

Joy In Trials

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[0:00] Children, you are now dismissed to your Sunday school class. You're going to be learning about your promise-making and promise-keeping God. This November, last week, we started a series, Hardship, Holiness, and Our Loving Heavenly Father.

And last week, we looked at the book of Lamentations, and specifically Lamentations 3, where Jeremiah was in the midst of some severe hardship, and yet he says this, But this I call to mind, and therefore have hope.

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They're new every morning.

Great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, I said, therefore I will have hope. Jeremiah had hope in the hardship, because he believed his God was for him.

And this morning, we're going to be looking at another passage about hardship. James 1, verses 2-4. So if you want to open up your Bibles to the book of James, it's towards the end of your New Testament.

[1:21] Chapter 1, verses 2-4. Where Jeremiah 3 is about hope in hardship, James 1, verses 2-4 is about joy in hardship.

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds. Now, this, what I'm about to say, may be a gross oversimplification.

But typically, when a human being encounters difficulty, hardship, when they are drawn out of their comfort zone, typically a human being will respond in one of two ways, fight or flight.

Fighters put up their dukes, and they say, Okay, who's to blame? Fighters look for cover and wait until the all-clear is sounded. But a Christian has a third option.

It's not fight. It's not flight. It's faith. Faith in our God. A Christian, one confronted with difficulty, must resist the natural instinct to fight or flight and choose to trust in God.

[2:35] And Lamentations 3, trusting God in hardship, shows up as hope. And James 1, trusting God in hardship, shows up as joy. Count it all joy. So here's what I believe God is telling us this morning from James 1, 2-4.

Here's what I want you to see. When trials come knocking, we welcome them with joy because we trust in our God.

When trials come knocking, we welcome them with joy because we trust in our God. It sounds crazy, doesn't it? We must be believing truth about God when we encounter trials.

Let me just read this passage. Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that this testing of your faith produces steadfastness, and let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

This morning we're going to look at three things. First is the command. There is a command here in James 1, 2. Count it all joy. We're going to look at the command, and then we're going to look at the rationale for the command.

[3:52] This command begs the question, why? And James answers that in verses 3 and 4. So we're going to look at the command, and then we're going to look at the rationale. And our last move together, I want to gird up your mind for the trials that are coming this week.

You're going to be facing them. We all are. And so three moves, command, the rationale, and then by way of application, girding up your mind for the trials to come this week.

So first, let's look at this command in 1, 2. Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds. I mean, we are being commanded to be joyful in the midst of trials, to have joy in suffering, joy in hardship, joy in confusion.

Does that sound crazy to you? Well, there's a context in which this command is coming. Trials. What does James mean by trials? Well, the word that is used here is translated one of two ways in the New Testament.

[5:06] The first way that this word is translated is it means an outward trial, a process of testing that comes upon us from the outside.

God brings the trial. The second way that this word is translated is an inner temptation, an enticement to sin that doesn't come from without, but it comes from within, out of my own heart, out of your heart.

This leads us to a very important distinction to make. God tests us, but He doesn't tempt us. God brings trials, but He doesn't make us sin.

Our own desires are what tempt us, and we see that played out in verses 1 through 13, excuse me, 13 and 14 in chapter 1 of James.

So in verse 2 here, what is very clear is that this is a trial that God is bringing to test us, the trials.

[6:16] And verse 3 confirms that. So verse 2, when you meet trials of various kinds, and verse 3, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

When God tests us through trials, He's not trying to make us sin. He's seeking to make us more holy. God's responsible for the trial, but He's not responsible for how we respond to it.

He doesn't take responsibility for our desires in that. So what I want you to see coming out of this little piece here is that all trials are challenging opportunities God sends to mature us.

They're redemptive in nature. They're purposed. And what we learn here from James is that they vary in form and intensity. You see the words in verse 2, when you meet trials of various kinds? Various kinds of trials. Some trials are simple. Some trials are complex. Some trials are mild.

[7:29] Some trials are intense. Some trials are brief. Some trials are extended. Some trials are unique to Christians. We suffer for Jesus' name.

Some trials are common to all. Living in a fallen world. We all deal with loneliness, sickness, disappointment, broken cars, unexpected bills when a loved one dies.

Some trials are very personal. Other trials are communal. Are corporate. We've been going through some trials as a church.

When trials are complex, intense, extended trials, these are the very most difficult kind. They can be unsettling, uncomfortable, and unpredictable.

But one thing we know is that these various trials are coming. Now, if this is true, if God sends trials for our good, and there are a variety of kinds of trials, we're dealing with trials on a frequent basis.

