

# Trusting in Trials

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     2. Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness, and let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing, and so on.

Now, when you read the introduction to this letter, we see that James is writing to those who are in the dispersion. They are scattered all over the place, and sometimes in life we feel like that ourselves.

We feel that we are far from heaven, and sometimes we feel that we are far from God, and the life that we live and the world in which we live sometimes has that effect upon us.

We read through the letter, and we see the way in which James understands that. He understands the kind of world his readers are living in. He understands the way in which the world is a temptation to them. He understands the different groups of people in the world.

There are those who are rich. There are those who are poor. There are those who are showing their faith. There are those who are not showing their faith. And there is the overall theme of the importance of them living in dependence upon God.

[ 1 : 2 3 ]     And right at the very beginning here, we see the way in which James wants to encourage the people with regard to their faith. And looking at these two verses this evening, we want to think of trusting in our trials and spiritual maturity.

Well, first of all, see that there is a prompt in these verses. And sometimes we need a prompt. We need somebody to poke us, to waken us up to what we should be doing.

And we rely on good friends to do that for us from time to time. But God is the expert at doing that at the right time. And here, James is prompting those who are going to hear this letter to think of certain things.

And he wants them to think especially about the way in which they are going to look at what they are going through in life. And he wants them to count it all joy when you meet various trials.

He wants them to go through a kind of thought process. He wants them to think things through. And he wants them to think things through in such a way that they will come at last to find joy.

[ 2 : 4 7 ]     And it's wonderful the way in which he wants them to count it all joy. He wants them to see all of life as a time and experience of joy.

And that kind of prompt is really staggering. We think of our own lives and we think of how much time we spend rejoicing and how much time we spend sorrowing.

But James wants his hearers, his readers, to be joyous all of the time. And when we think of joy, we want to ask ourselves, what is joy?

Is it an emotion? Is it a choice? Is it a feeling? What do you think of when you think of joy?

When the Bible thinks of joy, it thinks of joy in God. And it is experiencing God in a particular way. And in order for us to have that kind of joy in God, we have to do the things that lead us to joy.

[ 4 : 01 ] There is an activity. And that activity creates joy in our hearts. And then we have joy in God. And in general terms, when we read the New Testament, we see that joy especially arises out of the resurrection of Jesus.

He told the disciples in John 16 that he would see them again and their hearts would rejoice. And your joy no one will take from you. There is a joy that has its source in the resurrection of Jesus.

And that joy should filter through the whole of our lives so it becomes part of who we are every day. Perhaps all of us tonight need the kind of prompt that points us to remember that we should be joyful.

And we may look at ourselves in the mirror. We may reflect on our own lives. We may look at the lives of others. And we may ask or think, where is the joy?

But we do remind ourselves that the joy that we have in the Bible, it's not going around with a smile on your face all of the time. It is something that's deep-seated. It's something that takes place in our hearts.

[ 5 : 22 ] But the prompt is even more staggering when we see the arena in which they are to remain joyful. Count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds.

He's giving us a picture as if we're walking along the road, walking along the street in life, and we encounter somebody. We encounter something. And as we journey on in the life of faith, we will from time to time encounter, not oppression, but we will encounter trials.

And in the book of the letter of James, we see that the same word translated trials is used in two ways. We see as we journey on later on, he speaks of being tempted and not being tempted.

God does not tempt us with evil in version number 12, number 13. There is a temptation that is to prove the genuineness of something, and there is the temptation to entice us to sin.

There is the temptation to bring something to shine forth, and there is a temptation that seeks to destroy. But here we have God working.

[ 6 : 42 ] Here we have God encountering us in life with various trials, the things that cut across our paths.

We are familiar with these kinds of things. They come in various shapes and sizes. They come with physical things. They come with providential things.

They come with things that happen in our hearts. They are testings. They are trials. We see that God tested Abraham, asked him to go and sacrifice his son.

We see at the end of it that God says to him, now I know that you fear God because you did not withhold your son from me. There is the need for us to know joy and to have joy and to have joy in the midst of our trials.

