tapeinos*. Do not be conceited.

The *tapeinos* are such losers that we need a command in Romans 12 to get us to even be willing to associate with them.

Luke 1:52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the *tapeinos*.

It is the opposite of a ruler - someone who is down low, in need of being lifted up. In 2 Corinthians 7:5, Paul calls himself *tapeinos* because he was brought low by all his fears and weaknesses and anxieties. So a *tapeinos* person is someone who is so weak and inadequate and lowly that people don't even want to associate with him. Our word for all that is loser. And that is the word James uses in this passage. It is the word in verse 9 translated **humble circumstances**. Or your Bible might say **lowly**.

But whatever word you use, the question is, how do you deal with that in your life? How do you deal with your loserness/lowliness – the things that make you unattractive or cause people to look down on you, or that cause you to look down on yourself and get depressed?

Wrong Solutions

The world's solution is self-esteem. Self-esteem is the art and science of just pretending you are *not* a loser. But for most people it doesn't work. It only works for people who are good at being delusional and denying reality. But for most of us, we realize - these areas where we feel like losers – in most cases, we didn't just make that up. We feel that way for a reason. It is reality.

Other people try to deal with it by doing things like cutting themselves. They don't know what to do, but they have to do something, and it comes out in the form of self-destruction. That is how they express their disapproval of their *tapeinos*.

Some deal with it by getting drunk or smoking pot or taking Xanax. I can't stand the sting of my lowliness, and so I'll just take something to deaden the pain of that sting.

Most people deal with their lowliness by just ignoring it, and diverting their attention to some area where they are doing well.

"Yeah, I may be a dunce when it comes to book knowledge, but I've got a lot of common sense."

"I may be way below average there, but at least I'm good over here. See – I'm not so lowly. I'm not really a loser. I'm not a failure."

But isn't it true that as much as you try to do that, from time to time the reality of your lowliness in those other areas leaks through your defenses and you see someone excelling in those areas, and you just feel it – "Ah – *loser! I can't deny it!*" What if I told you there was a way to take that painful feeling, and instead of just stuffing it back down under the covers, or clouding it over with drugs, or crying or cutting or pretending it's not real – what if I told you that instead of any of that you could do something that would actually take that very feeling and convert it into joy? Would you be interested in hearing how to do that? That is exactly what James is going to teach us today.

Before I went on sabbatical a month and a half ago we were studying verse by verse through the book of James, and we left off at verse 9. So that is where we pick it up today.

Losers: Prize Your Lowliness

James is going to show us what we should do when we get hit in the face with some of our lowliness.

"I'm a D student."

"I got fired – from a job that a monkey could do."

"I was engaged."

If that's you, what should you do? Boast! (NIV – **take pride**)
“Why does he tell us to do that? I thought boasting was a bad thing.”

Boasting

It can be bad, but there is also a good kind. The topic of boasting comes up a lot in the Bible, and sometimes it's condemned as a sin, and other times it is a good thing. And to understand why that is, you have to understand the definition of boasting.

The Definition of Boasting

Boasting is celebrating something you regard as having supreme value.¹

And that can be done in a good way or in a bad way depending on two factors:

- 1) What you celebrate as valuable, and
- 2) How you celebrate it.

What You Celebrate

What you celebrate matters because that shows what you value. Suppose a guy finds out that he has a reputation of being the toughest, meanest guy on the block and everyone is afraid of him – and he celebrates that as being valuable. He prizes that reputation as a badge of honor. And suppose another guy finds out that his reputation is that he is everybody's servant. He has a reputation of being meek and humble and gentle, and is known for his servanthood. And when he finds out that that is his reputation, he is elated. He celebrates that. He prizes that as a badge of honor. The first guy is evil and the second guy is righteous, and you can tell that by what kinds of things they celebrate. Whatever you think of as being worth celebrating in your life – that is your boast. And the things that you boast in – the things that you celebrate and prize and highly value as really important and worth running after – those things reveal what kind of person you are.

How You Celebrate

So it matters what you celebrate, and it also matters how you celebrate. I celebrate something good in my life in a way that points to me as deserving the credit, or I speak in ways that draw attention to me, cause people to be impressed with me, lift me up in people's eyes – that is the bad kind of boasting. We call it bragging. So what is the good kind of boasting?

