

## JAMES 1:2-4 Benefits of Trials

In this wisdom letter James begins with the issue of trials.

I want to begin this morning with a story about someone that many of you have heard of – Joni Here's how Steve Estes describes his first encounter with Joni about 2 years after her accident. ...p.11-12 When God Weeps

Here are some thoughts from Joni reflecting on a trip to Africa to take wheelchairs to some of the poorest of the poor... p. 17-18... "We're civilized and so is our view of God."

Trials are the litmus test or the canary in the coal mine of our souls.

If you ask a non-believer, "WHAT IS THE THING THAT IS THE BIGGEST STUMBLING BLOCK TO BELIEVING IN God?", the answer is usually TRIALS and suffering.

If you ask believers, "What has been the greatest tool for growth in your life?", many will say, "Trials."

Why begin with trials? James knows that his audience is facing hard times.

James 1:1-4

**1 James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.**

**2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.**

James doesn't tell us everything that the Bible says about trials, but he tells us enough to challenge us for a lifetime.

This is the kind of passage that you read, preach, or hear, and are inclined to think, "Yeah, BUT James doesn't know MY SITUATION. If he did he'd be more sympathetic or empathetic, instead of just sounding pa-thetic."

Some might tell pastors to "be careful with this passage because a lot of people are having trials and this will be hard to hear or understand." That is true of this passage, along with many others in the Bible.

Let's remember who wrote this – James, the brother of Jesus- under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. James knows something of trials, loss, and suffering. His brother, the only perfectly innocent person to ever live, was crucified. He is leading the church in Jerusalem that is in a constant state of persecution. He has street cred when it comes to facing trials.

So you'll know that this is not just ivory tower Holy Spirit inspired thinking about trials, I want to quote from one of my favorite books – A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows Through Loss

Jerry Sittser: he lost a child, his mother, and wife in an auto accident; He and 2 other kids survived. He is a credible voice when it comes to loss and trials.

I remind myself that suffering is not unique to us. It is the destiny of humanity. If this world were the only one there is, then suffering has the final say and all of us are a sorry lot. But generations of faithful Christians have gone before and will come after, and they have believed or will believe what I believe in the depths of my soul. Jesus is at the center of it all. He defeated sin and death through his crucifixion and resurrection. Then light gradually dawns once again in my heart, and hope returns. I find reason and courage to keep going and to continue believing. Once again my soul increases its capacity for hope as well as for

sadness. I end up believing with greater depth and joy than I had before, even in my sorrow.

[Sittser, *A Grace Disguised*]

“Count it all joy” DOES hold up under the direst of circumstances.

Joni tells us it does, Jerry Sittser tells us it does, many of you would tell us it does, but more importantly, God tells us it does.

It begs this question...

WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT ENDURANCE???

2020 US OPEN TENNIS 5 sets, the winner was down 2 sets to 0 and came back to win in the 5<sup>th</sup> set tie-break. Both men were totally exhausted. It was a picture of endurance.

The result of the endurance was a deep sense of satisfaction and the winner's trophy.

Here's where the GOOD NEWS comes in.

Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame, so that we might be complete in Him, so that we might get the winner's trophy. Scripture makes it clear that endurance is a mark of faith. We saw several exhortations regarding enduring to the end in our study of Hebrews.

Jesus' endurance empowers our endurance when we keep our eyes on Him and trust in His purpose and His character. This biblical response to trials brings the benefit of endurance and its perfect work – we are made mature and complete, lacking in nothing.

CONSIDER V. 2-4

Troubles are inevitable – you will encounter them

Anything can happen to a Christian that happens to others. Current culture is not prepared for suffering, we are whiners and complainers.

A secular society = I DESERVE what I want, and I WANT IT NOW.

Get all your happiness now, this is it. If your health or money or looks or FB likes fail, you're through. All other cultures held out for something more. The spirit of the age says, "if you lose what makes you happy here and now, you've lost it all; there's nothing else. You only go around once in life so grab for all the gusto you can get. YOLO, seize the day."

This influences the church as well, so be prepared.

James wants us to know that TRIALS HAVE A DIVINE PURPOSE

They arrive with a divine purpose. V 3

Trials are tests to produce perseverance and growth in endurance.

Notes that James says, "Of various kinds", thus application for ALL OF US. But we won't all have the same type or intensity of trial.

Don't be ignorant of this..."for you know" KNOW THIS ABOUT TRIALS – they have a purpose.

Often the casualty of trials is the loss of biblical purpose for the trial – we get skewed by our feelings rather than relying on what we know.

Don't let our reactions be determined by how they first feel to us.

React based on what we 'know' is true.

This is where we must speak to ourselves rather than listening to ourselves.

**A Balanced attitude**

Consider it pure joy- not masochist or hedonist. He doesn't say "grin and bear it or there won't be joy until trials are over", nor does he say "yea, trials are fun".

We must be careful to understand what James is calling for here. He is not suggesting some kind of masochistic happiness in the hurts and losses of life. He is not saying that we are to enjoy being sick, losing a loved one, getting laid off from our job, being persecuted, etc. This is not some weird kind of denial that life often hurts. Some of us here today are hurting. We are suffering. James does not suggest that we manufacture some kind of other-worldly, phony sense of happiness about our troubles. So, what is he suggesting?