And we know that if we're going to do that, there is a lot of thinking because, naturally speaking, our response to trials is not to have joy.

[ 7 : 51 ] It's not to have gladness to sing the song. The natural response is not only to reject and to complain, but sometimes even to question the very goodness of God.

The God who is in the trial. The God who is the object of our faith. So often we crumble at the least trial in life and faith seems to disappear because we're not thinking it through.

And perhaps tonight that's where we are at. This has happened. This has come into your life. And because this has happened, your whole experience has changed.

And by the very thing that you're going through, you're rebelling against it. You're rejecting it. And you're even questioning the very grace of God.

And if that is the case, how much tonight you need the prompt from God, his hand upon your shoulder, his alert to you, his waking you up so that your response to your trial will be one of faith and not one of fear or of rejection.

[ 9 : 09 ] The prompt to have joy all of the time. That's what we long for. And the Bible is suggesting to us this evening that that's what we should have.

Following on from that, we want to see that there is a particular perception here. How on earth am I going to rejoice in all of my trials?

Only from the right perspective. And James says to them in version number three, for you know, you're going to do this based on what you know.

And based on what you know, not of your trial, not of life in general, but based on what you know of the God who is your savior, based on what you know from the word of God, which he has breathed out for us to equip us to live for him.

It is a perspective that's based on the knowledge of God. And in the very relationship with God, the promise that he gave to Jeremiah through Jeremiah in chapter 31, that when he makes this new covenant with his people, all shall know me.

[ 10 : 28 ] It's a fact of a Christian experience that we know God. If we don't know God, we are not the children of God. But because we are the children of God, we do know God.

And it is that knowledge of God that gives us the perspective with which we're going to look down upon the whole of life and look down especially upon our trials.

And what does that knowledge of God tell us that enables us to have joy? It is that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

The testing, the trial, what they're going through. And interestingly, once more to do with the words that James is using, he is using a different word here in verse 3 to what he has used in verse 2 with regard to trials and testing.

The testing here is a process through which the genuineness of something is confirmed. And James is saying to them, this is what you know, that the trial of your faith is actually for your good.

[ 11 : 48 ] it's confirming who you are and it's enabling your faith to shine forth in such a way that it did not before and that it could not up until now.

And God appoints the encounter, he appoints the meeting with us along life's way for that very purpose. It produces steadfastness.

There's an energy that comes from God that works in the midst of our very testing and that energy is something that produces something in ourselves.

And what it produces in ourselves is steadfastness. It's that sense of being constant and being firm and being established.

The picture that the word gives us is remaining under bearing circumstances. No matter what the circumstances are, it's continuing under them.

[ 12 : 58 ] And is that not what our trials so often feel like? They feel so much like a weight. And if we don't have the right perspective, the weight is crushing.

and it can crush us right down into the ground. It can break us emotionally. It can leave us a crying wreck because of the huge burden of the very testing process through which God is taking us.

But despite that, and regardless of that, it does produce the effect of steadfastness. And that's why Job was saying in Job chapter 23, when he has tried me, I will come forth like gold.

And the very experience that we think will cause our faith to fail is the very experience through which your faith is refined, through which its impurities are taken away and through which it becomes really strong.

Douglas Moon says, like a muscle that becomes strong when it faces resistance. So Christians learn to remain faithful to God over the long haul only when they face difficulty.

[ 14 : 28 ] How have we survived until now in our faith? only because through our difficulties God has strengthened our faith.

And had he not done that, we would have failed long ago. We would be like the seed that fell upon the rock in the parable. And when the testing came when the sun rose, the scorching heat, faith vanished that they fell away.

