

Choose Joy in Trial James 1:2-8

Joy in the midst of trials? At best that sounds like a paradox; at worst, ridiculous and insulting. And yet James commands us to choose joy when we suffer. Such a perspective is only possible when we see through the trials to the good that God can accomplish through them. While all people suffer, we suffer with hope because we have a loving Father who will not allow our suffering to go to waste IF we will choose to believe that He is GOOD even when life is not.

Couple things to let you know about...

- **1) New website: grace-bible.org**
 - o Find sermons, Bible studies to download; small groups to sign up for; information on our church; upcoming events
 - o Follow-up questions for each sermon in James
 - For individual, family, small group – take you deeper
 - search for “James Questions”
 - will post Monday afternoon following each sermon
- **2) I’ll be making much more use of facebook and twitter**
 - o Help you prepare for what we’ll be studying
 - o Solicit questions and ideas from you about something in James
 - Don’t want to limit our study to my questions / ideas
 - o Send you additional resources – articles, websites, videos to help you apply
 - o No pressure! But if you want any of that...
 - facebook: Blake Jennings college station
 - twitter: [@GraceBibleBlake](https://twitter.com/GraceBibleBlake)

Let’s jump right into our passage... Read 1:2

This morning: **everyone’s least favorite subject – trials!**

- Yes, you woke up early... to hear about pain and suffering! Yeah!!!
- Fix our crowding problem! Because no one wants to talk about suffering

Don’t know if you’ve ever had that moment...

- Quiet Time – read a verse like this
- Get nervous! Oh, man – God, are you trying to tell me something?!
- Rest of the day – extra cautious – not going to take any chances!
- James 1:2 is the kind of verse that can mess up your whole day!
- No one wants to talk about trails and suffering...

No one but James, that is!

- Hello. Now let’s talk about suffering!!
- No warm up, illustration, small talk – just Wham!
- Right into one of the least enjoyable aspects of human existence...

“Trials”

- *periasmos*, can mean multiple things
- Here, it means “hardships that test us.”

- = a difficult situation that tests the strength of our faith and endurance.
- for James' audience – 2 particular trials: persecution & poverty
- But James doesn't want to limit himself... So he describes the trials as..

“various”

- lit: “multi-colored, multi-faceted”
- trials of all shapes and sizes
- he's casting the net wide
- any and every circumstance that produces hardship
 - o persecution and poverty +....
 - o sickness, loneliness, death of a loved one, loss of a job...

“when you encounter these various trials”

Notice the word that phrase begins with...

“when”

- Not “if” but “when” – that's very significant
 - o Trials aren't just for some of us – the unlucky
- No, **trials are inevitable** – an inescapable part of life on this planet.
- **Now some of you have not yet experienced that reality**
 - o Your life has been relatively easy. The worst thing that's happened to you lately is that the Aggie game got postponed and you finally had a date.
 - o That's sad. But if that's the worst that's happened to you, then your life's been pretty easy.
 - o And if your life's been easy, James wants you to know...
 - it's not because you're lucky
 - it's because you haven't lived long enough yet!
 - o Trials are coming to you just like to the rest of us. So buckle up!!
- **Now some of you know that's true because you're in a trial right now.**
 - o Some hardship is swamping your boat
 - o **If that's you, then I hope that this little word “when” will be a comfort to you.**
 - o Because when things go bad, what's our natural response?
 - Why me?? Why my spouse / child??
 - Why is this happening to me and not to him??
 - o When that question comes, I need to remember: all of us suffer trials
 - If his life looks easy – either because
 - 1) he's not lived long enough yet – trials are coming
 - 2) he's just better at hiding his pain than the rest of us!
 - o And I've found that, usually, it's the second option...
 - He's suffering, but you don't know it
 - All you know is the good stuff because that's all we share in public
 - don't air our dirty laundry
 - So, if all we see is a person's public persona, then their life will look a lot better than it actually is.
 - That's the problem with facebook, right?
 - Everybody looks good on facebook.
 - o “Look at my beautiful kids!”
 - o “Check out this steak dinner I'm about to eat!”
 - o “I'm so grateful for my awesome husband!”

