

## **Jas02 – Joy in Trials? James 1:2-4**

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Open your Bibles. Title of the message this morning, “Joy in Trials?” We’re going from verse 2 through verse 4 today.

We said last week there were fifty imperatives (commands) in the five chapters of James, and James wastes no time getting to his first one. So, we better just pray right up front, because once we jump in, there’s no stopping ‘till the end.

Let’s pray. *Heavenly Father, we pray that you would make our hearts ready to hear your Word, Lord. Give us focused minds and hearts. Give us ears to hear and eyes to see. Lord allow your Word to be what it is, living and active and powerful, sharper than any two edged sword. God we allow you to pierce our hearts right now. Lord we willingly present ourselves to you right now and say, Lord reveal our own hearts to us. Convict us. And encourage us and exhort us. And inspire us. And fill us with your life and your power Lord. Continue to transform us, God. Don’t allow us to sit on the sidelines or be spectators, but bring us in the deep end. And change us into your image. We pray you would do it more and more, and we pray you would do it today, by the power of your Word, through your Holy Spirit, in Jesus’ name, amen.*

### **James 1:2 (ESV)**

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

Now that’s a famous verse, isn’t it? Here’s what R. Kent Hughes (one of my favorite Bible commentators) says about this verse.

### **R. Kent Hughes:**

***How nice ... a letter of encouragement from Pastor Whacko! “Don’t worry ... be happy!”***

Does this sound like a whacky “Don’t worry, be happy” verse to you? What R Kent Hughes is referring to is how irrational this command sounds to our culture. In the NLT James 1:2 says:

### **James 1:2 (NLT)**

***2 . . . when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy.***

Ummm... no thank you. This flies contrary to everything we think God is about. To our American ears that is irrational. Why? It’s because our culture has taught us to insulate ourselves from any trial. It’s taught us to avoid anything that might *look* like a trial. It’s

taught us to work to make our lives trial free. We have been taught to work hard, to gain comfort and ease and avoid all difficulties in our lives. You put in your time and work hard, and comfort is coming. Keep your eyes on the prize. Retirement. That's what we're taught. So, a command in the Bible to consider a trial an opportunity for great joy seems irrational.

It definitely seems irrational to our culture. But what about the Church? Has the Church been influenced by culture? Yes. Our culture definitely has impacted the Church. Let's be honest, all of us, including myself, when we meet a time of trial in our lives, what's the first thing we pray for? *Lord, please remove this trial. Please fix this. Please make it go away.* Isn't that what you're supposed to do? Some in the Church have taken this to such an extreme level that they feel it's God's job to remove our trials, and that it is his responsibility to make our lives trial free. That must be what his purpose in our lives *IS*.

But, what if God desires something for us that is more valuable than our comfort? What if God's purpose is much higher than fixing our trials in this life? If it's true, God's desires something much more valuable... if it's true God's purpose is much higher... Would it be possible – if we were to truly take hold of the higher value and higher purpose of God – would it be possible for us to truly have a joy that surpasses the difficulty of our trial? A joy that could even carry us through our trials?

Yes, it absolutely is possible! It absolutely is possible to have a steadfast joy that surpasses our trials and carries us through the midst of our trials. If you belong to Jesus Christ today, you have his life living in you. You are living a supernatural life. God did not save us and give us his life and his power to just fix the tangible, temporary fleeting circumstances of this world.

How small would God have to be if his only purpose was to make the circumstances of this life right? I'll tell you how small, he would have to be a man-made God. When a person makes their own God, they make a God to serve their own needs. When a person chooses to serve the creator God, they look for God's ways and God's purposes for themselves.

Can I ask you to please struggle with that a second? If you are making up your own God, you will make him to serve your needs and remove your trials. If you are serving the Creator God you will be looking for his way and his purposes in your life.

When we stop wanting God to be our "circumstance handy man," meaning, fix all our circumstances, when we begin making deliberate decisions to see who God really is and to begin to see his way and his purpose in our lives, then we will begin to have a settled,

steadfast joy. A joy that surpasses our circumstances. A joy we can experience in the midst of our circumstances. *That* is the joy James is talking about.

And that is why James says in the second half of verse 2:

**James 1:2 (NLT)**

***2 . . . when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy.***

Look at this word “consider” in the NLT. In the ESV it is Count. **Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds** (Jas 1:2).

