

Joy In Trials

James 1:2-3

James 1:2-3 ²Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

- 1. Trials Provide Opportunities For Joy** – ^{2a} *Count it all joy,*
(cf. Rom 8:28; Heb 12:2; 2 Cor 12:7-10)
- 2. Trials Are To Be Expected For Believers As A Call To Discipleship** – ^{2b} *my brothers,*
(cf. 1 Pet 2:21-23; Mk 8:34-35; 2 Tim 3:12)
- 3. Trials Seem Overwhelming But Serve God's Purpose** – ^{2c} *when you meet trials*
- 4. Trials Come In Various Ways To Round Us Out** – ^{2d} *of various kinds,*
(cf. Eccl 7:2-4; Job 23:10)
- 5. Trials Will Test The Resolve Of Our Faith** – ^{3a} *for you know that the testing of your faith*
(cf. 2 Cor 1:9-10)
- 6. Trials Produce Toughness And Endurance** – ^{3b} *produces steadfastness.*
(cf. Phil 1:19-20; 1 Pet 1:6-8; Heb 12:2; Rom 5:3)

Hebrews 12:2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the **joy** that was set before him **endured** the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Romans 5:3 Not only that, but we **rejoice** in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces **endurance**

Conclusion:

1. Find joy that God will make something beautiful out of our messy trial – count on it!
2. Seek the lessons God wants us to learn through hardships about Him, our salvation and ourselves.
3. Build the muscles and thick skin of an enduring faith through being forged by fire.

Discussion:

1. What joyful realities have you experienced with the Lord as a result of your past trials and sufferings?
2. What could a current or recent trial teach you about the character of God, the grace of our salvation and our own weaknesses/strengths?
3. Read Hebrews 12:2 and Romans 5:3. What do you need from God to enable you to **endure** your trial/suffering?
4. How does our personal suffering connect us to the suffering of Christ? (Phil 3:10)

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Introduction:

Ie/ Feeling Bad playlist – My daughter was scrolling through my music playlist and noticed I had a “Feeling Good” playlist and a “Feeling Bad” playlist. This affirmed that her dad isn’t always “happy-go-blessed.” The two songs on the “Feeling Bad” playlist are “Finding Beauty” by Escala and “Remembrances” by Itzak Perlman (from John Williams’ “Schindler’s List”). These songs use beautiful melodies to resolve the minor tone tension. It helps me work through the tensions of various hardships by realizing God will make everything beautiful in His time. (Ecclesiastes 2:11)

Ie/ Cancer Support group – We host at our home a Cancer Support group monthly. We had 24 at our last meeting. This is a group that we don’t want to grow. But I’m glad that the group is here for each other. During one of life’s most difficult trials, we are there for each other. One of the main questions is “Why?” Support groups are necessary because trials are necessary and victory in trials can be achieved.

There are 6 benefits from trial.

1. **Trials Provide Opportunities For Joy** – ^{2a} *Count it all joy,*

- *Hēgeomai* = “**count**” – an accounting term – count, evaluate
 - Accountants try to make sense with a balance sheet
 - They will use an Excel spreadsheet to make sure their situation adds up
 - But when we go through trials, things don’t add up
 - Instead of using our own abacus, slide rule or Texas Instrument Ti90 we commit our trials to God and He will work it out for good

Romans 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

- Count is a command
 - Instead of running your trial through an EXCEL spreadsheet, Run it through God’s EXCELlence!
- What are we to evaluate it as? A Joyful Experience!
 - *Chara* = “**joy**”
 - Happiness is based on happenings – it is an emotional reaction to a circumstance
 - Joy is based on relationships – it is an emotional confidence in God’s intentional presence in our lives

- “We are to choose to be joyful in situations where joy would naturally be our last response.” (*Life Application Bible Commentary: James*, Tyndale, 1992, note 1:2)

James 1:2 [NLT] when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy.
James 1:2 [NET] consider it nothing but joy when you fall into all sorts of trials,

- Our joy is not that we suffer or struggle, but what can be gained through struggle
- When a trial comes, we’re not told to feel happy or joyful, but to consider it joyful that we will gain from this trial.
- R. Kent Hughes: “James is not ordering *all-encompassing joyful emotion* during severe trials; nor is he demanding that his readers must *enjoy* their trials or that trials are *joy*. ... Rather, James is commending the conscious embrace of a Christian understanding of life which brings joy into trials that come because of our Christianity.” (*James: Faith That Works*, Crossway, 1991, p. 18)
- “**all joy**” = *pasan charan*
- Douglas Moo: “[‘all’] ... probably suggests intensity (complete and unalloyed joy) rather than exclusivity (nothing but joy)” (*The Letter of James: Pillar New Testament Commentary*, Eerdmans, 2000, p. 53)
- Tony Evans: “Please notice the *all*. ‘Consider it all joy,’ the Word says – not *some* joy or *partial* joy, but *all* joy.

