

Consider It All Joy
James 1:2—4
ABC 1/20/1

As we continue our study of the book of James & come to the 1st test to see if our faith is real, it's important we remember how these tests are to be used. The easiest way to do that is to look at how they're not to be used. As you know, if someone tells the truth in a wrong way, at the wrong time, with the wrong motivation, it can bring hurt rather than help. For example, imagine you've been planning for a year a week-long backpacking trip. 2 days before your planned departure you break a bone in your foot. There will be no permanent damage, but you have to stay off the foot for 2 weeks. Word of your injury spreads through the church & soon a guy shows up at your door.

Cheer up! he booms. *Here's some Scripture to help you out.* He then reads **Js 1:2-4**.

So, he continues, be glad this happened because God wants to strengthen your character through this! I don't know about you, but at this point I'd be tempted to grab the guys Bible & thump him over the head with it! This is not why God has given us this book, to beat up on other people. It's given so we might see that our faith is real by the way we live. Of course, we can use it to help other people, just don't do it like the hypothetical guy just mentioned.

Let's define some terms. What are some of the **trials** James is talking about? Persecution, poverty, exploitation, prejudice, conflicts caused by sin on the inside (4:1-2) & the tongue on the outside, sickness, & suffering in general. James is talking about external trials of affliction in contrast with internal temptations to sin. Internal temptations (1:13-15) aren't occasions for joy.¹ Of course, external trials can often cause internal struggles of temptation. The term **various** (2) means variegated, manifold, or mutli-faceted. It's the same word used of the multi-colored coat Jacob gave to Joseph, a story the writer of James probably knew well since his Hebrew name was Jacob & his father's name was Joseph. Joseph in the OT certainly fell into various trials, literally falling into a pit & into the hands of slave traders (both done by his brothers), then being unjustly accused by Potiphar's wife & being thrown in prison. Our trials differ in severity & circumstances, but James has all types in mind. God not only permits trials, He even plans them. He isn't just capable of

¹ Robert Greenlee, *Exegetical Summary of James*, pp 14-15

using trials for good, but He intends trials for good, even sinful acts intended for evil (Gen 50:20). If you don't have this high view of God's sovereignty, that God is in charge of all things at all times, that He's almighty, all-supreme, all-glorious, & all-satisfying; if you have a lesser view of a god made in your own image, you're not going to be able to accept this passage. & you'll never experience the joy found here in the sovereign God who created you for His glory & to enjoy Him forever. No, trials aren't enjoyable, but there can be, should be, a God-centered joy that cannot be shaken by trials. This isn't a superficial happiness or natural emotions, this is a supernatural joy in a sovereign God. **1-4 PRAY**

1. Position 1

I'm starting with vs 1 again because it's important we know our position, our identity as Christians. The original word-order of vs 1 is, *James, of God & of the Lord Jesus Christ, slave*. The 1st thing James wants us to know about him is **God**. He is **of God**. He is owned by God, thus he's God's **slave**. As a **slave** of God, James had a Master with complete sovereign control over him. The original readers knew well that a **slave...**

- Was owned & totally possessed by his master.
- Existed for his master & no other reason.
- Had no personal rights.
- Was at the master's disposal at all times.
- Had no will of his own but was completely subservient to his master.

The mindset of a slave was one of absolute submission to his owner. This is the same attitude we must have, especially in the **various trials** we face. How can you tell if you have a proper slave's attitude? By how you respond when you're treated like one!

Mabel Williamson was a missionary to China who described the sacrifice of her rights to a normal standard of living, health, finances, marriage, & even a home life. Just like us she struggled with suffering & self-denial & the fact that she had to give up so many of what she thought were her *rights*. But she finally came to the conclusion that part of serving & becoming like her Lord & Master was becoming like one who had no rights. In her book *Have We No Right?* she wrote,²

