

Through The Fire

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James 1:2-4

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According to verse 1, James is writing these first century Jewish Christians who have been “*scattered abroad*” by persecution. This scattering had a massive effect on the lives of those involved.

They had to endure great difficulty and as a loving pastor, James wrote to encourage and challenge them. He did not want them to be **devastated** by the trying circumstances of life but **developed** “*through the fire*” of affliction into full grown, fruitful, faithful, followers of Christ.

There is no doubt that they had all kinds of trying circumstances: *Relational, Marital, Parental, Professional, Financial, Medical, Societal, Political.*

In this lies the connection for us tonight – you and I will also have times and seasons of great difficulty in this life.

What trying circumstances are you afflicted with right now?

These things shouldn't be a surprise to us, Jesus told us:

John 16:33

These things I have spoken to you, **that in Me** you may have peace. **In the world you will have tribulation**; but be of good cheer, **I have overcome the world.**”

Tribulation: Anguish, Pressure, Affliction, Persecution, Tribulation.

Even though “***in the world***” we will have difficulties, The Word of God is abundantly clear that we will not go through them alone!

God speaking through the prophet Isaiah, assured His people that though they were driven all over the world, He would be at work in them and for them! Much like what James wrote to those first century Christians!

Isaiah 43:1–5

¹ But now, **thus says the Lord**, who **created** you, O Jacob, And He who **formed** you, O Israel:
“**Fear not**, for I have **redeemed** you; I have **called you** by your name;

You are Mine. ² **When** you pass through the waters, **I will be with you**; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. **When** you walk through the fire, **you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you.** ³ **For I am the Lord your God**, The Holy One of Israel, **your Savior**; I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place. ⁴ **Since you were precious in My sight**, You have been honored, And **I have loved you**; Therefore I will give men for you, And people for your life. ⁵ **Fear not, for I am with you...**

It is God's nature to see His people through every difficulty, every trial, and every tribulation.

So whether you feel like your life is a raging sea, stopped up by an impossible river, or walking through a painful fire, the Lord says, ***"Fear not, for I am with you..."***

God has pledged Himself and His presence ***Through the Fire!***

Hebrews 13:5b-6

^{5b} For He Himself has said, ***"I will never leave you nor forsake you."*** ⁶ So we may boldly say:
***"The Lord is my helper;
I will not fear.
What can man do to me?"***

Not only is He present through every trial, He is also working through every trial!

The Lord has a purpose for every difficulty He allows in the life of the believer, even when we cannot see it and don't understand it.

God will not waste anything!

Now, as we get into our text in James tonight, we are going to see the purpose of trials, and even more specifically we are going to look at our responsibilities through every trial.

In every trial we face, **we have 3 responsibilities** to ensure that our trials develop us rather than destroy us.

1. Counting It All Joy (2)

James 1:2

² My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,

Our first responsibility in any and every trial, is to **embrace it joyfully** rather than flee from it

fearfully. But, before we dive into why that is, I want you to focus on those first 2 words:

Verse 2a:

“My brethren...”

We learn from these 2 words that whatever follows, applies specifically to the “*brethren*,” that is: **This promise and reality is uniquely Christian!**

James addresses **the believers** to whom he is writing. This **is not** a universal reality for all of humanity! The presence of trials certainly is, but what the trial produces is a promise for those who are **in Christ!**

Romans 8:28

28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

“To those who love God...”

All things are working together for the spiritual benefit of those who love God, to those who have believed on Jesus for salvation.

Spurgeon put it this way:

“If everything works together for our good, then nothing is left to work for our ill.”

I want you to notice in Verse 29, Paul gives us some insight on what God is producing in us:

Romans 8:29

29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be conformed to the image of His Son*, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Through every situation and circumstance of life, God is producing a Christlike Spiritual maturity in your life.

I will say, if you’re here tonight and you are not a believer in Jesus, I have seen the trials of life bring men and women to the end of themselves to recognize they are powerless and hopeless and finally call out to God – if that’s you tonight, *what are you waiting for?*

Call upon Christ, so then at least your trials will work for you and not against you!