- Post the good stuff, but not the bad...
 - “Spanking my child for hitting her brother”
 - “Throwing up my undercooked steak dinner”
 - “Crying because my husband forgot our anniversary, again”
 - No, you don’t post that!
 - Result: if you spend much time on fb – get depressed!
 - Because everyone having such a good time
 - spouse / kids / job / vacation / life – Awesome!
 - But that is not reality!
 - Reality is that no one’s life is awesome
 - Because life this side of heaven is not awesome.
 - The next life will be awesome. But not this one.
 - This life is hard. It is full of trials.
 - And none of us are immune to that.
 - Every person either in a trial, coming out of a trial, or about to go into a trial.
 - When you suffer – God’s not treating you unfairly
 - Everyone suffers in one way or another – we may just not see it
- **Trials are inevitable in this life...**
- **And just so we’re clear – that’s not God’s fault.**
 - **READ Genesis 1:31a**
 - No pain, no suffering, no trials in Garden
 - What God wanted for us: life free from pain
 - walk with God face-to-face in the cool of the morning
 - What Adam & Eve enjoyed, until they decided it wasn’t enough
 - preferred to become gods themselves
 - ate of the tree
 - *that’s* what introduced suffering to the human race
 - When we suffer: not God’s fault – humanity’s fault – we chose sin...
 - And sin broke everything
 - broke this planet – battle hurricanes and drought
 - not in Garden
 - broke our bodies – cancer, heart disease, MS, depression
 - God didn’t create that – sin did
 - Sin broke everything – our planet, our bodies, our relationships, our families... everything.
 - Good news: God has provided a solution to sin
 - The moment you believe, God rescues you from sin
 - But He doesn’t rescue you from trials – not yet
 - That comes in the next life.
 - In this life trials are inevitable even for believers
- **That’s why James says, “when you encounter various trials”**
 - **verb “encounter”** – lit: “when you fall into trials”
 - NT: used of man traveling to Jericho who “fell in” among thieves
 - didn’t seek them out; didn’t provoke them
 - just walking along and Bam! on the ground, surrounded
 - That’s how trials work
 - don’t need to seek them out
 - James doesn’t want us to do that

- No need to – they’ll find you!
- Often at most unexpected time / way

**You can’t control the timing, frequency or intensity of your trials...
...all you can control is your response.**

And that’s what the command of v2 is all about. When you encounter trials...

“CONSIDER IT ALL JOY”

- this is the part of the vs that makes people either confused or outright mad
- hard enough if all he said was, “You’re going to encounter various trials”
- not enough for James – has audacity to say, “Consider it all joy”
 - Are you kidding?!
 - When I suffer, I’m supposed to rejoice!?
 - That’s impossible. Seriously?! That sounds ridiculous!?

Let me help you make sense of this seemingly absurd command by defining that key word...

“Joy”

- **Start by defining what “joy” is not: joy is not “happiness”**
 - Happiness = a pleasant feeling based on enjoyable circumstances
 - laughing with friends as you eat a perfect meal on Fri night
 - 75° Oct afternoon as you stand in Kyle watching Ags beat LSU
 - That’s not what James wants us to have when we suffer.
 - In fact, if you have a pleasant feeling when you suffer...
 - crazy! delusional! masochistic! that’s not good!
 - No, joy is not an emotion based on pleasant circumstances.
- **Joy is much deeper than that. Joy is an attitude of gratefulness.**
 - the core idea of joy
 - even when life is falling down around you, you give thanks to God for the life He’s given you.
 - you give thanks because God is GOOD, even when life is not.
- Joy is an attitude of gratefulness
- Based not on circumstances, but on a choice.
- **That’s clear in the command James uses, “consider”**
 - = “to choose to regard something to be true, even, or especially, if that thing doesn’t feel true.”
 - You don’t have to “consider” this room to be crowded – it’s obvious
 - But, trials being a source of joy – that’s not so obvious
 - seems contrary to evidence
 - That’s why James uses the word “consider.”
 - because we have to make a choice to believe despite appearances
- **So, put “consider” and “joy” together: what James is telling us to do...**
 - choose to be grateful
 - choose to believe that God is good even when life is not
- That’s joy.