- *Jesus claimed no rights, No right to a soft bed, & a well-laid table*

² pp 125ff

- *No right to a home of His own...*
- *No right to choose pleasant ... companions, those who could understand & sympathize with Him.*
- *No right to shrink away from filth & sin & walk in cleaner paths.*
- *No right to be understood & appreciated.*
- *No right even not to be forsaken by His Father... His only right was silently to endure shame, spitting, blows; to take His place as a sinner at the dock; to bear my sins in anguish on the cross ... & I?*
- *A right to the "comforts" of life? No, but ... the love of God for my pillow.*
- *A right to physical safety? No, but ... the security of being in His will.*
- *A right to love & sympathy from those around me? No, but ... the friendship of the One who understands me better than I do myself.*
- *A right to be a leader among men? No, but ... to be led by the One to whom I have given my all.*
- *A right to a home, & dear ones? No, not necessarily, but a right to dwell in the heart of God as a child of God.*
- *A right to myself? No, but oh, I have a right to Christ.*
- *All that He takes I will give. All that He gives I will take. He, my only right! He, the one right before which all other rights fade into nothingness. I have full right to Him. Oh, may He have full right to me!*

This is the attitude we're to have. Our identity as slaves is important as we go through this book. We're to be submissive to our Master. We see this submission in vs 4 where we're to **LET endurance have its perfect result**. As long as we're thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought, as long as we're thinking in terms of our rights & what we want, & what we feel someone like us deserves, it's going to be very difficult to have joy when we encounter various trials we don't think we deserve! Did you know the NT calls believers **slaves** far more often than it calls us Christians! The word **slave** is used more times than *servant, saint, believer, or Christian*. Lordship & slavery means the end of our self, our will, our control, our life. That helps us understand why Jesus said, **If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, & take up his cross daily & follow Me** (Lk 9:23). That's slave talk. It's not about you. If you've never bowed your knee in surrender of your life, will, & soul before Jesus as Lord, you're a slave of sin (Jn 8). The sovereign God of the universe in His

Word commands you to repent & believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, to deny yourself, & confess Him as Lord, meaning you're His slave. Every knee will bow & every tongue will confess Jesus is Lord, if not in this life, you will in the next (Phil 2). As **slaves of God & of the Lord Jesus Christ**, we're exclusively owned by Him & have no rights of our own. We're to be constantly available to His will, not our own. Our only goal in life should be to please our Master. Our position is a slave. What are we commanded to do?

2. Command 2

James isn't ordering a joyful emotion during trials or even that we must enjoy our trials. He isn't commanding that we rejoice when we lose our job or when the neighbor's kid gets leukemia. James says, **consider it all joy**, which means to make a deliberate & careful decision to experience joy even in times of trouble. Is this possible? Yes. Paul told the Corinthian church, **I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction** (2 Cor 7:4). This doesn't mean we'll be laughing about the trials we experience. But it does mean we'll have a deep-seated confidence that God knows what He's doing & the results will be for His glory & our good. **Consider** is a financial term for evaluating. It means to think, count, or regard something based on weighing & comparing the facts. It's a deliberate & careful judgment coming from external proof, not subjective feelings.³ & James doesn't say *IF* but **when** we experience various trials. It's not an elective but a required course for all humans to experience trials. Wiersbe writes,

Our values determine our evaluations. If we value comfort more than character, then trials will upset us. If we value the material & physical more than the spiritual, we will not be able to "count it all joy." If we live only for the present & forget the future, then trials will make us bitter, not better ... So, when trials come, immediately give thanks to the Lord & adopt a joyful attitude. Do not pretend; do not try self-hypnosis; simply look at trials through the eyes of faith. Outlook determines outcome; to end with joy, begin with joy.⁴

What does **joy** mean? After an extensive study I found it means ... *joy!* James isn't commanding us to walk around with a silly grin or an attitude that denies difficulties. Nor to wake up & say, *God, please send me the hardest day of my life today. That's what I'm looking forward to.* He's not saying to go out & look for & cause trials. He's saying when trials come, **consider them all joy**. This

³ Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the NT, p 276

⁴ Be Mature, p 33

is a command that we're to obediently follow. Joy in trials comes from knowing who God is & trusting Him completely. Joy in difficult circumstances, when life falls apart, doesn't come from us. It can't come from us. We don't have the resources to manufacture our joy. But it does begin with the consideration, the realization that trials have a purpose because they come from the sovereign hand of a God who loves us. We must know that nothing gets through His nail-pierced hands except what He allows. It's all from Him. Therefore, our joy depends on our perspective & knowledge. Our mindset & thought patterns are the focus here, not our emotions. James doesn't say, *feel joyful* about the trial, but **consider it all joy**. James speaks of a pure joy that's not mixed with bitterness or sinfulness. Joy & happiness aren't the same thing. **Joy** is a settled contentment in every situation, *an unnatural reaction of deep, steady, & unadulterated thankful trust in God ..., a deep profound inner joy*.⁵ This isn't the power of positive thinking like Norman Vincent Peale, Robert Schuller, or Joel Osteen teaches. This isn't psychobabble or a superficial emotion drummed up in an emotional church service. This isn't theology from Bobby McFerrin or the Lion King (*Don't worry, be happy & Hakuna Matata* [no worries]). The joyful mindset James is speaking of comes from biblical thinking, not positive thinking. It's rooted in theology, in the doctrine of a supreme & sovereign God. **Joy** is a deep satisfaction or contentment that comes from knowing God is in control even when my circumstances seem out of control. The key to **joy** is knowing that God is in control. If you know that, you can be content at a very deep level even while weeping over what is happening around & to you. We need to **consider** & be prepared to **encounter various trials** which refers to falling into something, usually something unplanned & undesired. It's any kind of trial that's common to mankind or that we bring on ourselves. What is our 1st thought & response when we encounter trials in life? Do they toss us around like a boat at sea? The natural response many of us have to trials is to complain. But 1 Cor 10:10 says we're never to murmur or grumble or whine or complain as the Israelites in the wilderness did. If God is sovereign, who ultimately are we complaining about? God Himself. That's why He takes it so seriously, because ultimately trials come by His hand. Js 1:2 is written so we'd neither collapse nor complain in trials, but so we can **consider** or

⁵ *Exegetical Commentary on the NT*, Craig Blomberg, Vol 16, p 48

count it **joy**. This command has more to do with our will, choices, & a mindset more than just emotions. James doesn't say *always feel joy* or *trials are all joy*. He isn't saying, *Put on your happy face & pretend you're not hurting*. He says, **consider it all joy**. But joy isn't the only type of emotion allowable in difficult times. We know that sorrow & grief aren't wrong or sinful because Jesus Himself was a man of sorrows & grief. Jesus wept. In fact, there are times when it would be a sin not to mourn or weep because Scripture commands us to mourn with those who mourn & weep with those who weep (Rom 12:15). & yet the Christian's sorrow isn't inconsistent with or independent from a deep inner joy. Pain isn't joyful, but the purpose of the pain can be considered joy. We have a hope that is supernatural & unexplainable to natural men. We have a peace that surpasses all understanding. & as Christians, we can have a joy that's untouched by circumstances, unexplainable by natural man, & unconquerable because our God is sovereign. This joy isn't overpowered by trials, it overflows in trials. It's a supernatural joy that begins on the inside & flows outwardly. Of course, **counting it all joy** when troubles come isn't a natural response. If we want a natural response, we can talk about anger or despair or complaining or getting even or running away. It isn't natural to find joy in hardship. But that's the whole point. James isn't talking about a natural reaction. He's talking about a supernatural reaction made possible by the Holy Spirit who enables us to see & respond from God's point of view. **Considering it all joy** is a conscious choice we make when hard times come. Because this is a command, it's a sin not to have a joyful mindset. We who say we believe in the sovereignty of God should be the most joyful of all people! The goal of the Christian life & of vs 4 is Christlikeness. We're in the process of becoming as much like Jesus as possible. We can rejoice in the Lord always when we understand He's always doing whatever it takes to make us more like Him. The choice is if we'll trust in God & His promises, or not? As James says, it's our faith that's being tested. We don't know if our faith is genuine until it stands up under the test. You can buy boots that claim to be waterproof. If you wear them on dry days you haven't put them to the test. The test of those boots is if you get caught in a downpour or try to cross a creek, do they keep you dry? If so, those boots have been proven. The test of your faith is when you choose to joyfully trust God in trials. Afterwards, you

know your faith is genuine, because it brought you through the trial. But the point is, when you're faced with a trial, you have a choice: Will I trust God & His promises or not? To trust God & experience His hope & joy in the midst of trials is a radical attitude that James commands us to adopt. Our position is a slave to God & to Jesus Christ. The command He gives is **to consider it all joy when we encounter various trials**. Here are 4 principles that help us think clearly about our trials:

- 1) Because we live in a fallen world, bad things happen to all of us.
- 2) We have no control over many things that happen.
- 3) We do have control over how we respond to them.
- 4) Our response to our trials largely determines our spiritual growth or lack thereof.