The perspective, the wonderful thought, that whatever is happening to you tonight and whatever happened to you yesterday and whatever happens to you tomorrow, God is working for your good to produce your faith, to stretch that muscle of faith.

and I'm sure we will all agree that it's a muscle that needs stretching, so weak, sometimes so feeble, that it's hard working and we need the exercise that comes through the testing through which God strengthens and enables and causes us to persevere and to persevere because the knowledge that we have is increased in that process and that increase of knowledge in the time of testing ensures that we do not separate from God but guarantees that we are bound closer together with him than ever before.

And then we have joy, then we easily counted all joy because of the knowledge, because of the perspective of God as he looks down upon the furnace watching over your trials and mine and ensuring that the temperature doesn't go beyond what they're able to bear and ensuring that the temperature is such that it will produce the refining to perfection.

[ 16 : 36 ] And so like Job when he has tried you, you will come forth like gold. And thirdly, we want to think of participation.

In version number four, and let steadfastness have its full effect. Why is he saying that?

He is saying that because they're not letting steadfastness have its full effect. He is saying that because there is resistance in them.

There is a lack of submission. And that lack of submission means that they have no joy and that no matter how great the pain, they have lost their joy and they're overcome by sorrow and they're never going to recover.

other. And it's thought-provoking for us all tonight that the joy that we crave, it is absent because of what we're not doing as well as what we are doing.

[ 17 : 46 ] and if we're growing as the children of God who have this knowledge of God then we should be developing and growing and we should have this real sense of the joy, the deep seated sense of trusting in the grace of God and that producing its fruit.

And we may well ask ourselves and I may well ask myself not only tonight but every step of my journey of faith am I standing in the way of God?

Am I resisting what God is doing? Am I rejecting what God is giving to me for my good? And therefore am I going through my life of faith with the absence of the thing I crave to have the joy of the Lord which is the fruit of the spirit love and joy and peace.

I long for that and yet soften their opposite and here James is saying let steadfastness have its full effect.

Take possession of this whole thing instead of pushing it away embrace it in your heart and make it your own and once you do that you will no longer hinder the work of God but you will allow the steadfastness to have its full effect to reach the pinnacle which is God's design and all that you are going through and what we desire most of all and what we cannot reach so often because of who we are is what God has purposed for us so we cannot say tonight that we don't have joy because God did not purpose that we would have it right now but what we can say is that if we don't have joy in the way that God has purposed to have it in our lives and our hearts then we ask what are we withholding what are we embracing at the expense of embracing his providence and his will and his purpose and how we need to exchange how we need to empty our hearts of the thing that stands in the way of embracing what

[ 20 : 20 ] God is doing and then it will have its full effect it will reach its telos there's the goal there's what God has in view that's what he wants us to be and that's what I want to be ourselves if we're honest but let us tonight think of participating participating in this very thing to ensure that we're not standing in the way of what God wants to do for us and in the participation then that you may be perfect and complete lacking nothing it's an awful thing in any kind of experience any area of life to think that there's a deficit that we cannot do what we want to do because we lack certain things sometimes we can be so conscious of what we lack that we lose sight of the things that

God has given to us but here is God working so that we will not lack anything he wants to fill our experience he wants to fill our cup in such a way that we will feel we lack nothing because our joy is complete in God that we may be perfect and complete I said at the beginning that sometimes we feel we're far away from heaven and far away from God and we know that there is a perfection and a completion that will only be ours when we get to heaven but there is another perfection and there is another completion and that is that our development should correspond to where we are on the journey of faith if it does not then there's something seriously wrong and the maturity that the

Bible speaks of that Paul speaks of and Jesus himself speaks of that maturity there should be a corresponding level of maturity in our faith to the years that we have travelled with God on this journey and so tonight let's hear the prompt let's be alert what is God saying to us let's ensure we have the right perspective make sure we know the word of God make sure we know more of Jesus Christ make sure we know more of God as the object of our faith to give us the perspective that ensures joy and then let's ensure that we are participating in what God is doing not standing in his way but willingly submitting to him and recognising the way in which he blesses and the way in which he fills and the way in which he tops up our experience of his grace and therefore our experience of his joy may God bless these thoughts to us so concluding psalm is psalm number 34 from

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