Most translations actually use “consider.” Please listen carefully to Strong’s definition of the original word: . . . ***denote[s] a belief resting not on one’s inner feeling or sentiment, but on the due consideration of external grounds, and the weighing and comparing of facts.***

Wait a minute. To count (or consider) is to make a decision not resting on your feeling or sentiment but a decision based on the due consideration of external grounds. What external grounds is this decision made on?

The decision is made on the grounds of WHO God IS, Who he is to YOU personally and WHO you are to him personally. It’s made on the grounds of his *unchanging word*. It’s made on the grounds of his *guaranteed promises*.

But, God’s promise is not that you get to avoid trials. His promise is – in Christ – you have overcome your trials. In John 16:33 Jesus said:

**John 16:33 (ESV)**

***33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.***

In promise after promise God has guaranteed overcoming victory for all those who are in Christ. But here’s a news flash to some in the Church. Nowhere does the Bible promise that God will insulate us from trials or painlessly remove those trials. What we do see (right here) is the opportunity to have supernatural joy in the midst of our trials

In Acts 5 the Sanhedrin drags the Apostles before the Council and has them beat with whips. And the text reads:

**Acts 5:41 (ESV)**

***41 Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.***

They considered their suffering an opportunity for supernatural joy. Why?? Because they had the eyes set on God's true blessing and they had their eyes set on God's true purpose.

In Acts 16 Paul and Silas were beaten severely with rods and put in stocks in the inner dungeon. It says:

**Acts 16:25 (AMP BIBLE)**

***25 But about midnight, as Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God . . .***

*Excuse me?* Did you say "Hymns of praise to God?" How? Because Paul and Silas had the eyes set on God's true blessing and had their eyes set on God's true purpose. Paul and Silas weren't saying "God how could you?" they were saying, "God, we know you. We know you are doing something great and awesome right in the midst of this severe trial.

2 Corinthians is an incredible look at Paul's suffering for the name of Jesus. And Paul says in 2 Corinthians 7:

**2 Corinthians 7:4 (ESV)**

***4 . . . I am filled with comfort. In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy.***

Why? Because Paul had his eyes set on God's true blessing. Because Paul had his eyes set on true purpose. And you and I can make the same choice and experience the same supernatural joy.

When James 1:2 says ***Count it all joy - when you meet trials of various kinds***, the word count means to make a decision, not based on your feelings, but based on a correct understanding of the true facts.

And in 1 Peter chapter 1 is one place we have the correct understanding of the true facts.

**1 Peter 1:6 (NLT)**

***6 So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while.***

There it is. Be truly glad because there's **Wonderful JOY ahead *EVEN THOUGH there are many trials now***.

That is exactly what James is saying. Make a decision to experience joy based on a correct understanding of what's coming (wonderful joy.) This is why Paul says in Romans 8:

### **Romans 8:18 (ESV)**

*18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*

Then continuing in 1 Peter 1:

### **1 Peter 1:7 (NLT)**

*7 These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.*

When your faith remains strong through your trials. 1 Peter 1 says it will bring you praise, glory and honor on the day Jesus is revealed to the world. And if you would say somewhat sarcastically, “Yeah, great, so I got that going for me,” you might be having trouble prioritizing the eternal with the temporal. I’m not saying all of God’s blessings are eternal, but the one that last forever are.

So let’s get back to James 1 and look at another of God’s blessing and purpose in the midst of your trials.

### **James 1:2–3 (ESV)**

*2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,  
3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.*

The word testing we just saw in 1 Peter 1:7. This is testing as fire tests and purifies gold. And if you are reading New King James (NKJ) it says this testing of your faith produces patience. But if you’ll look at your footnote it says: Footnote = Endurance or Perseverance. The footnote conveys the meaning much better. Endurance, perseverance, steadfastness (in the ESV.) One commentator translated this word, “staying power.” One use “heroic endurance.” Another used “toughness” as in “spiritual toughness.” So the testing of your faith produces staying power, heroic endurance and spiritual toughness.

Listen, we are in a battle. But the battle is not to avoid the trials of this world; the battle is to overcome the trials of this world. In 1 John 5 it says:

### **1 John 5:4 says (ESV)**

*4 . . . And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith.*

And for our faith to overcome this world, we need staying power, endurance and spiritual toughness. We need steadfastness to overcome the trials of this world. And where do we get our steadfastness?

**James 1:3 (ESV)**

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

God's true blessing and his true purpose is for us to be victorious over this world. And how does he give us the supernatural ability to be absolutely victorious over this world? God gives it to us by the testing of our faith.