- **The greatest trial ever faced was endured because of future joy!!**

Hebrews 12:2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the **joy** that was set before him **endured** the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

- Paul’s trial was some mysterious **thorn in his flesh** – Paul took **pleasure** that in His weakness Christ’s strength would be evident

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 ⁷And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. ⁸Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. ⁹And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

- Phillip Brooks: “I do not pray for a lighter load, but for a stronger back.”
- Yiddish Proverb: “God gave burdens, also shoulders.”

Ie/ Some of you like to lift weights to build muscle. You gain muscle and strength by breaking down your muscles. Like weightlifting, we have to break down to gain.

- Ie/ We Saw Your Smoke Signal (John Yates, Falls Church, Virginia, quoted in Leadership, Winter Quarter, 1992, p. 57)
 - The only survivor of a shipwreck washed up on a small uninhabited island. He cried out to God to save him, and every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forthcoming.
 - Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a rough hut and put his few possessions in it. But then one day, after hunting for food, he arrived home to find his little hut in flames, the smoke rolling up to the sky. The worst had happened; he was stung with grief.
 - Early the next day, though, a ship drew near the island and rescued him.
 - "How did you know I was here?" he asked the crew.
 - "We saw your smoke signal," they replied.
 - Though it may not seem so now, your present difficulty may be instrumental to your future happiness.

2. Trials Are To Be Expected For Believers As A Call To Discipleship – ^{2b}my brothers,

- One of the false expectations believers assume is that the Christian life is free of trials
- James is writing to Christians to anticipate trials
- "my brothers" is a reference to the believers in the dispersed churches who are suffering as immigrants away from their homeland
- The readers of James were facing religious persecution, financial poverty
- Facing emotions of loneliness, fear, disappointment, grief
- There is this sense that we go through this **together (solidarity)** – brothers and sisters in Christ who will go through the journey together
- Ie/ BMW & IFCA – like denominational meeting – that's where my mentors and counselors are
- It has saved us thousands of dollars in counseling
- Men who understand the pressures of pastoring
- Ie/ Daisy's pastor's wife group
- Ie/ Cancer Support group – it's the one group we don't want to grow, but we had 24 folks at our house at the last meeting. 20 from our church and 4 from other churches going through and suffering through cancer together – both patient and supporter.

1 Peter 2:21-23 ²¹For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ²²"Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; ²³who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;

- Vocational Suffering (Latin root of vocation means "to call")
- Robert Murray McCheyne: "Some believers are very surprised when they are called to suffer. They thought they would do some great thing for God, but all God permits them to do is to suffer. Just suppose you could speak with those who have gone to be with the

Lord; everyone has a different story, yet everyone has a tale of suffering. One was persecuted by family and friends...another was inflicted with pain and disease, neglected by the world...another was bereaved of children...another had all these afflictions. But you will notice that though the water was deep, they all have reached the other side. Not one of them blames God for the road He led them; 'Salvation' is their only cry. Are there any of you, dear children, murmuring at your lot? Do not sin against God. This is the way God leads all His redeemed ones."

- **Suffering Is The Extreme Call Of Discipleship: To Follow Christ In Suffering**

Mark 8:34-35 ³⁴When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. ³⁵For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "To endure the cross is not tragedy; it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ."

2 Timothy 3:12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

- All 12 disciples died in martyrdom or in imprisonment for their faith
- Vance Havner: "At the Nicene Council, an important church meeting in the 4th century A.D., of the 318 delegates attending, fewer than 12 had not lost an eye or lost a hand or did not limp on a leg lamed by torture for their Christian faith."
- Someone asked C. S. Lewis, "Why do the righteous suffer?" "Why not?" he replied. "They're the only ones who can take it."

3. **Trials Seem Overwhelming But Serve God's Purpose** – ^z *when you meet trials*

- "meet," "fall" = *periptō* = to fall among something
- To fall into the midst of evil or suffering
- Used in Luke 10:30 when Jesus described the victim in the parable of the Good Samaritan as – "fell among thieves"
- Acts 27:41 – "falling into a place where the two seas met"
- "trials" = *peirasmos* = test of fidelity and integrity
- Moo: "... denote either an outward trial or process of 'testing' or they can denote the inner enticement to sin: 'temptation' or 'tempt.'" (p. 53)
- Biblical Pictures Of Production Through Suffering
 - Painful childbirth produces life (Jer 4:31; Jn 16:20-22)
 - Strenuous farming produces harvest (Jn 12:23-28; Gal 6:7-8)
 - Disciplined training produces excellence (Jer 12:5; Acts 20:24; Heb 12:1-11)
 - Treacherous warfare produces victory (Job 19:11-12; Lam 2:4-5; 1 Tim 1:18; 2 Tim 2:3)
 - Torrential rains produces agricultures (Ps 42:7; 69:1-2; 148:8; Isa 43:1-2; Jonah 2:3)