But to really understand joy, I’ve got to take you to one more passage... Jn 11

- Jesus’ good friend Lazarus got sick and died
 - That’s a hardship for Jesus!
- How did Jesus respond?
 - He was perfect
 - So if God wants us to choose joy in hardships
 - Then you can be absolutely certain that Jesus chose joy

- Now let's see what joy in trial looked like for Jesus...
 - o **read Jn 11:32-35**
 - o God in human flesh, who did all things perfectly, who reckoned all trials to be a source of joy...
 - o when Lazarus died, He wept!
- **What I learn: joy is not antithetical to grief**
 - o the opposite of joy is not grief
 - o the opposite of joy is not sadness
 - o the opposite of joy is not weeping
 - if you want to be like God, then when you suffer or others around you suffer – you weep! That's what God did!
 - Normal, natural, good to cry & grieve when we suffer
- **The opposite of joy is not grief – it's bitterness**
 - o = choice to believe that God is NOT good.
 - o = choice to believe that your life is not a gift from Him.
 - o = settled anger against God or other people
 - normal to feel anger towards God when we suffer – not bitterness
 - bitterness = choice to embrace that anger; not deal with it; not confess it – harden yourself in it

So, James is NOT...

- saying "be happy; smile!"
- not rebuking us for weeping or for grieving.

What he is saying:

- **in the midst of our tears and grief...**
- **choose to be grateful**
- **choose to believe that God is GOOD even when life is not**

That should raise a logical question in our minds... WHY?

Why should I be grateful in the midst of this trial?

I'd never really wrestled deeply with that question until a few years ago...

- Luke & Gracie – beautiful, smart, funny – did I mention "smart"!!
- What you may not know: God gave them to us only after... infertility
 - o College students – struggle with infertility hard to imagine
 - just trying to keep yourself cleaned & fed!
 - o But one day, you will really want children
 - o then you will understand how painful life is for those couples who can't
- For the first time in my life, I wrestled with WHY...
 - o God, why should I consider this joy? Sounds ridiculous!!
 - o God, you want me to be grateful after yet another of friend finds out he's going to be a dad for the 2nd or 3rd time & I don't even get to be a dad once!!
 - o Why should I be grateful for that?!

Reasonable question – James knows we'll ask it – so he gives us 2 answers...

Why should I be grateful in the midst of trials?

Reason 1) read v3-4 – builds character now

- **the "testing of our faith"**

- Greek word pictures process of refining gold
- Melt it – impurities rise to surface – scrape them away
- That’s how a trial can work – the pain can improve us
- **Specifically, trials can grow our “endurance”**
 - = ability to bear up under a load.
 - used to describe a good soldier: able to fight in midst of fatigue and hardship.
- **And that endurance, over time, will make us mature.**
 - the point of v4.
 - Endurance works / produces:
 - “maturity” – what James means by “perfect”
 - “complete” – no part of your character missing
 - “lacking in nothing”
 - another term often used of a good soldier
 - well-equipped. Ready for anything.
- **So, trials can make you mature, BUT only if you obey v2.**
 - V3-4 assume you apply v2.
 - If you don’t and choose to give in to anger and bitterness instead, then you won’t grow in endurance and maturity.
 - No, that growth is only available if we choose to believe that God is GOOD even when life is not.
- Growth is contingent on our response.
- So is the 2nd reason James give us for rejoicing in trials...