3. The Promise 3

What does **knowing** mean? It means we know these things because we've learned them by experience. Our faith has been tried & has produced endurance. We've lived this & seen it. That's why we can count it all joy when we experience tough times because our response to those trials continues to testify to our own soul that we are a child of God. When trials come there's something we can't know & something we can know. We can't always know why things happen the way they do. No matter how hard we try to figure these things out, there will always be mysteries in life. God doesn't explain Himself to us. As we go through life, we can look back & see many blanks we wish God would fill in for us. But we can know, when hard times come, that God is at work in our trials for our benefit & for His glory. Sometimes we'll see it; often we'll have to take it by faith. But it's true whether we believe it or not. The phrase, **testing of your faith**, is one of the keys to the entire book. It's the theme or purpose of this book, the tests of true faith. One of the reasons for trials is to prove our faith. These trials are for a reason. & the end is that the one tested should emerge stronger & purer because of it. Remember, life's various trials all come from a sovereign & loving God & aren't meant to make us fall or to defeat us. They aren't designed to make us weaker, they're meant to make us stronger. Therefore, we shouldn't run from them but rejoice in them. The Christian is like an athlete. The harder the training, the happier he is because he knows

it's preparing him to be more victorious. Joy in trials is only possible in knowing, choosing to fix our minds on & reminding ourselves, that the temporary testing & suffering is producing something greater in us for the future. What does James say? **The testing of your faith produces endurance.** The word **testing** is from the refining process of the ancient world. The same root word is used in 2 Tim 2:15 where it says to **study to show yourself approved unto God.** In this context, Puritan Thomas Manton points out, trials are *not only to approve but to improve.*⁶ The word **endurance** in the Greek is from 2 roots meaning under & stay, remain, or abide. It means abiding under & thus remaining under some discipline or some person or some trial which calls for the submission of one's will when our natural tendency would be to rebel. **Endurance** gives the picture of steadfastly & joyfully bearing up under a heavy load. It describes the quality of one's character which doesn't cause one to give in to circumstances or trials. Clearly, this is a supernatural work in our hearts by the Spirit of God, as we interact with the trials God allows or sends into our life.⁷ God is using our trials for His purpose. He isn't sitting in heaven saying, *I didn't want that to happen, but now that it has, let's see how we can make the best of a bad situation!* Scripture is clear that God is sovereign over everything, from the rain & snow that fall (Job 37:6-13), to seemingly random events (Prov 16:33), to the events of nations (Ps 22:28; Acts 14:16; 17:26). On the personal level, He ordained all of the days of our lives before we were ever born (Ps 139:16) & He fashions our hearts (Ps 33:14-15) & orders our steps (Ps 37:23; Prov 16:9; 20:24). Some try to get God off the hook when it comes to trials, saying, *This wasn't in His plan.* They say God doesn't control (or even know in advance) the choices we make. But the Bible declares that God is sovereign over everything including birth defects (Ex 4:11), natural disasters (Gen 6:17; Jonah 1:4), & even over the evil things that people do, although He isn't responsible for their sin (Gen 50:20; Ex 4:21; 1 Kgs 22:23; Is 10:5; Acts 4:27-28). It robs people of comfort & creates a scary world, where evil is out of control. When we deny God's sovereignty over trials we can't believe He's purposefully working these trials

⁶ *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton, D.D.: With a Memoir of the Author*, Vol 9, p 454

⁷ www.preceptaustin.org

for our good. We are slaves commanded to have joy in trials. We've been promised these trials & testings produce **endurance** in us. What's the end result of all this?