[8:49] God is challenging us on a regular basis to grow us. He's not waiting for us to ask Him. He brings them for our good.

Life is one trial after the next, isn't it? And sometimes, trials come in clusters. But what we see here is that trials are normal.

I'm so grateful for John Bunyan's book, Pilgrim's Progress. It's a classic. It's one of the most published books in all of history. There's also a children's version called Dangerous Journey. And if you're a parent with young ones, it is a great book. We have so benefited from that book. If you're not familiar with the story, John Bunyan has written a tale, a depiction of the Christian life. And it is encouraging and very helpful. The story is about the main character, Christian, and his journey from the city of destruction to the celestial city, heaven.

[10:04] And very wisely, Bunyan shows that through this story that the Christian life is marked by regular trials of various kinds.

I mean, Christian goes through the slew of despond. Christian has to navigate Vanity Fair. Christian has to climb the hill difficulty.

Christian has to square off on Apollyon and slog it out for a full day. And of course, Christian has to encounter, come face to face with the final trial, death.

The Christian life is filled with trials. But you know what? It's not only about trials.

Pilgrim's Progress is about joy in the midst of trials. And that's what the Christian life is too. Joy in the midst of trials. Trusting God through hard times.

[11:10] When trials come knocking at your door, how do you typically respond? No one's home.

Go away. Not interested. Because we know that trials bring pain, right? When trials come knocking on your door, how do you respond?

James is very clear in how we are to respond. Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.

various kinds. So let's look at this command. Here's what James is telling us. When trials come knocking, welcome them with joy. That word count in the ESV or consider in the NIV, it's a command not to feel.

It's a command to think. Count it joy. Consider it joy. It's not about how you're to feel.

[12:23] It's about what you're to think. It's a call to think God's thoughts. Close to this word count and consider is the word appraise.

Have you ever had an appraisal done on your car? See how much it's worth. Your house, see what it's worth. Jewelry, see what it's worth. What we are to appraise, what we're to count, is the word it. And what it refers to is hardship, trials, difficulty of various kinds. We're to appraise these things a certain way. All joy.

What is joy? What is it? I want to help you with that. This is a little arbitrary, but I think it will help you.

I want to make a distinction between what joy is and happiness is in order for you to get a sense of Christian joy. Joy is a settled contentment in the unchanging character of God.

[13:36] Joy is a settled contentment, a satisfaction in the unchanging character of God. It is not dependent on circumstances.

Joy rests squarely on God. Happiness is finding contentment, satisfaction in circumstances. and we all know that circumstances change with a win. So, what's the difference between joy and happiness? The object of faith.

What one is depending upon. Joy depends on God's constant, unchanging character. Happiness depends on constantly changing circumstances.

And so, if you're to graph them, if you're to graph happiness, happiness would be up and down following circumstances. Anybody relate with that? Joy would be constant as God's character is constant.

[14:40] As you learn Him and understand Him and know how wonderful He is, it's constant even in the midst of difficult circumstances. So, this is what God is commanding us.

When trials come knocking, welcome them with a joy grounded in God. James is not saying take joy in the hardship for the hardship's sake.

What James is saying is take joy in the hardship because God is going to do something through it for your good. So, we welcome trials with joy because our trust is in God.

We appraise trials with joy in God. That's the command. Now, we've got to look at the rationale because it leaves us asking the question, why?

Why are we to take joy in trials? Why? Why? And James provides the rationale in verses 3 and 4. He says, this is why we welcome trials with joy.

[16:03] Now, I know that it kind of sounds crazy to take joy in trials, but when you walk through and understand James' rationale, it actually makes sense.

So, we've looked at the command. Let's look at the rationale why we welcome trials with joy. And the first thing I want to draw to your attention is the first word of verse 3. It's the word for in the ESV or in the NIV it's the word because.

This clues us into the fact that James is going to give us reasons for welcoming trials with joy. And he says this, for you know, because you know.

Again, James is appealing to our minds, not our emotions. What he started in verse 2, count it all joy, appraise it, think about it this way.

He continues in verse 3. He's not appealing to our emotions. He's appealing to our minds. He wants us to think rightly about trials in relationship to who God is.

[17:12] And so, let me help you see the rationale. Three things here. The purpose of trials, the immediate result of trials, and the long-term goal of trials.

We see that laid out in verses 3 and 4. So let me just draw it out for you. The purpose of trials.

Verse 3. For you know that the testing of your faith.

Trials are not random. It may feel that way to us, but they're not. God is sovereign over it.

He is bringing them for our good. God sends trials of various kinds to strengthen and refine our faith. It is a testing of faith.

He wants to strengthen our faith. Do you know how to grow muscle mass? You go to the gym and you start lifting weights.