But James establishes His audience and now moves forward:

Verse 2b:

“count it all joy when you fall into various trials”

Count: (Imperative): Deem, Consider, Account, Count, Judge, Have Rule Over (Making the call!)

This is you taking control of a situation and making a decision like a judge slamming a gavel.

This is a command to see the trial and make a firm and fixed decision to have joy, ***regardless of feelings.***

When he says “*all joy,*” it has been translated in various way as “pure joy, unmixed joy, or complete joy.”

The idea is that it is not a manufactured or made-up joy, but a gladness or joyousness that comes as we patiently endure trials. We are going to see **why** this is the case as we continue, but for now, that is the command.

The Christian can and should be steady through the ups and downs of life.

“How is that possible?!”

Philippians 4:12–13

¹² I know how **to be abased** (be down!), and I know how **to abound** (be up!). **Everywhere** and in **all things I have learned** both **to be full** (up!) and **to be hungry** (down!), both **to abound** (up!) and **to suffer need** (down!). ¹³ **I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.**

There’s the secret! Trusting in the power of Christ through the ups and downs!

For you and I to be steady in the ups and downs, the trials and tribulations, we must believe in both the sovereignty **AND** goodness of God. This is how we can **“count it all joy”!**

Psalm 27:13

¹³ ***I would have lost heart, unless*** I had believed
That I would see the goodness of the Lord
In the land of the living.

If we believe God is good, but not sovereign, then He *would like to help*, but be unable. And if we believe that God is sovereign but not good, then *He could help*, but wouldn’t.

But, if God is good and sovereign, then we can make a firm and fixed decision to trust Him joyfully **even when we don't fully understand!**

David understood this!

Psalm 61:1–4

1 Hear my cry, O God;

Attend to my prayer.

2 From the end of the earth I will cry to You,

When my heart is overwhelmed;

Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

3 For You have been a shelter for me,

A strong tower from the enemy.

4 I will abide in Your tabernacle forever;

I will trust in the shelter of Your wings.

Selah

David knew what to do, when he didn't know what to do...run to Him.

Verse 2c

“...when you fall into various trials”

Notice: NOT *“if you fall into...”* but *“when you fall into...”*

James is a straight shooter – I love that – but what he says, hurts a little bit!

The word **fall into** carries the idea of being *encompassed by* or *surrounded by*...Jesus used it in the parable of the good Samaritan for how he *fell* among thieves. It was used in Acts 27 for a ship being stuck and wrecked by the waves.

This is often the case with trials...everything can change in a moment.

Think of a rock being dropped into water, and that water encompasses the rock in a moment.

In the blink of eye, we may find ourselves surrounded by **various trials...**

Various: Various in character, Diverse, Manifold, Many colored (like a paint sampler)

Trials: Test, Trial, Adversity, Trouble

Rather than pointing out one specific trial, he mentions **various trials**. That's because trials

come in all shapes, sizes, and severities.

Just to be clear, in this context, James is not talking about self-inflicted hardships or being disciplined by the Lord.

1 Peter 2:19–20

¹⁹ For this *is* commendable, if because of conscience toward God **one endures grief**, suffering wrongfully. ²⁰ For what credit *is it* if, when you are beaten **for your faults**, you take it patiently? But when you **do good and suffer**, if you take it patiently, **this is commendable before God.**

So, when these trials that are outside of our control come, our first responsibility is to “**Count it all Joy.**”

That happens as we decide to have joy in view of God’s sovereignty over circumstances.

This leads to our **second responsibility** in the midst of a trial.

2. Knowing There’s An End In Mind (3)

Knowing that it’s headed somewhere! It’s not a meaningless chain of unfortunate events. When I say, “*an end in mind*,” I am speaking of God’s end goal for allowing this trial into your life.

James 1:3

³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

Knowing: To know, be aware of.

- This word is often related to **personal experience**, in contrast to a simple head knowledge.

In the midst of every difficulty, we are to keep this in our mind. We don’t think about it occasionally and then move on, but this ought to take up permanent residence in our minds!