4. The Result 4

The definition of the word **endurance** by itself includes having a submissive will to God's will & vs 4 makes this even clearer when it says, **let endurance have its perfect result**. The implication is that if we don't submit our will to what God says & patiently endure trials, if our focus is getting out at all costs & if we refuse to consider it joy, we're disobeying God's command & are short-circuiting His work in us for our growth. Submitting to God doesn't necessarily mean passively enduring trials without praying for relief. Paul prayed that God would remove his thorn in the flesh (2 Cor 12:8-9). Being submissive to God doesn't mean we don't take steps to remedy the problem. If the trial is the loss of a job, it's right to seek another job. If the trial is an illness, it's right to pray & seek medical help. If it's a difficult circumstance, it isn't necessarily wrong to try to change the circumstance. Submission is an attitude toward God, where we don't defiantly shake our fist in His face & tell Him He has no right to do this to us. We aren't submitting to Him if we ignore Him & take matters into our own hands. One of the best examples of submission was Job. After God afflicted him, he said, **The Lord gave & the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord** (1:21).

God sends various trials not to hurt or hinder, but to help. Sometimes they're trials of our own making & other times they're just a part of life's problems that we all experience. What is the result of considering trials with joy? **So that you may be perfect & complete, lacking in nothing**, or as much like Christ as we can be. **Perfect** isn't sinless, it means *mature*. JB Phillips paraphrases it this way:

When all kinds of trials & temptations crowd into your lives my brothers, don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends! Realise that they come to test your faith & to produce in you the quality of endurance. But let the process go on until that endurance is fully developed ...

God has a goal. **4**

Is James telling us that if we do what he says we'll be without sin? That can't be what he means because he tells us in 3:2 we all stumble in many ways. He isn't talking about sinless perfection. He's talking about God with this purpose or goal in mind. He's bringing us somewhere. When we

endure trials by faith with joy, our faith is stronger for the next trial. We know that we can endure, because we've already been through previous trials. Trials aren't a sign of God's displeasure but are opportunities to endure & persevere in the Lord. How can we go on when trials have paid us a visit? What shall we do when tragedy strikes & we feel like giving up? A few suggestions:

1. Remind yourself of the promises of God. That simply means, dwell in God's Word. Talk to yourself & call to mind the promises of God's presence, comfort, care, & purpose to mold you into the likeness of His Son.

2. Give thanks for what you can give thanks for. There are times when thanksgiving seems almost impossible. Pain & sorrow are overwhelming. But even in the darkest of times we can thank God for who He is, for His love, & presence with us.

3. Choose to believe in God. That means exactly what it says. Believe in God! Believe in His goodness. Believe in His love. Believe in His kindness. Faith is a choice made by the heart.

In order to make this as simple as possible, let me boil this down to 2 words. When hard times come, when trials fall upon us, or we seem to fall upon them, what should we do? 2 words: *Pray & stay*. Don't run. Don't hide. Don't shake your fist at God. Don't start arguing with the Almighty. Don't try to bargain your way out of trouble. It doesn't work, & you don't have anything to bargain with anyway. Pray & stay. Pray: Seek God's face. Spend time with Him. Ask Him, *What are you trying to teach me? Speak, Lord, & I will listen to your voice.* & then stay. Wait. Be patient. Don't rush God. (You can't rush Him!) Refuse to run away. Affirm by faith that God is at work even though He seems invisible & your life seems chaotic. The Christian life isn't an easy one & any representations to the contrary are false. There is an abundant life to be had, & there's spiritual victory, & there's joy in the Lord & the filling of the Spirit, but those things don't come in spite of our trials. Most often they come through & with & alongside our trials. In a fallen world, there can be no other way. & for the most part, we can't choose our trials nor can we avoid them. But we can choose how we respond. That part is up to us.

Joy or bitterness?
 Forgiveness or anger?
 Trust or unbelief?
 Faith or fear?

Love or hatred?
Kindness or malice?
Gentleness or stubbornness?
Mercy or revenge?
Peace or worry?
Hope or despair?

Our trials aren't sent to make us fall. They're sent to cause us to grow by God's grace. They aren't meant to defeat us but to be the means to more Christ-likeness. They aren't intended to make us weaker but to make us stronger. They aren't sent to hurt us but to help us. Therefore, we shouldn't complain when hard times come. We should rejoice. & we will rejoice if we believe what God has said. James calls for a decisive act, to consider our trials opportunities for joy & endurance. You may not often think of God as a God of joy, but there is a joy of God, from God, & in God that we are to enter into. &, as His children, we're to consider all joy in light of our trials. PRAY