[18:18] And when you stretch your muscle a certain way, it starts to tear just a little bit. And you give it time to kind of respond and the actual muscle comes back with a greater mass.

You're actually able to move more weight. It's strengthened, but there's pain in the stretch. No pain, no gain. But what we're talking about here is not just strengthening faith.

It's refining faith. Heat refines things. Burns off dross. And what God is doing through trials is not only strengthening our faith, He's burning off impurities of our faith.

Turning to different things that are not God when things get hard. God sends trials of various kinds to strengthen and refine our faith. And mind you, this is not a faith in faith.

This is not just to strengthen our faith so that we can have a strength in faith. It's faith in God. God sends trials to strengthen our faith in Him.

[19:31] To grow our trust in Him. Now, when we are confronted with a trial, when trials come knocking, we tend to focus on the trial. To feel the heat.

To feel the pain. And what God does through a trial is to refocus our gaze on Him. Truth about Him. Glorious truth about Him.

We see that played out in the Psalms over and over and over again. David encounters some kind of difficulty and he cries out to God. God, rock, my fortress, my shelter, I got people doing this, I got people doing that, I don't know what's going to happen, I'm poor and needy, I need help.

Again and again we see David encountering difficulties and turning to his God. God's purpose for trials is to grow our faith in Him.

They're not random, they're purposed. They're for our good. They're various and they're frequent. That's the first thing that James wants us to understand.

[20:39] His rationale. Trials are testings. God wanting to grow us. But it moves from testing to an immediate result.

God tests us to bring about an immediate result. We see that in verse 3. For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

Think of steadfastness as a kind of faith. How faith shows up in a particular way.

It's faith showing up in the midst of hard circumstances. It's the ability to endure when you are under pressure.

To trust God when things get hot. To trust God when you get stretched. Trusting God in the midst of crisis.

[21:35] Okay, we're entering basketball season. Has any, who has seen a basketball game? Raise your hand. Just want to know what I'm working with here. Alright. There is this defensive play called a full court press.

And what it is is the offense gets the ball underneath their basketball hoop and they need to get it down to the other basketball hoop. And so what the defense does is they come on strong and furious.

They apply a lot of pressure. And the purpose of a full court press is to test the offense to see how they can handle it. And if you're watching this on TV and you see a full court press going on and you kind of focus in on the offensive player with the ball, what you'll see is one of two things.

That offensive player is either going to panic or he's going to call to mind what his coach has told him and he's going to persevere through the press. He's going to break the press.

He's going to be steadfast under trial. He's going to walk through it all the way through. When God brings trials, He's going to grow our steadfastness in Him.

[22:47] God delights in a steadfast faith. Steadfastness literally means to bear up under weight.

Now the question we can ask is this, why does God like steadfastness? What does He like about it? Well, God is steadfast.

He Himself is steadfast. The steadfast love of the Lord. He's an ever-present help in trouble. He is our rock. He is our fortress. But what I want you to see is if you turn your Bibles over maybe a page to the left to Hebrews 12 verses 1-3, we're going to see that steadfastness is Christ-like.

So turn to Hebrews 12 verses 1-3. We read this, Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, pointing back to chapter 11, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance.

That is the same word translated steadfastness or perseverance in James 1. So let us run with steadfastness, the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross.

[24:22] Again, that's the word for steadfastness, perseverance, despising the shame and seated at the right hand of God. Jesus Christ endured the cross in order to save us.

The joy of our salvation. Steadfastness, a steadfast faith is a Christ-like faith.

In fact, He endured the cross so that we can be like Him when hardships come. The deal is the only way to grow in steadfastness is to go through trials.

It's the immediate result. It's what God wants to get done in us when we encounter a trial. So we've looked at the purpose of trials.

They test us to grow us. The immediate result is steadfastness, faith under pressure. The long-term goal comes in verse 4.

[25:37] If you look at it, verse 4, we see this. And let steadfastness have its full effect. That word full effect is getting at the long-term goal of trials.

What God is seeking to get done in the long haul. You see, steadfastness is not an end unto itself. God brings trials, grows steadfastness over and over and over again in order to get something greater done in a long-term goal.

And you know what that's called? Maturity. The way that James talks about it is like this. And let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. And we all know that the day we see Jesus, it's all perfect. Sin is gone. No more trials. What James is getting at specifically here is the maturity that comes over time.

As we experience trials, as we respond with a steadfast faith over and over, that produces maturity. And he describes it positively and negatively.

[26:50] Positively, he describes it as perfect and complete. That word perfect can also be understood as mature and complete.

That word means well-rounded. You know what the fruit of the Spirit is? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.