What is it that we are to keep in mind?

Verse 3b:

“that the testing of your faith produces patience.”

Let’s look first at how James describes a trial – “***the testing of your faith...***”

In this we get a description of a trial and its purpose! It is a Father-filtered difficulty to test and

try the believer's faith.

Every industry has (or should have) some form of *quality control* tests and standards. In a very real way, trials are God's *quality control tests*, and His R & D department.

James reveals to us what is going on behind the scenes, God is testing and proving the genuine faith of the believer & exposing the false faith of the non-believer!

This is not to say that if you struggle with doubt during a trying season that your faith is false, **not at all**. Look at what Jesus said when He explained the Parable of the Sower. (Where He uses the same Greek word from v.2)

Luke 8:13

¹³ But the ones on the rock [shallow, superficial faith] *are those* who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and **these have no root**, who believe for a while and in time of **temptation [trial] fall away**.

Jesus here speaks of those who *fall away*. The trial did not cause them to *lose their faith*, but exposed that they never had true faith to begin with. (This is not James' audience...) James was writing to the genuine Christians!

So, what about the believer?

Peter teaches us the test is to prove the genuine faith of the believer with even more clarity.

1 Peter 1:6–8a

⁶ In this you greatly **rejoice**, though now for a little while, if need be, **you have been grieved by various trials**, ⁷ **that** 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, ^{8a} **whom having not seen you love**.

Somehow, and in some way the difficulties you and I endure will be used to give God praise, honor and glory when Christ is revealed!

Peter says that "*various trials*" have come to prove the "*genuineness of your faith*," which he describes as it being tested by fire.

Last week Pastor Jack mentioned that "*Faith was built to endure*." This is true, and this is why the Christian *needs* trials and can embrace them joyfully.

You can drive a tank to the mall, but it was built for war.

We know God has an end in mind, this is why James concludes verse 3 with this statement: (the testing of your faith....)

Verse 3c:

“...produces patience.”

God is using the trial in your life to take you to **His desired end**.

Produces: 2 Gk words put together meaning: *“To work fully, accomplish, finish, fashion, result in.”* (To take it all the way to the end.)

The work God is doing **in you** is a work He intends to finish.

2 Corinthians 4:16–18

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, **yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.** **17** For our **light affliction**, which is but for a **moment**, is **working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,** **18** while we do not look at the things **which are seen**, but at the things **which are not seen**. For the things **which are seen are temporary**, but the things which are not seen **are eternal**.

“working for us” = “Produces.” The afflictions of your life and mine are the very tools God uses to work in us, or produce in us...**PATIENCE**.

*In the Bible, patience is not a passive acceptance of circumstances. It is a **courageous perseverance in the face of suffering and difficulty.***

-Warren Wiersbe

He is bringing you to **His desired end**, which is a mature, enduring, patient, and steadfast faith that will give him *“Praise, honor, and glory.”*

Do you see your faith growing?

VBS - Alligators don't grow based on their age, but on their climate and diet. When they eat a lot and the temperature is hot, they grow faster. Same thing with you and I...When we endure trials and feed on God's Word and faithfulness, we'll grow, regardless of age.

The word **patience** is a cheerful or hopeful endurance and steadfastness. The idea is that as

God faithfully see's you through, you will grow in faith, hope and love.

Patience... is a steady and determined, perseverance, in spite of difficulties, toward the right – toward the goal of God's will for our lives.

-G. Coleman Luck

James 5:11

¹¹ Indeed we count them blessed **who endure**. You have heard of **the perseverance of Job** and **seen the end intended by the Lord**—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

James gives us some insight and commentary on Job and God's purpose. **What was the end God had in mind for Job?**

A Greater understanding of His nature and character.

Job 42:5

⁵ "I have **heard of You** by the **hearing of the ear**,
But now my eye sees You.

God – through those difficulties – took Job from theory to reality. From head knowledge, to experience.

Hindsight being 20-20, Job saw that God had a purpose for all of it, for everything he suffered.