Good Boasting

The good kind of boasting is when you celebrate good things in ways that point to God as being great.

If you celebrate the fact that God gave you strong faith, or you celebrate the fact that some brother or sister is walking in righteousness and following God's way, or you celebrate the opportunity to serve someone – if those are the kinds of things you prize in life, and you celebrate them in ways that cause people to be impressed with God rather than being impressed with you, that is the good kind of boasting.

The whole idea comes from Jeremiah 9.

¹ The New Testament concept of boasting comes from the Old Testament, where there are two different Hebrew words translated with this Greek word. One is HALLEL – the normal Hebrew word for praise. Boasting is praising. You naturally praise the things you highly value. The other Hebrew word is ALAZ, which means to rejoice or exult. (Don't confuse exult with exalt. Exalt means to lift up or magnify. Exult means to rejoice in or take delight in or get excited about. So we exalt God, and we exult in God. We lift Him up (that is exalting), and we get excited about Him (that is exulting). The New Testament idea of boasting combines those two ideas (HALLEL and ALAZ).

Jeremiah 9:23 This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.

The point there is not that you go around bragging about how spiritual you are, "I know the Lord better than you do!" No – the point is that when you think of what really matters in life, and what gives you confidence, it is not your wisdom or strength or bank account – it is your knowledge of God. That is what matters to you. And if you found out that people think you are really smart, or really funny – that wouldn't mean much to you. But if you found out that your reputation is that you really know God, you would say, "Ah – I'm reaching my goal!"

The Effect of Boasting

Boasting is such an important principle in living the Christian life. There is a reason why it comes up so often in Scripture. It is important because not only does it reveal what kind of person you are, but your boasting is what steers the direction of your life.

James wrote this book to help us steer our lives in a wise direction, and so he has to teach us about the good kind of boasting. In this passage there are two commands: boast and boast. He tells one group of people to boast in verse 9, then another group in verse 10. The whole purpose of this passage is to command us to do the good kind of boasting because James knows that what you boast in will be the things that determines the direction of your life. The things that you prize as being really important; the things you think of as being the definition of success – those are the things you will run after in life. They are the things that your heart says, "If I have those, I'll be happy. If I don't have them, I won't." So you will end up orienting your life in the pursuit of those things. So here is another way we could define boasting:

Your boast is in whatever things have risen to heart-controlling levels of importance in your life.

Something is so valuable to you, or so important to you that it controls how you feel, what decisions you make, what direction your life goes – that is the thing your heart boasts in.

The Value of Humility

So let's get back to our verse. When James tells the lowly loser in verse 9 to boast, what he is saying is, "Hey – when you feel the sting of your loserness; you have something worth celebrating. It's of high value that really matters. It's something you should think of as a badge of honor. It's so valuable that it should rise to heart-controlling levels in your life, so that it governs the direction of your life." That success in your career that you wish you had – those good looks you wish you had – that money, the car, the house, the education, the respect from others, that organized life where you have all your ducks in a row and everything lined out and squared away and under control – don't let the pursuit of those things control your life. Don't make those things your boast. But the pain you feel when you lack those things – that pain can give you something that *is* worth boasting in.

The High Position

What is that? What is this priceless treasure that losers can have that is so valuable that it's worth celebrating and pursuing and lifting up to a heart-controlling level in your life? Look at what James says – what does he tell us to boast in?

9 The brother in humble circumstances (loser) ought to boast in his high position

The word **position** is not actually in the Greek. Literally it is just **the lowly brother ought to boast in his highness**. So what he is saying is, “If you’re down low – be glad that you’re up so high.” That’s a paradox.² And it only makes sense if you are familiar with Jesus’ teachings. James doesn’t give any explanation – he just expects his readers to understand. He is speaking to believers who have been taught the gospel, so they should know this. One of the most fundamental principles of the gospel is that only the humble can be saved. And the more humble you are, the greater you are in the kingdom of God.

Upside-Down Principle

Jesus’ first sentence in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

How important is humility? The poor in spirit are the only ones who ever make it into heaven.