Reason 2) read v12 – brings reward later

- more on this verse next week
- for now – just point out the obvious
- if you endure trials by obeying v2 – then when trial of this life is over, God will bless you with reward
 - “crown of life” – doesn’t tell us exactly what it is
 - “crown” = victor’s wreath = honor and reward

Summarize. When I suffer a trial, why should I choose to rejoice, to be grateful?

- Because of what God can do *through* the trial
- We don’t rejoice in the trial itself
 - Hardships are not good in and of themselves – not God’s original design
- What’s good is what God can accomplish in us and for us *through* the trial
 - In sovereign love, can use a bad thing for good ends
- Be grateful because you have a Father who will not let your pain go to waste.
 - Everyone suffers
 - But our suffering isn’t in vain – because we have a Father who loves us...
- So don’t look *at* the trial – look *through* the trial at the good God will make of it
 - IF we will choose joy.

But, let’s be honest – in the midst of trials, this is really hard to do!!

- even if we know all the theological reasons
- still, it’s really hard to see through the pain to the good on the other side.

That’s how I felt when we battled infertility

- **“God, how do I do this!?”**
- “How do I choose joy? It’s so hard and I feel so weak and overwhelmed.”

Fortunately, God offers us help in v5. Read v5

- “wisdom” = “knowledge applied” = living skillfully by applying God’s Word.

- in this specific context: = insight to be able to apply v2
 - o ability to see trials like God does – as an opportunity for great good
- If you lack that ability... JUST ASK!
 - o What God demands, He provides
 - Always true – He gives the strength to do what He commands
 - You just have to ask
- God is gracious. He loves to give.
 - o When we suffer – not kicking back in heavenly recliner...
 - o He's with us – just waiting to give us the help we need – if we'll just ask

BUT, there is one condition – read v6-8

- You must ask in faith – you cannot doubt
- I really struggled with this verse!!! I'm a doubter by nature!
 - o low on "faith" – high on "Analytical," "Critical," "Logical"
 - o For me, faith is hard and doubt is easy.
 - o Read this verse: "Oh man, am I hosed?"
- But, then I studied that word "doubt" – and my fears were relieved.
 - o Does NOT mean our intellectual struggles with faith
 - o Gr word "doubt" = "to distinguish, separate, or divide"
 - The person who doubts is the divided person we talked about last week.
 - He is "double-minded" – v8 – of two minds – two purposes
 - Like's what God has to offer... but also likes what the world has to offer
 - So he sits on the fence
 - reason people sit on a fence: give them options
 - o But God doesn't help fence-sitters.
 - If you want God's help, you must get off the fence
 - "Commit to me. Commit to my ways. Then I will give you the wisdom u seek"
- **Practically: the person who asks in faith rather than doubt is the person who says,**
 - o **God, whatever you allow to come into my life, I will accept**
 - I'm not going to sit on the fence and decide whether I like it or not
 - I accept the life you give me, both the good and the bad
 - o **God, wherever you lead me, I will follow**
 - I'm not going to divide myself between following you and following this world
 - You get all of me, even when I suffer / weep / am angry / confused
 - o **God, not my will, but yours be done**
 - I don't enjoy this battle with infertility, or depression, or sickness...
 - I want it to end yesterday...
 - but, God, not my will but yours be done.

That's what it means to ask in faith.

And so, let's apply this...

Everyone in this room is either in a trial, coming out of a trial, or about to encounter a trial. We all need this passage.

And so, when you encounter a trial...

- **Ask God for help, without hesitation**
 - o Ask Him every day – multiple times a day
 - o Invite others to join you in asking God for wisdom

- **But, before you ask, get off the fence**
 - Give God your undivided allegiance. Give Him everything. Even though you feel overwhelmed, depressed, angry, say to the Lord...
 - “Whatever comes, I will accept”
 - “Wherever you lead, I will follow”
 - “Not my will, but yours be done”