

Jas 1:2-4 (ESV) Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ⁽³⁾ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁽⁴⁾ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

1. Obviously the study today is on trials and how to handle them

- A. I know there is a blasphemous teaching that says the kids of the king shouldn't experience trials
 - 1). That real faith rejects them – rebukes them – claims better things
- B. But James is going to teach us that real faith rather than renouncing trials can find joy in them
 - 1). Because we believe that God is doing something very beneficial in them

Transition: Let's just set the scene here – lay a foundation for where we are going

2. Trials are inevitable

Jas 1:2 (ESV) Count it all joy, my brothers, *when* (not IF) you meet trials of various kinds,

- A. We find this truth illustrated in the life of Christ – our example
 - 1). He goes public in His ministry – and meets the devil in the wilderness - brutal
 - 2). From that point on until the resurrection He faces one trial after another
- B. Peter writes that the believer will follow in His footsteps – we will experience the same
 - 1). Haven't you found that to be true? We have times of rest but trials are a regular part of our life
 - a). These situations that confront us – challenge us – disrupt our comfort
 - 2). James says that is just a normal part of living life as a believer

Anon: God promises the Christian heaven after death, not before it.

Thomas Boston: Sin has turned the world from a paradise into a thicket; there is no getting through without being scratched.

Transition: So trials are going to come – let's define what a trial is scripturally

3. Trial defined – Greek word *peirasmos*

- A. Interesting word that can mean “Trial” as in James 1:2 or “Temptation as in James 1:13
 - 1). God will send “Trials” to develop us – make us stronger
Satan will send “Temptations” to destroy us – make us weaker
 - 2). Many times when we're speaking of trials both of these are happening at the same time
 - a). God sends a trial to develop us – Satan uses the same circumstances to tempt us
Tempt us to doubt God's love – tempt us to compromise in an attempt to remove the trial
- B. So a trial is something that is sent by God to develop us – strengthen us – purify us
 - 1). James tells us in v. 2 that they come in various kinds = diverse and multi-colored
 - a). Some are small some epic
Some are minor inconveniences and irritations and some are life shattering
Some are short and others are really long
 - b). It may be financial pressure – domestic problems – work or health related.....
 - 2). But the one thing that is common in all – they hurt
Heb 12:11 (ESV) For the moment all discipline *seems painful rather than pleasant*, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.
 - a). A trial wouldn't be a trial if it was pleasant
 - b). Trials force us out of comfort zone – stretch our faith – remove things we want to cling too

Point: God sends trials to move us to a better place – but things must be removed for us to get there

- A. The picture of this in Psalm 23
 - 1). The Good shepherd is moving us to those green pastures where we can lie down and rest
 - 2). But the path to those green pastures must go through the “Valley of the shadow of death”
 - a). In that valley is where things in our lives and in our character must be put to death

Things that make lying down and resting impossible – DIE (that hurts)

- b). Where things we are trusting rather than God are removed – the cutting away is painful
 - 1a). But we will never get to that blessed place of rest if this doesn't happen

Thought: So we don't like trials because they are trials – they hurt

- A. But James says that doesn't have to defeat us IF we can view what is taking place Biblically
 - 1). If we can see what the pain is producing we can actually rise above it and still have joy
- B. Remember who he's writing to – the 12 tribes scattered by persecution
 - 1). Driven out of their homeland – losing everything
 - 2). Now suffering persecution where they had been driven
 - a). Even then James says the truth of Scripture can lift you – give you joy
 - b). IOW the truth can set you free from the joy stealing power of circumstance

II. THE COMMAND: COUNT IT ALL JOY WHEN YOU HAVE TRIALS

Jas 1:2 (ESV) Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,

1. At first this may seem like a ridiculous command – excuse me

- A. It's a trial pal – it's bringing pain and discomfort into my life when I want just want comfort
 - “Yeah. I'll get right on that joy thing. Maybe I'll hum “Don't worry be happy” while I'm doing it”
 - 1). Do you know what I'm going through – you say have joy over that!

Transition: Let's see what James is not saying – so important to start to understand the logic here

2. James is not commanding us to respond emotionally in a certain way

- A. As if the trial itself was a source of joy
 - “Oh praise God I just lost my job. I'm so happy” – this shallow, mindless, giddy emotion – la la la
 - 1). Ever seen Christians do that? *They feel they have to FEEL this emotion of joy*
 - a). They're trying to be obedient – to do what's right – but it's not real – it doesn't last or help

Point: James is not saying that the trial itself is a source of joy – it's not – it's a trial - it's a source of pain

- A. Some shatter our lives – they hit us like a ton of bricks – they knock the wind out of us