Matthew 18:1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" ... 3 "I assure you," He said, "unless you are converted and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Luke 18:14 everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The humble will be exalted and the exalted will be humbled. I counted 38 times where I found that principle in the Bible. Old Testament, New Testament, Gospels, Epistles, Prophets, Psalms – it is everywhere. This world we live in is upside down. Think of this world as a giant snow globe (those things that have a house or something in it, and it’s full of water, and you turn it upside down and then right side up and it looks like it’s snowing). We are in one of those and it’s currently upside down. It has been that way ever since you were born, and it is not going to be turned right side up again until Jesus’ Second Coming. So in this life, the whole world is inverted. And everyone in the world is scrambling up a ladder. Everyone wants to get higher. We all want greatness. We all want success. We want to move away from *tapeinos* (loserness) upward toward greatness in this world. So all of humanity is in a mad scramble to get up this ladder. But they don’t realize that the ladder is upside down. Everyone is scrambling to get farther “up” the ladder and God steps in and speaks to us in His Word and says, “Psst – *hey, you’re going the wrong way*. Up is that way.”

Once you discover that, your goal becomes humility. You turn around on the ladder and say, “Excuse me; pardon me; I’m going that way,” because you are the only one who knows which way up really is. Humility becomes our great treasure – the thing that really matters to us. You can hardly overstate the value of humility.

Isaiah 66:2 ... this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

When you are humble, God looks toward you. I love C.J. Mahaney’s summary of that verse: “Humility draws the gaze of our sovereign God.”³ Drawing His gaze means attracting His grace. Isn’t that an amazing thought? There is actually something you can do to attract more grace from God!

James 4:6 That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

² This is a paradox. (A paradox is something that sounds like a contradiction even though it isn’t.)

James wants to get us thinking here, so he says something that sounds crazy. If you are reading your Bible, and you read through this paragraph and then just keep right on reading, you might want to rethink your whole approach to reading the Bible. The proper response to reading James 1:9-11 is, “What? What on earth is he trying to say here?”

I am convinced that when James wrote this paragraph that was what he was shooting for. It is one of those passages that makes the point in such an outrageous way that you are forced to stop and really think hard about it. That is the purpose whenever you see something in the Bible written as a paradox. Chesterton: “A paradox is truth standing on its head screaming for attention.”

This passage is not designed to be instantly understood. James wants us to stop and think.

³ Humility: True Greatness, p.19.

Would you like more grace from God? Would you rather not have God opposing you and fighting against you? There is only one way – humility.

Emptiness = Riches

Don't misunderstand – It is not that by attaining humility you earn blessings from God. The reason you get a lot more blessing from God when you are humble is simply because when you are humble, your cup is empty. And God fills empty cups. When your cup is already full, there's no room for God to pour anything else in. *When you are full of yourself, there is no room for God to give you more of Himself.*

That is the chapter where Paul talks about his famous thorn in the flesh. This is one of those passages where, for some reason, everyone wants to focus more on what isn't said than on what is said.

“What was the thorn? Did Paul have an eye problem or a stomach ache or what was it?”

I am not one bit interested in what God chose not to tell us. But I can tell you two things He did want us to know about Paul's thorn. One was that it was some area of weakness. We see it described that way three times in the passage. The other thing we know for sure is the purpose of the thorn.

2 Corinthians 12:7 To keep me from becoming conceited.

It was some area of weakness allowed by God for the purpose of protecting Paul from pride. So what did Paul do? He did exactly what James is teaching us to do with our weaknesses. He made that his boast.

8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Do you see how that works? Painful, hard, agonizing, humiliating things came into Paul's life. Result? Humility. And when Paul made that humility his boast (the thing he prized and treasured and ran after in life), the result was Christ's power rested on him. **When I am weak, then I am strong.** Why? Because when all of my glory is emptied out of my cup, God fills that empty cup with His glory and strength. And so Paul says, therefore **I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses.** When weakness shows up in your life, say, “Yes! I'll do what I can to shore this area up, but in the meantime I will celebrate the fact that this weakness can empty me and make room for God's grace in my cup.”

“But I thought the way we got grace was through faith?”

It is – but the way to get faith is through humility.

James 2:5 Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith...?