Do you mean to tell me that God is building in me victorious faith through my trials? Yes, but only if you will join him. He is giving you the opportunity to produce steadfastness, heroic endurance and spiritual toughness in your life.

God wants to do something in you far greater than removing your trial. God wants to produce something in you through that trial that is of far greater value than him removing the trial from your life.

**Romans 5:3–4 (ESV)**

***3 . . . we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,*** (Which is a confident expectation of God)

God wants to do something in your life far greater than simply fix your circumstances. Have you ever seen someone “help” a butterfly in their struggle to get out of their cocoon or chrysalis? If you've seen that then you know that butterfly will never fly because it wasn't allowed to develop the strength through difficulty.

Our son David was once in a “talent show” at his Christian school. And he put together a band of Christians who played hard core metal. Some would call it Christian Death Metal. David was the screamer (vocalist) and the crowd “riler” and they blasted into a song in this talent show. And about one minute into the song, a teacher runs out on the stage and shuts the band down and makes a huge scene. And as the kids were about to riot (literally) this “not-very-smart” teacher scolded my son in public. But that event and numerous others like it are a big part of what God has used to make David able to stand and take personal attacks without losing his cool – which has made him a great asset to the U.S. Navy and the U.S.M.C.

Listen, I know there are much more serious trials here. But James is exhorting you today and encouraging you today that because of God's blessing and God's purpose in the

midst of your trial you can have supernatural joy. James is not saying you should be giddy happy because of the difficulties in your life. He's saying you can have supernatural, steadfast, life changing joy in the midst of your trial. It's because you know who your God is and you know he is at work for good, in the midst of your trial.

### **James 1:3-4 (ESV)**

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

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

Biblically the words perfect and complete are synonyms. Some versions use the word mature in place of perfect. The word perfect means "fully mature."

**Let the Steadfastness Developed thru your trials, have its Full Effect - Until you are Fully Mature and Complete - lacking nothing**

But listen, it is the steadfastness and its full effect that brings maturity and completeness. Have you ever heard someone say, "Trials produce maturity." Well, that's not true. It's your steadfastness in the trials that produces maturity. I know people who've been responding incorrectly to their trials for decades and have never become any more mature. But if we will choose steadfastness in our trials, if we will choose to meet God there, if we will choose to join God in the work he's doing in us, then and only then will our trials bring that spiritual maturity and completeness in our lives.

Allow me to read these famous verses one more time out of the Good News Translation (by American Bible Society.) It's a dynamic translation like the NLT.

### **James 1:2-4 (GNB)**

*2 My brothers and sisters, consider yourselves fortunate when all kinds of trials come your way, (great rendering)*

*3 for you know that when your faith succeeds in facing such trials, the result is the ability to endure. (when your faith succeeds)*

*4 Make sure that your endurance carries you all the way without failing, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*

That is my prayer for us all. That we'll see the joy available to us in our trials and that our faith would succeed in the face of our trials and as a result God would give us the ability to endure, steadfastly and that endurance would carry us all the way until we are perfected and complete, lacking nothing. And when that happens, down in verse 12 of James 1, James tells us what the ultimate reward is.

**James 1:12 (ESV)**

***12 Blessed is the man (woman) who remains steadfast under trial, for when he (she) has stood the test he (they) will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.***

I promise you ultimately that is what you want; the crown of life given to you by God, for eternity. The moment you receive that crown in the presence of the Lord, you're going to say, "Trial? I don't remember any, Lord."

The endgame is, stay steadfast. Receive the crown of life. Enter in to the presence of the Lord, where he says "Well done my good and faithful servant. Enter into your rest."

Let's pray. *Heavenly Father please, make us "that." Refine us in our trials. Give us joy that goes beyond our trials, beyond our difficulties, give us joy, Lord. Reveal to us as much as we can take, but give us the faith to believe what we can't see, to walk by our faith not by our sight. To trust you because we know you. We know your character. We know your love. We know your plan, we know your purpose and we know the end of the story, Lord. Allow our trials to refine us, to keep us steadfast until the end. We want to be steadfast in you Jesus, 'till the end. We pray for the faith to do just that today.*

*Repent and confess to God, right where you are, God, I am so sorry. I made you so small. Thinking that you should just fix all my circumstances. I was so narrow minded, so short sighted. I'm sorry. Lord open up heaven to me, allow me to see your greater purpose, the greater value. Save me Lord from my own self interest. Forgive me of my sin, make me right before you, and fill me with your spirit. Make me steadfast all my days, I pray in Jesus' name, amen.*