3. What James is saying

- A. When that happens – you MUST THINK – you must stop yourself from just reacting
 - 1). You must bring the weight of scripture – the thought of God into the picture
- B. He says “*Count it* all joy” “*Consider it* all joy”
 - 1). That isn't speaking to the emotions at all – *it is speaking to the mind – the intellect*
 - a). Your emotions are going nuts on you – they want to dominate you in time of trial
 - b). You must THINK – you must remember what the Bible says – what God is doing

2 Co 10:5 (ESV) We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, *and take every thought captive to obey Christ,*

- 1a). We must get tough with ourselves – not let our feelings – imaginations control
 - We must take our thoughts captive and FORCE scripture upon them
 - AND MAKE THEM bow to truth! Make ourselves think correctly

Thought: Here is the necessity of theology – to find joy in circumstances that seem adverse
You need doctrine – you need to understand what this joy is built off of

- A. What doctrine in particular? To have this joy we MUST trust in the sovereignty of God – His control
 - 1). We will never have joy in times of trial if we don't see the loving hand of God behind them
 - 2). If we just feel like were victims of circumstances – bad luck – Why me?
There is no way to build joy off of that kind of thinking

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- B. Joy's foundation is in KNOWING that God is in control of all things – this isn't an accident
 - 1). That He loves me – He never makes a mistake in His planning for me (Perfect wisdom - doctrine) and is working all things out for His glory and for my good (Romans 8:28)
 - a). Even when I can't understand how – even when everything seems to be out of control
I retreat back to what I know – He loves me - He knows what He's doing!
 - b). Now through the thought of God – through truth
Joy can begin to overcome the panic and despair that the trial has brought into my life
 - C. This is why doctrine is essential – you must KNOW what you KNOW
 - 1). People say I'm not into doctrine – I just want to live out what the Bible says
 - 2). I say “You can't live out what the Bible says without doctrine”
 - a). It is the foundation a Christian response to life and its circumstance is built upon
- Transition:** So a trial has hit my life – I now have a choice
- A. Will I let my emotions control me – or will I consider – think – and let truth control me
 - 1). *James says “If I choose truth then that will lead to joy”*
 - B. What truth will lead to joy? The truth of the sovereignty of God – and what He is doing – next point
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II. THE TRUTH THAT LEADS TO JOY IN TIME OF TRIAL

Jas 1:2–4 (ESV) Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ⁽³⁾ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁽⁴⁾ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

1. “For you know” something

- A. This tells us first of all we need to KNOW truth – we need to be students of the Bible
 - 1). If you're not regularly in the Scriptures you will respond incorrectly to the trials
You can't help it – you aren't supplying your mind with the truth you need to control emotions
 - B. Either truth will dominate you or emotions will – you really want truth to be the controlling factor
 - 1). If you're disciplined in the Word – you're feeding your mind Truth
 - a). And truth can bring joy into your life even in time of trial
- Thought:** I think we need to balance out what we mean by the thought of joy here
- A. James is NOT SAYING all the pain is going to go away – suddenly you're happy
 - 1). He is saying that truth brings meaning into the pain – rescues the pain from meaningless
 - a). Brings such a value and purpose into it
That joy will be produced - but sometimes it will exist with tears
 - B. This is that paradox of Christianity – we can experience grief mingled with joy at the same time
1 Pet 1:6 (NIV) In this (Doctrines of salvation) you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.
 - 1). The trials are bringing grief – but that grief is tempered by truth that brings joy!
 - 2). Hear this all the time – great trials “But I thank God because...” – it amazes the world
 - a). Truth brings a purpose into our circumstances the world doesn't have - joy
 - C. Let's look at the benefits of trials – truth meant to produce joy
 - 1). This first one is one you REALLY want and REALLY need
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FIRST BENEFIT OF TRIALS: They Produce Steadfastness

Jas 1:2–3 (ESV) *Count it all joy*, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ⁽³⁾ *for you know* that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