It is through humility that you can become strong in faith because when you don't have your own resources you are forced to rely on God.

Not Self-Worth!

Don't short circuit what God is doing in your life by running after self-esteem. And watch out for the Christianized version of self-esteem that a lot of people push. They take the concept of self-esteem and dress it up in the lingo of identity in Christ. The world says, “If you want to make much of yourself and feel good about yourself, build your self-esteem.” And some preachers try to baptize that by saying, “If you want to make much of yourself and feel good about yourself, focus on your identity in Christ.” I am loved, and I am sanctified, and I am pleasing in God's sight in Christ, and I'm gifted spiritually and I have the mind of Christ, etc. Those things are all true. But the reason God gave us that identity in Christ is not so that we can make much of ourselves – it is so we can make much of the Christ who gave us that identity. You see, feeling good about yourself isn't the best kind of feeling good. The goal is not to feel good about yourself but to feel good about God, because *feeling good about God feels better than feeling good about yourself.*

The greatest joy is not to be on the stage with a bunch of fans cheering for you because they are so amazed and thrilled about you. The greatest joy is in being in the crowd and you being amazed and thrilled by something on the stage that is truly amazing and thrilling.

Winners: Prize Your Upcoming Loss

So – if you are a loser in some area, James' command for you is this: Prize your lowliness.

But what if you are not a loser? What if you are the one with the Mustang? You are the one who's advancing in your career beyond people twice your age. You're an honor student. You're on top of your game. You're highly educated, wealthy, successful. Then what? The *tapeinos* – the lowly losers have something to celebrate, because their loserness can be their ticket to humility. But what about the wealthy and the winners? There is still hope for them. James turns his attention to them in verses 10-11.

10 But the one who is rich should boast in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower.

Does that sound like a strange argument?

“If you're on top of your game, you should celebrate.”

“Why, James?”

“Because you're going to die soon.”

Maybe you do have the big house and the great job and the cool car, but look at the bright side – at least you have one foot in the grave and the other foot on a banana peel. Maybe you do look like supermodel right now, but don't worry – very soon you will be as ugly as a dead, rotting flower. What in the world kind of argument is that?

Look again at verse 10. That word translated **low position** is *tapeinos*. The rich person does still have some *tapeinos* – some loserness, which means he does still have a shot at gaining humility. What is it? If I have my act together, and I'm rich and successful and beautiful and all the rest – what loserness do I have? You are a loser in the sense that all that stuff is really, really temporary. That is your ticket to humility. If you have all the glorious things this world prizes, that's ok because you still have one thing going for you – one thing that can still rescue you from the death trap of pride; it is the fact that all your glory is going to fade away very soon. You lost 20 pounds and dyed your hair and you are just smoking hot. Realize that very soon you will be like the lady I saw a while back with a bumper sticker that said, “I'm still hot – now it just comes in flashes.” Very soon no one will even remember what you used to look like before you got old. You are really smart now – very soon your children will be changing your diapers.

James wants to get your attention. He is saying, “You absolutely must get humility. It's of dire importance. If you're a loser – then it's fairly easy to get – celebrate that. But if you're rich, it's harder. You can still get it, but only focusing your attention on how temporary all your glorious riches are.”

But it is hard for winners to remember that. So James has to explain it to us. He didn't give any explanation in verse 9, but in verse 10 he gives a big, long explanation because James knows it is very rare that a winner really gets this. So he paints a picture for us.

11 For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed.

It's funny – he gives all those steps. First the sun rises, then the plant withers, then the blossom falls, and finally the beauty is destroyed. So it sounds like this lengthy, drawn out process. But the whole thing is all over in one day. The wildflowers in Israel would blossom and then die all in one day.

11 ...In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.

It is all going to fade away long before you're ready for it to fade away. You are going to be in the middle of something. You usually don't hear people say, “Yeah, this is about the right age for my back to go out. I had a good run.” Usually it's more like, “How could this be happening to me already?”

Face of Beauty

Look at verse 11 again. Look at the final step in the death of the flower.

11 For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant. Its flower falls, and its beauty is destroyed.

Literally it says, ...**its face of beauty is destroyed**. That **face of beauty** is the thing James is telling us – don't make that your boast. What is the **the face of beauty** of your life? It is whatever glorious things there are in your life that are only temporary. The face of beauty in your life includes...