In your life tonight, whatever it is, God has a divine, loving purpose for allowing it in your life.

Now, before you object and say that whatever is on your plate is too much, you feel weak, tired and weary, I would point out that He has not left you to do it all in your own strength – in fact, the trials are so that we wouldn't trust in our own strength, but His.

Colossians 1:11

¹¹ **strengthened with all might**, according to His glorious power, **for all patience and longsuffering with joy...**

According to Ephesians 3:16, this Strength comes "*His Spirit in the inner man.*"

1. We count it all Joy.

2. We know there's an end in mind.

Which brings us to our **third responsibility** in a trial...

3. Letting Him Work In You (4)

This is the part where you and I can **get in the way**, or **get out of the way!** So often, rather than embracing the truth James is sharing, we resist the work that God is trying to do in us **because it's uncomfortable.**

In our last point we spoke about **knowing** that God has an end in mind, this is good! But James is too practical to leave it in our heads, he tells us to get it down into our hearts!

James 1:4

4 But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

James teaches us that our *outward* difficulties shape our *inward* character!

Romans 5:3–4

3 And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Tribulation produces... Christlike Spiritual Maturity **inside** those that joyfully endure by faith.

We are often our own biggest problem!

We get in the way of what God is trying to work inside of us!

When we resist & fight against God's work in us, we suffer and wilt under pressure. Look again at what God is using the trial to do...

Verse 4a:

"But let patience have its perfect work..."

Perfect: This does not mean a *perfect score* on a test – 100%, but means ***fully mature.***

Follow me here through James' logic:

"Count it all joy when you fall into various trials..."

WHY?

“Knowing that trial is producing an enduring faith in you....”

WHY?

“Because that enduring faith is maturing you!”

That is what James is communicating here. That we can be joyful through every trial knowing that God is using your endurance through that unique difficulty to mature your faith.

Our responsibility is to let that God ordained process take place in our life!

Is there any area of suffering in your life that you are resisting His work in you?

VERSE 4b:

“...that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

James seeks to prevent any misunderstanding by using 2 words that are very similar in meaning but come from 2 different perspectives – **1 positive & 1 negative**.

Complete: Entire, Whole, Sound, Complete.

This is God’s end goal for you, **a complete and mature believer in Jesus Christ**.

Now, listen carefully, this only happens as we lovingly submit our will to Him and joyfully embrace the trials He allows in our life for our spiritual maturity and completeness.

1 Peter 4:19

19 Therefore let those who **suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him** in doing good, as to **a faithful Creator**.

Commit: To *deposit* (as a trust or for protection), to put into the care or protection of someone.

“As we begin to conclude...”

What is it that you’re suffering with tonight?

Are you letting Him work in you?

Have you entrusted your soul to Him for care and protection?

As I mentioned at the beginning, the reality of God using every trial is made bearable by God

giving us strength to endure.

Paul asked God 3 times to remove his affliction, Jesus' response?

2 Corinthians 12:9–10

⁹And He said to me, “**My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.**” Therefore [Paul concludes] 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.**

The secret to strength...**is weakness.**

The Prophet Habakkuk cried out to God as he looked around and was distressed by his circumstances, he was burdened...but **after God spoke to him**, he concluded:

Habakkuk 3:17–19

¹⁷ **Though** the fig tree may not blossom,
Nor fruit be on the vines;
Though the labor of the olive may fail,
And the fields yield **no** food;
Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,
And there be **no** herd in the stalls—
¹⁸ **Yet I will rejoice in the Lord,**
I will joy in the God of my salvation.
¹⁹ The Lord God is my strength;
He will make my feet like deer’s *feet*,
And He will make me walk on my high hills.

So tonight, for those of you suffering in the midst of trials, you and I have 3 responsibilities:

1. Counting it all joy.
2. Knowing there’s an end in mind.
3. Letting Him work in you.

God will do the rest:

Philippians 1:6

⁶ **being confident of this very thing**, that He who has **begun a good work in you will complete it** until the day of Jesus Christ;