1. Steadfastness (Perseverance) defined:

- A. It is that ability to carry on doing the right thing no matter how much resistance there is
- 1). Commentators called this “Spiritual toughness” and “Staying power”
- B. It is that ability to carry on when you feel discouraged – when you feel like quitting
- That ability to do the right thing when you lack any feelings at all – no desire to do the right thing
- 1). This is huge – that is one of the big trials – we lose all feelings – all emotions
We don’t FEEL like reading – praying – witnessing – serving in church
 - a). So many just stop – their feelings dominate them – they don’t read, pray etc.
 - b). They are in desperate need of steadfastness (Perseverance)
If they remain like they are they will remain spiritually immature
- C. I’ll use myself as an example here – seems to help when people see what the Pastor goes through
Especially when they admit their struggles
- 1). People come up – loved that one part of the sermon – “Oh when I spoke about the atonement?”
“No! When you admitted you were a jerk that time you were in the car...”
 - 2). I just went through a time when I lost all my feelings – all my emotions spiritually
“I didn’t feel like reading my Bible. Praying. Christianity seemed boring instead of exciting. Just flat and emotionless. So what! Who cares!”
 - a). I was talking to Carri about it – I found our conversation interesting
We were both talking about how those feelings didn’t matter one bit.
Normal for feelings to come and go. But what was important was to not let them control.
To keep doing what was right against that pressure the trial was exerting on me to stop.
 - 1a). To keep reading my Bible daily – keep praying – keep studying just as hard
 - 2a). The feelings eventually will come back – then they’ll go – then back again...
 - 3a). AND one morning I woke up – “Oh hello feelings. God speaking to me etc.”
 - 3). That conversation really blessed me because I saw growth in my life
 - a). Early in my Christianity times like that would have freaked me out! Am I saved?
 - b). But 36 years of experiencing that trial numerous times – God has strengthened me
 - 1a). *He has helped me not be so dependent upon feelings*
He has taught me the important thing is to just do what is necessary - right
 - 2a). Don’t worry about it at all – the feelings will return
Just do what is right so your heart is in that healthy state feelings can return too

Thought: These trials have been so beneficial

I’ve learned to honestly look back on the trials in my life and thank God for them – haven’t you?

- A. Those are the times I’ve grown – so much more than in the happy times
- B. This is the testimony of the saints – trials have been necessary and have been sent for my benefit
- Malcom Muggeridge:** Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful *with particular satisfaction*. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my seventy-five years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness, whether pursued or attained.
- 1). **One writer put it this way: *Great faith must have great trials***
 - a). Great faith to carry on when everything in us is shouting give up
 - b). Great faith that takes a crisis in life and simply prays
“Lord help me to live this out in a way that brings you glory”
 - c). Great faith that is willing to step into God’s will when there is a great cost
 - 2). Great faith is produced by great trials AND THAT is worth it!
 - a). As the gem cannot be polished without friction

The man or woman of God cannot be perfected without trials

- C. We can also thank God for the trials today because they are preparing us for the trials tomorrow
 - 1). I need the trials today – to produce more perseverance – because of what’s coming tomorrow
If God didn’t graciously send the trial today – I wouldn’t be ready – swept off my feet
 - a). If that is true I can find joy in this trial today – what importance it has

Point: So the trial is a servant sent by our loving Father to mold us and shape us – to prepare us

- A. To bring us into a place of usefulness – to a place where we can be blessed
- B. A place where joy stealing idols are removed – where we learn false sources of strength will fail
- C. Where we are forced to begin to view life from a divine perspective
 - 1). *For all they do – we can respond with joy to this gift of grace scripture calls trials*

SECOND BENEFIT OF TRIALS: They Produce Maturity/Character

Jas 1:2-4 (ESV) Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ⁽³⁾ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁽⁴⁾ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect...

James 1:4 (NIV) Perseverance must finish its work so *that you may be mature...*

James 1:4 (NLT) So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, *you will be strong in character...*

1. Mature character is a product of spiritual perseverance

- A. Perseverance is the ability to do the right thing when you are tempted to do the wrong
 - 1). As I do the right thing – character is fashioned into me
- B. We need to see our trials as presenting opportunities for this
 - 1). If I persevere – if I do the right thing right now – even though I don’t feel like it
In the end I will have grown – I will have matured – Christlike character will be formed
 - a). If I make the choice to love my wife even though what she just said really upsets me
 - b). If I choose to trust God even though I just heard bad news
 - c). If I choose to give when I feel like hoarding – the idol of greed nipping at my heels
 - d). If I choose to serve with excellence even though I feel discouraged
 - e). If I choose to witness even when fear is my trial at the moment

Point: This is how we grow – when we just continue to persevere

- A. As I do that character is formed and the flesh is defeated
 - 1). Emotions lose control and truth becomes more and more what I’m guided by
- B. **PLEASE GET THIS** - This is how we take advantage of the opportunities a trial presents
Heb 12:11 (ESV) For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness *to those who have been trained by it.*
 - 1). It is possible for a trial God sends to grow us up – not to do anything at all
 - a). We don’t persevere we just give into the flesh – the trial is just wasted pain
- C. I like to look at trials – like lifting weights – weight plus gravity creates resistance to our lifting
 - 1). As I push back against that resistance and lift that weight – I get stronger and stronger
Each rep causes a bit more physical strength
 - a). I must persevere – I may not feel like lifting any longer
But those last reps where you really struggle are so important to do
 - 2). It is the same with us – when we persevere in doing the right thing
Especially when it is a struggle – that is when we grow
 - 3). See your struggles correctly – one more rep – do what’s right regardless of how I feel
 - a). Wrestle against yourself – against those contrary feelings
Depend upon the Spirit to enable you - overcome them with truth

b). Then you will grow - become a bit more like Christ – character will be formed