Your money	Your ethnic/cultural background
Your good looks	Your job/career
Your muscles/physique	Your spouse/kids (you won't be married in heaven)
Your education	Your skills/abilities
Your house	Your experiences
Your car	Your influence/fame/importance in this world
Your clothes	Your spiritual gift
Your accomplishments/awards	
Your reputation	

Take all that away – what's left? Picture yourself without any of that. No clothes on, no money, no ability, no family, no job, no skill, no education – all the temporary glories of this life that aren't really part of who you are, they were just given to you temporarily by God – strip them all away, and what's left? Anything worth bragging about?

“But I worked hard for all that stuff!”

If those things were in your power to have, then you would never lose them. The fact that it is all going bye bye someday proves that none of it is really in your power. Everything you have is a gift. And none of it is the real you. It is just a lot of external adornment and decoration draped over you temporarily.

All the things we are so prone to put our confidence in – they are like the Burger King cardboard crowns. A kid puts one of those on, but mom and dad can see that nothing is different. They can see he's not really a king. He is the same kid as he always was, and that crown will be in the trash in a matter of hours. Your great career, your good looks, all your money – just so much cardboard. It doesn't make you special, it doesn't make you king – it's just cardboard.

If someone walked up to you and said, “Could you please hold this for me for a second?” and hands you the keys to his quarter-million dollar car, then a few seconds later says, “Thanks,” and takes them back – are you puffed up with pride during those few seconds? No. Why not? Because it's obvious to you that it's not your car, and holding it for a few seconds means nothing. That's obvious to us. What isn't as obvious to us is that this life is essentially a few seconds. And all those things in that list – all your faces of beauty – those are just someone else's car keys. The truth about the real you is whatever is there when all that's stripped away. And thinking about that can give you the priceless treasure of humility and emptiness that God will fill with grace.

This is why God reminds us so often of how short our lives are.

Psalm 90:5 ... [men] are like the new grass of the morning— 6 though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered.

Psalm 103:15 As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; 16 the wind blows over it and it is gone

Isaiah 40:6 ...“All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. 7 The grass withers and the flowers fall ... Surely the people are grass.

Something in our fallenness creates a disorder in our brains that makes this life seem long. It's not. This is why Solomon said it's better to go to a funeral than a wedding. Weddings are about something that is temporary. Funerals wake you up to eternal reality. One of the best things you can do is think about how soon all the faces of beauty in your life will be long gone – not so you can be morbid and depressed, but so you can stop making them your boast. So you can get off the drug of the temporal and your eyes can be opened to some things that are really worth getting excited about.

Interpreting Your Lacking

Remember, James is teaching us about how to properly interpret trials and hardship and suffering. A huge number of the problems we face in life come from misinterpreting our trials. When you get angry at a flat tire – the reason you get angry is misinterpretation. You interpreted the trial as a bad thing that is getting in the way, rather than as a good thing, sent by God to change you and bring Him glory. So James is laboring in this first chapter to instruct us on how to correctly interpret the hardships in our lives. And one of the most common hardships in life is either not having something you want, or having it and losing it. And so James is showing us how to properly interpret both of those. They are things to celebrate because they can bring humility!

Do Not Let Wealth Near Your Heart!

Notice that James uses the word **rich** to refer to the winners. Does that mean every poor person is humble and every rich person is proud? No. But there is a very definite connection – so much so that Jesus said it is next to impossible for a rich person to even have enough humility to become a Christian. It can happen - Abraham was rich, Job was very rich, David was rich, Joseph of Arimathea was rich; so it is possible. But it's rare.

In Matthew 19 a man came up to Jesus and asked how he could get eternal life. Jesus says, "How about this – give away all your wealth and come follow Me." And the man walked away sad.⁴ Why? Because he couldn't do that. He really wanted to follow Jesus, but he couldn't. Why not? Because his heart was chained to that money.

So whatever you do, don't let the faces of glory in your life anywhere near your heart! If you are not on your guard your heart can attach itself to them, and you don't even see it until that day comes when you have to choose between them or the way of Christ, and you find that you just can't bring yourself to let go of them. Or it could be a job, or comfort, or a relationship. You realize, "Man, I need to choose between Christ or this relationship," and you just can't seem to bring yourself to let go of it.