Just imagine all this fruit of the Spirit showing up in fuller and fuller measure in every area of your life. Every relationship.

Every situation. Growing in greater and greater measure. He's going to round you out and make you complete. Negatively, he says, lacking in nothing.

Not having a distracted focus. Your undistracted focus on Jesus. An unblemished character. When we put this stuff together, perfect, complete, lacking in nothing, and you know what?

[27:55] It starts kind of sounding like Jesus. The long-term goal our Father has for trials is to make us like Jesus.

Mature. The rationale James is laying out here is a process in which God uses trials to stretch and refine our faith to grow us over time to be more and more like Jesus.

Progressively making His children holy. Trials are an essential tool. Trials are necessary to that end.

Our Heavenly Father wants us to share in His holiness. We'll see that next week out of Hebrews 12. He wants us to share in His holiness so much that He employs various kinds of trials to refine us.

He values our holiness more than our comfort. In other words, God considers trials good for us. So, having seen the rationale that we are to consider trials joy because God's testing us, He's seeking to produce steadfastness, and the long-term goal is Christ-like maturity, because of that, because we see that, we know that, we can have joy.

[29:41] That when trials come knocking, we can welcome them with joy because God is using them for our good even when they involve a lot of pain. When hardship, trials come knocking, we welcome them with joy because we trust in our God.

so we've looked at the command, we've looked at the rationale, now I want to gird your mind up for this week. I want to help you think a certain way because you're going to encounter trials of various kinds this week.

When you encounter a trial, when the heat goes up, when you feel the stretch, when you start sensing pain, when you encounter a trial, you need to fight for joy.

And the way you fight for joy is by calling to mind to consider for we know we call to mind truth about our God in relationship to the trial.

You fight for joy by calling to mind three truths about God. You ready? God is over it. God is in it.

[31:04] And God is using it for our good. Will you say it with me? God is over it. God is in it. God is using it for our good.

Over it, in it, through it. Over it, in it, through it. When you encounter a trial, what comes to mind? God is over it, this trial, He's in this trial, and He's using this trial for my good.

He's over it. This is not random. This is not some freakish random event. But God is sovereign over it. Ephesians 1.22 God has placed all things under the feet of Jesus.

All things. He reigns over it. God is sovereign. sovereign. It may not feel that way when you first encounter a trial, but that's why we call this to mind.

Our God is a sovereign God. Our trials don't reign over our God. Our God reigns over our trials. He's over it, and God is in it.

[32:13] God is in it with me. God is in it with you. He's in it with us. He hasn't left us. He'll never leave us nor forsake us. God is right here, right now, and is committed to us as ever.

He has given us His Son. How will He not also give us everything we need even when we encounter trials? He's an ever-present help in time of trial.

He loves us, and He's not going to leave us hanging when we go through a trial He sends for our good. He's with us in it.

I love this verse. Isaiah 41.10 Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. I have set the Lord always before me because He is at my right hand.

[33:18] I will not be shaken. God is in it. He's with us. He's over it. He's in it. And He's working through it. You know, we can overplay Romans 8.28.

We can slap that on hardship like whatever. Alright, go have a merry day. But it's true. God does work all things out for the good of those who love Him and have been called according to His purpose.

And all things includes trials. He's working it for our good. So when we encounter a trial, if I know that God is going to work through it, I can welcome it.

With joy. Because I know that God is going to refine me so I can share in His holiness. So the question becomes when we encounter a trial, not okay, who's to blame or take cover, it is this.

God, how are you using this to refine me? How are you using this to round me out to be like Jesus? What are you doing, God?

[34:36] Help me to see it. So this week, maybe you're a mom of a two year old. You're going to have some trials. God's over it, He's in it, and He's through it.

All of us are going to count on trials. Over it, in it, through it. Over it, in it, through it. Over it, in it, through it.

God is over it, God is in it, and he's working for our good through it. We got to remember it. We got to believe it. We got to speak it to ourselves and others, and then we get to enjoy it.

We count it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when we meet trials of various kinds, because we are confident in our God who has our good in mind.

Let me pray. God, we are so grateful that you are a God who is over it and in it and working through it.

[35:42] God, we thank you so much that you bring trials. We are able to rejoice in that because we are confident that you are sovereign, that you're with us, and that you have good purposes for us through the trial.

God, would you use it for our good? Would you teach us and strengthen us? Would you bring to our attention areas that must change in order to be like Jesus?

God, we trust you. We love you. We know that you don't bring these things upon us for our ill, but for our good. So God, we look to you, and we say, have your way.

We trust you. Our joy is in you. And it's the name of Jesus that we pray. Amen.