

Real Faith for Real People
Happy Though Hurting
James 1:2-4

It is interesting to me that we just came out of a topical study on heartbreak only to discover that James is speaking to us about a similar issue; trials.

Job 14:1 - *Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble.*

John 16:33 - *In the world you will have tribulation...*

This is truer for Christians who live in and anguish over an imperfect world while reading about, believing in and longing for a past and future perfect world.

As we noted last week, James is writing to suffering Jewish Christians.

Like Paul in Galatians, James skips the normal opening of a letter and jumps right into his concern.

Count In doing so, James is emphasizing

- a) His understanding of their situation
- b) His primary focus in writing
- c) His concern for their trouble

And this is what he says -

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

First: We can have joy in trouble 1:2a

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds

The word “when” reminds us of a fallen world insures we endure heartache. Hardship is not optional for anyone although it is useful for a Christian.

God uses our suffering for redemptive good; in this case, to produce endurance or perseverance.

Knowing that a great and good God oversees our suffering enable us to have joy in the midst of it.

No sorrow is accidental or purposeless. God has a reason for every trial we endure.

a) Consider

How do we do this? James says to “Consider it all joy...”

“Consider” is a command because such reflection is key to our happiness in the world. We can get so caught up in the cause or pain of our suffering that we don’t stop to lift our heads and look around.

Your suffering may not be optional – even unbelievers suffer – but your suffering is purposeful, ultimately beneficial.

To consider God, his purposes and the benefit of your trial changes a lot of things about enduring trials.

b) Joy

Thinking about this produces *pasan charan* or ‘pure joy.’

This doesn’t mean we won’t have other emotions but that ultimately, if we remember God and look at life realistically - joy will prevail.

Colossians 3:15 - And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts / rule = mediate

Remember that when Daniel prayed for the release of Israel from Babylonian captivity, he spent the first part of his prayer thinking about God. This elevated God in his thinking and, minimized his sorrow in comparison.

c) Trial

The word implies a hardship of our own making or difficulty thrust upon us.

‘Various’ adds to that thought = *variegated*

Picture of variegated hosta

What different kinds of hardships were James’ readers facing?

- External –

1:9 - Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, ¹⁰and the rich in his humiliation

Someone else’s external trouble might provide a temptation to us –

2:1 - My brothers, ^{1a} show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

1:15-16 - *If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, "and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good^b is that?*

4:1 - *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions^a are at war within you?*

Another person's trouble may present a temptation of omission or commission.

Internal –

ILL – Last week Jack Van Zandt became ill during our morning gathering. He wants me to thank the medical response team for their kind and professional help.

5:4-5 - *Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. ^cYou have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. ^dYou have condemned and murdered the righteous person.*
over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

5:14 - *Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray*

Whether external or internal, we can experience joy as we consider God, the world and God's purposes for our hardship.

We can have joy in trouble....

Second: If we think about what God is doing 1:3

for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

a) Knowing = *ginosko*

This is not intellectual knowledge but the knowledge of experience -

Mark 13:28 – *From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near.*

If I take that attitude, then I know when I am suffering that God is up to something good in my life.

b) Testing = *dokimion*

1 Peter 1:6-7 - *In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ^eso that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold*

that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

It means ‘refining’ and Peter sees God behind all of it.

The difficulties of life are intended by God to refine our faith: heating it in the crucible of suffering so that impurities might be refined away and so that it might become pure and valuable before the Lord.

- Douglas Moo

- c) Stedfastness = *hupomeno* (root) = *remain under* / 17t in the NT, most often translated as ‘endure’ or ‘patient’

1:12 - *Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.*

We can have joy in trouble, if we think about what God is doing...

Third: And persevere v 4

*And let steadfastness have its full effect,
that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

Romans 5:3 - *we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance*

We are saved by grace, but the New Testament constantly maintains this balance of importance to James; the balance between faith and works

James 2:14-18 - *What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁴If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁵and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good^{is} is that? ¹⁶So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. ¹⁷But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*

Ephesians 2:8-9 - *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁸not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ⁹For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

‘perfect’ = *teleios* – ‘complete’ as in God’s intended end / brought to its consummation
19t in NT most often as ‘perfect’

Testing, James suggests, is intended to produce, when believers respond with confidence in God and determination to endure, a wholeness of Christian

Character that lacks nothing in the panoply of virtues that define Godly character. This concern for spiritual integrity and wholeness lies at the heart of James' concern, and he will come back to the matter again and again.

- Douglas Moo

Do James' words find a target in your life? Is there somewhere you are contemplating the surrender of your purity, your distinction, your commitment? Or do you regularly fail to persevere?

Conclusion:

Christianity doesn't exempt you from sorrow.

The Bible describes Jesus as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3).

Hast thou no scar?

No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand?

I hear thee sung as mighty in the land;

I hear them hail thy bright, ascendant star.

Hast thou no scar?

Hast thou no wound?

Yet I was wounded by the archers; spent,

Leaned Me against a tree to die; and rent

By ravening beasts that compassed Me, I swooned.

Hast thou no wound?

No wound? No scar?

Yet, as the Master shall the servant be,

And piercèd are the feet that follow Me.

But thine are whole; can he have followed far

Who hast no wound or scar?

- Amy Carmichael

Yet, like Jesus, we can have joy in trouble if we think about what God is doing and persevere.

Listen to him again:

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.

Community Groups:

Read the text

- 1 – Why is there trouble in the world?
- 2 – What does James mean by “**when** you meet trials...?”
- 3 – How do Christians respond to trials differently than nonChristians?
- 4 – How can we have joy in the midst of trouble?
- 5 – What kind of trials were James’ audience facing?
- 6 – What kind of trials are you facing?
- 7 – How does thinking about God change the experience?
- 8 – What is God doing in our trials?
- 9 – Discuss “*hupomeno*.” What does it mean? Have you ever witnessed anyone do it? Describe a time in your life when you faithfully ‘remained under’ a trouble.
- 10 – How does perseverance provide a testimony of God’s faithfulness? Of God’s grace?
- 11 – How does a lack of perseverance distort the gospel?