Point: This is well worth the pain isn't it – we don't want to be dominated by the flesh

- A. There is only defeat there – *there is no joy – no peace there at all*
 - 1). So count it joy when trials come that are meant to move you past that
- B. Those who have let the trials train them – have taken advantage of the opportunities for growth
 - 1). These are those saints that stand out and shine – that live above the mediocrity
 - 2). These are those who amaze you with their peace – joy – even when the storms of life hit
 - a). There is a deep rest that you envy – God is their support – their provision
They live by the promises – they trust their Father in all things
 - 3). These are saints who've been trained by trials – no other way to get there

Transition: Now James reminds us that growth takes time – we are going to have to be patient

2. Let steadfastness have its full effect

Jas 1:4 (ESV) And let steadfastness have its full effect...

- A. This is a picture of staying under – remaining under the trial until God has finished His work
 - 1). As He's working in perseverance that leads to character
That ability to do the right thing – that can be hard when the trial lingers
 - a). Satan uses that weariness that comes with extended trials to tempt you to do wrong thing
To compromise to escape the pressure – to even disobey if it can just ease that pain
 - b). Your flesh will try to do all kinds of things to wiggle out from under that trial
- B. Remember James is encouraging these saints who have lost everything – this prolonged crisis
 - 1). Let God finish His work – don't shortcut it through compromise – disobedience – hang on
This is so valuable you don't want to lose what God is doing through it
 - 2). Look at the trial through a scriptural lens – choose joy rather than despair and frustration
Peter speaking to those suffering persecution: 1 Pet 5:6 (NIV) Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.
 - a). Humble yourself under His mighty hand – submit - trust Him in what He's doing
 - b). I know you want to escape the discomfort but the ways tempting you are wrong
You'll need to step out of His will – compromise - rationalize
 - c). Let Him do what He's doing until He's finished
 - 1a). Peter says I promise you He will lift you up as soon as He is finished
And you will be stronger – more Christlike – your faith greater – your peace deeper
 - 2a). You WILL look back on this and see what He's done and thank Him for it
1 Pet 5:10 (NIV) And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you *and make you strong, firm and steadfast.*
 - 3a). You come out of the trial in a better place
 - 3). But this is causing anxiety – worry – discomfort
If I'm going to remain under this – allowing God to work – what do I do with that?
Trust Him with that too: 1 Pet 5:7 (NIV) Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.
 - a). Learn to rest in His care when every other means of support is being removed
 - 1a). That is one of the points of growth that trials provide isn't it – trusting Him

Transition: One more benefit – mention quickly – where all this is headed

THIRD BENEFIT OF TRIALS: They Produce A Complete Well-Rounded Saint

Jas 1:4 (ESV) And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and *complete, lacking in nothing.*

1. Simply means the weaknesses will be filled in – those gaps in character

- A. God sends the perfect trial to deal with those areas that must be dealt with
 - 1). Trials don't hit our life with no design – they always have a purpose
The right trial to deal with the wrong characteristic
- B. As we go through life – each trial producing the desired effect – IF we are trained by it
 - 1). We become more mature and more well-rounded = become more and more like Christ
 - a). We become more settled – more stable – more loving, patience
We begin to look more and more like Christ

Point: This is where you want to be headed

- A. We should all be saying with John “He must increase I must decrease”
 - 1). It is trials that will produce that!
- B. THEREFORE trials should be embraced with joy

CONCLUSION

We all have trials – inevitable – but that doesn't have to defeat us – they are sent to elevate us – deal with what holds us down

Question: What should our response be when trials come into our life?

1. We must think – “Consider”

- A. Don't just respond emotionally – think – let the truth of God guide your response

2. Choose joy

- A. Let the truth of God lead you to joy – remember trials come because He loves you
 - 1). Trials come because they are necessary for your growth
 - 2). The end results of trials are so beneficial they can be embraced with joy
- B. We choose joy because we have considered truth – therefore we KNOW what the trial is doing

3. Let the trials do their work in you – patience

- A. If the trial is prolonged – Satan will use it to tempt you to compromise – disobey to get out from under it
 - 1). Choose perseverance instead – knowing that is how you'll grow
Compromise – disobedience will shortcut what God is doing
 - a). You'll just have to run that lap again – He's spotted something that needs to be pruned back
You can escape that pruning – wiggle out – but God sees what must be dealt with
- B. Hang on – choose perseverance – and when God is through – He will lift that trial
 - 1). You'll look back on it with thankfulness because you'll see the growth!
 - a). Like I said I am so thankful for the trials – that is when I grew – I saw God move