Mark 4:18 Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; 19 but the anxieties of this age, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.

I recently heard about a pastor in Dubai who was describing the people in his church. Dubai is a very wealthy, luxurious place. And this pastor said, "Almost everybody in our church is a believer who came to Dubai for work. They all come with ministry and missionary zeal, because there are so many gospel opportunities there. But within about two years they lose that missionary zeal because the wealth gets to their heart. After a while it is a big success just to get them to come to church on Sunday. You can tell right away the couple who is new to Dubai and those who have been there for several years just by their willingness to serve in ministry. You let the treasures of this world anywhere near your heart, and that will be the result.

⁴ Matthew 19:16-24.

Don't Invest in the Titanic

Should wealthy people feel guilty about being wealthy? No. Scripture teaches that God made all things for our enjoyment. He wants us to enjoy them. Enjoy them, but don't invest in them. Don't rely on them. Don't let them anywhere near your heart, because if you let your guard down for a moment, they will ascend to heart-controlling levels of importance in your life.

"How do I know if it's heart controlling?"

Do you get mad if something happens to it? That's heart controlling. Do you get worried if it looks like you might lose it? That's heart controlling. Do you think about it obsessively – more than is necessary? That's heart controlling. Do you feel like you need it in order to be happy? That's heart controlling. And the last thing you want to do is allow your heart to be controlled by the pursuit of things that are about to be destroyed. Think of the all the faces of beauty in your life as the Titanic. A glorious ship - Spectacular, beautiful, delightful, desirable. You could draw a circle around that description of the flower in verse 11 and label it – "The sinking of the Titanic." It is a ship that everyone in this world is fighting to get on that has already hit the iceberg. It's sinking. I believe the message of this section is very simple: Verse 9 says if you are not on the Titanic, you should be glad about that. And verse 10 says, "If you are on the Titanic, the only thing you have to be glad about is the fact that you know it's sinking, because that will make you get off before it's too late." James has one goal in this passage – to show us that anything that will get us off that sinking ship is something worth celebrating.

Conclusion

So don't resist your *tapeinos*. Is there some humbling circumstance in your life that you are just refusing to accept? ("No, I'm not lowly. Those other people just got a lot of breaks and I had bad luck...") Are you suffering anxiety because of some aspect of lowliness in your life that you just can't stand the fact that it's there? Remind yourself – *My boast is not in success. I will boast only in that which brings me closer to Christ. I accept that I am weak and empty – fill me up Lord.*

Have you lost some treasure lately? A financial setback, a relationship fell apart, a plan failed? Tell the Lord right now, "I accept that I am weak and empty – Your grace is sufficient for me." Is the burden of your workload or your family impossible for you to bear right now? "Lord – whatever it take to humble me so I will depend on You."

When your wife belittles you or treats you like a child, and you feel the anger starting to rise, stop and say, "OK Lord – whatever it takes. I want humility."

You make a mistake and someone totally over-reacts. And you start to feel yourself getting defensive. Stop and say, "Father, if this is what You have for me right now, I receive it. Teach me humility."

Or maybe you are riding high, and all the great things you have going for you in this life are starting to wrap themselves around your heart. And you need to remind your soul: "Only those things that give me greater access to grace are worth celebrating and pursuing in life. Lord, disentangle my heart from what is temporary."

There might be someone here this morning who God is working in your heart in a powerful way this morning. You know God is calling you to stop resisting your weakness and boast in the emptiness of your cup because you treasure His grace above all. I want to give you a chance to kneel down in humility before the Lord say the words out loud as a prayer to the Lord Jesus: "I will boast only in that which brings me close to You."

Benediction: 2 Thessalonians 2:15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. 16 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, 17 encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

1. In what areas do you most often feel a sense of “looseness”? Can you identify anything in your heart that stands in the way of you accepting that lowliness in a way that humbles and empties you to make room for God’s strength?
2. In what areas do you have “faces of beauty” (earthly treasures) that might tempt you to make your boast in them rather than in how temporary they are?