**There is a reason to be joyful in the midst of trials. It is finding joy in what the trouble produces in our lives.** It is not being happy about the trouble. It is enjoying the sweet fruit produced only by bitter times.

This is not a spiritual way of saying "Get a life, get over it." This is deep theology and it is an **IMPERATIVE**. Count it all joy.

TRIALS don't produce endurance automatically; maturity that comes from endurance happens based on how we respond to the trial.

James is telling us that there is a lot at stake when it comes to how we respond to trials. Suffering will leave you better or bitter; they will make you or break you, but won't remain the same. 35+ years of ministry shows me how true this is.

I've seen those on both sides of the response spectrum – growth in faith and endurance AND bitterness, anger,

The difference is found here in v. 2-4

We will not remain the same when we encounter trials. **Our response will put us on a trajectory toward growth or a trajectory towards spiritual stagnation or decline.**

### Sacred Romance

When we are caught in the socio-drama of our smaller stories, blind to the true story we need to ask, **"I wonder what God is up to in all this?"**

**The process of our sanctification rests entirely on our ability to see life from the basis of that question.**

EX: Older godly woman from the WPC church in assisted living. She was frail but generally in decent health. A bit of a fall and got a bad bump on the head. As I visited with her she said, "I wonder what God is wanting to teach me through this?"

I'd be inclined to say, "God, don't you see I'm old and wise and godly enough. Go work on some young person."

v. 4 "let" or (imperative) "MAKE SURE that endurance has its perfect effect" i.e. Don't short-circuit the life changing purpose of God in this trial. **Don't cheat the process of endurance leading to maturity by doing anything other than "counting trials as joy with a view to the endurance that will be cultivated.**

This is a supernatural response that can only be explained by the Holy Spirit.

If there is no God centered, God glorying response, then we will waste our trials.

Worse than facing a trial is wasting a trial AND ENDING UP WORSE THAN BEFORE..- bitter

In these trials it is possible to be rejoicing– we don't enjoy trials, but we can experience joy.

We can stand, if we see the end or where they are going. But often we don't even know how to pray

He says, "if you learn how to handle them you can have joy in them"- consider - "look at what they can bring you." not just think happy thoughts, but see the result- maturity that comes from trials, being complete, lacking in nothing.

**Perseverance produces maturity.**

The Greek term speaks of something that has reached its intended end. Here it refers to the maturity that perseverance produces.

This maturity is further described as “not lacking anything. The Gk. term speaks of a thing which has all its necessary parts.

Part of Christian maturity is knowing that God has a purpose for our trials.

There are voices in the church at large that would have us believe that God does not test or wound us. Friends, the shepherd carries the staff to fight off the wolves AND to discipline the stubborn wandering sheep.

**God knows that it is through trials and woundedness that we learn our own weakness and His healing power. Without wounds we foster an image of ourselves as strong and healthy. This is Christian growth: to become in our weakness more and more dependent on his strength, to seek in our woundedness more and more of his healing."**

– Chad Bird

**But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 1 Cor 12:9**

**A process is implied here. Trials – Perseverance - Maturity.** This is not automatic. It takes time.

How much time? I dare say, a lifetime. The most frequent question asked by the Psalmists is, “How Long, O Lord?”

That may be our most frequent question as well, and like the Psalmist, we don’t get a definitive answer. What James and the rest of scripture tell us is that we will know trials until God has used them to our own advantage in growth and maturity.

We’d all like to have veto power when it comes to trials, or we’d all be inclined to say, “OK God, I’ve learned all I need to. I’m good. Thanks.”

We’d like to rid ourselves of the evidence and the memory of our scars. There is a huge business in our culture to fix the evidence of our wounds, be they wrinkles of age or other scars. The advertising message is this:

**Only a fool would keep his or her imperfections. In our culture keeping our scars has become the new sin. But some scars are storytellers. They keep alive memories that, while punctuated with pain and regret, are also full of grace and healing. – Chad Bird**

EX: my shattered ankle is a reminder of my own Pharisaical heart – “stupid people” . While punctuated with pain, it keeps alive the reality of my need for grace and healing in my heart.

<https://mbird.com/2017/10/stewards-of-our-scars/>

One night after a meeting where he shared a painful incident from his past, Frederick Buechner was approached by a man who said, “you have been a good steward of your scars.” That surprised him because he had never thought of pain, and its impact on his life, in terms of stewardship. But the more he reflected on what it means to be a steward, the more he realized how true the man’s words had been. Later, he wrote,

**“If you manage to put behind you the painful things that happen to you as if they never really happened or didn’t really matter all that much when they did, then the deepest and most human things you have in you to become are not apt to happen either.”**

Translation... God uses our wounds to bring out the deepest and most human things about us when we are stewards of our wounds.

This should not surprise us when we consider how Christ suffered wounds and scars He exemplifies his full humanity by experiencing trials and suffering in this world. Jesus entered into the fullness of humanity by becoming a man obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil 2).

Growing into Christ likeness will require trials

Again Chad Bird says...

Jesus is a steward of His scars. His resurrected body must have been a marvelous sight, yet His scars remained. He used them to grant peace to the disciples in the Upper Room. And with these scars he continues not only to grant us peace, but to imbue our own scars with meaning and grace. Look at your scars and cherish them. They are icons of divine love. They are transfigured by the grace of the God who will always call us by one name: Beloved.

THINK ABOUT THAT. AMEN