- Heated furnace produces pure gold (Dt 4:20; Job 23:10; Ps 66:10; Prov 17:3; Isa 48:10; Jer 6:29-30; Zech 13:8-9; 1 Pet 1:6-7)
- Pruned plants produces more fruit (Jn 15:2)
- BLOODY CROSS PRODUCES SALVATION
- Ie/ Intense friction produces polishing
- Chinese Proverb: "The gem cannot be polished without friction, nor man perfected without trials." (New Man, March/April 1997, p. 18)

4. Trials Come In Various Ways To Round Us Out – ^{2d} of various kinds,

- "various" = *poikilos* = diverse
- Various kinds
- Various times
- Various people
- Health issues (cancer, heart attack, stroke) strengthen our understanding of salvation – we'll all die – are we confident we'll be in heaven?
- Dealing with sinners in our home, work and school (bullying, work politics, etc.) develops patience and an appreciation for God's patience and mercy towards us
- Persecution – learn mercy towards accuser
- People we struggle with – tolerance, patience – when they walk in the room, we ask, God give me patience (relative that always has something mean to say, the person that always has to argue and be right, the person that thinks they're perfect)
- Poverty – God's provision
- Fear – God's sovereignty, Worry – God's providence, Anger – God's wrath and mercy, Doubt – God's truth, Depression – God's joy
- As universities give us a diverse curriculum in a united university – **God has a diverse curriculum of trials for us.**

Ecclesiastes 7:2-4 ²Better to go to the house of mourning Than to go to the house of feasting, For that is the end of all men; And the living will take it to heart. ³Sorrow is better than laughter, For by a sad countenance the heart is made better. ⁴The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, But the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

Job 23:10 But He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.

5. Trials Will Test The Resolve Of Our Faith – ^{3a} for you know that the testing of your faith

- *Dokimion* = approved through testing
 - Strong's NT 1383: "that by which something is tried or proved, a test"
- Ie/ Your school quizzes and tests are to build your knowledge, to build on what you're learning

- Ie/ Testing process to make sure product is sound and safe

2 Corinthians 1:9-10 ⁹Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, ¹⁰who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us,

- Dave Dravecky, who lost his arm as a result of a break while pitching: “Looking back, [my wife] Jan and I have learned that the wilderness is part of the landscape of faith, and every bit as essential as the mountaintop. On the mountaintop we are overwhelmed by God’s presence. In the wilderness we are overwhelmed by his absence. Both places should bring us to our knees; the one, in utter awe; the other, in utter dependence.” (*When You Can’t Come Back*)
- Gleason Archer: “God permits suffering in the life of the believer in order to strengthen his faith and purify his soul. It is precisely when the props are knocked from under us that we find ourselves cast upon God. The more we are deprived of the temporal supports for our earthly happiness, the more we are driven to the Lord for our comfort and support. The more we walk through the valley of darkness, the more aware we become of the reality of His presence.” (*The Book of JOB*, p. 20)

6. **Trials Produce Toughness And Endurance** – ^{3b} *produces steadfastness.*

- “steadfastness” = *Hypomonē* = endurance, fortitude, toughness
 - Literally: “to remain/abide under”
 - Endurance is faith extended or stretched in time
 - The Latin term for this word implies hardening, like a diamond
- Ie/ Guitar callouses – it hurts the finger tips when you start playing guitar or ukulele. But when you get
- Ie/ in basketball practice – they run lines – at the beginning of the season, it was so hard, players would throw up – but it got them in “game shape” – it provided endurance
- Ie/ in soccer – we ran wind-sprints
- Moses was tested for 40 years in the wilderness to produce an enduring faith to lead Israel out of Egypt
- Paul was in prison

Philippians 1:19-20 ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰ as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

- **Suffering Strengthens Our Faith By Providing The Fire That Tempers Us Through Affliction**

1 Peter 1:6-8 ⁶In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor,

and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, ⁸whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,

- Jesus endured the cross because He looked forward to the **resurrection**. He looked forward to returning to heaven and sitting at the right hand of God.

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Romans 5:3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,

Conclusion:

Ie/ A child was observing a butterfly emerge from the cocoon. Noticing that it was struggling, the child assisted this painful transformation by snipping the cocoon open for this emerging butterfly. But as the beautiful butterfly emerged, instead of flying, it fell helplessly to the ground. The child's parent explained that by trying to provide help, the child actually hurt the butterfly. The butterfly needed to struggle in the chrysalis to develop the blood flow and strength in the wings.

- Our suffering is meant to strengthen us. To evade the lessons of suffering is to remove the opportunity to grow strong.
1. Find joy that God will make something beautiful out of our messy trial – count on it!
 2. Seek the lessons God wants us to learn through hardships about Him, our salvation and ourselves.
 3. Build the muscles and thick skin of an enduring faith through being forged by fire.

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