

When facing trials... count it all

Background: James, Jesus' half-brother who's been called one of the "pillar" apostles, has a lot to say about persecution and trials. In this letter, he's writing to "the twelve tribes of Israel scattered among the nations." These tribes consisted of Christian Jews who were permanently displaced under persecution most likely during the rule of Herod Agrippa. The technical Greek term for this scattering was called the *diaspora*.

Since the Romans had driven the Jews away from their homeland, they were distressed and in need of encouragement. So James pens this letter to provide them with an understanding of genuine faith, and to bring comfort and reassurance in the midst of tragedy. His letter is a circular letter because all the churches in the region had access to it.

James 1:2 Count it all _____ (KJV, NASB, ASV)

 Consider it pure _____ (NIV)

 Consider it all _____ (NASB1995)

Something that is not new to the Christian faith is the idea of trials or afflictions, which can be any number of things: from bodily pain to mental distress or even life being in a state of turmoil and chaos. When life is not going the way it is supposed to be, James tells us that in those moments to "count it all joy."

Why? Read James 1:3-4 These trials, when met with faith produce perseverance. There are going to be things that happen in life that will be difficult, that will be challenging, but the purpose of them is not to break us. They can show the need to fix our eyes upon Jesus. They remind us that our strength must only and can only be found in Him.

Challenge: Look at your circumstances with joy. Allow the strengthening of your faith to be what pushes you through whatever season you are walking into or out of today.

What's the key takeaway for you from these thoughts.

- Suffering is like growing pains: unpleasant, but it makes me stronger.
- The pressures I face are actually refining my character.
- True joy is found when I completely rely on God for strength.

Having pure joy in a trial doesn't seem like a natural response. So why does James say these should go hand in hand for the believer?

When your faith is tested, what does it produce?

How would you define perseverance?

The command to persevere and endure in our faith is scattered all over God's word. Life is tough. It's this truth; of holding onto God's grace until the very end, that leads to eternal salvation.

2 Cor. 12:9-10

Phil. 3:10-14

Ephesians 6:10-17

In what way do tests and trials unveil the "real you"?

How is your faith made mature and complete after you've persevered through a trial?

When we "pass" the test of a trial instead of being deceived into sin, we have greater communion with Christ and our character is made more holy and Christ-like. Perseverance must be finished, so we aren't cut short of what God wants to teach us about himself.

Let's move ahead to verse 12. Somebody read James 1:12-15.

James says *when* he has stood the test. It's not a matter of *if* you will face a trial but *when* and how you choose to grow through it.

What will we receive if we persevere and endure under trials and temptations?

So we know trials will come and that we can be tempted in them. **But how come God can never be tempted with evil or tempt anyone?** He is holy and is the author of all that is good, therefore no evil exists in him whatsoever. When we're tempted it is from another spirit and not from God.

Temptation comes from being enticed by our evil desires. **What does this mean?** Our fleshly, sinful nature can deceive and entice us into sin. This is not something God does to us, but is a result of having a fallen nature. Walking in the Spirit and abiding in Christ can help keep us from giving into temptation.

How can outward affliction and trouble become inward temptation? How can we prevent sin from gaining an inch in our relationship to Christ?

If we respond wrongly to a trial [ex. _____], it can open doors for temptation and even greater sin, leading us down a dangerous path. Loving [by obeying] God keeps us from sinning in our troubles and sinking under them.

Will someone now read verses 16-18?

James says, "Don't be deceived." **How can an ungrateful attitude deceive us and cause us to forget God's gifts?**

Psalm 40

Psalm 77 (esp. 1-15)

Back to James 1:18 **What does it mean that God brought us forth of his own will and by the word of truth?** The context here is dealing with regeneration or "new birth."

Regeneration is a work of God through his _____.

What is James saying about us when he says we would be a "kind of firstfruits"? It's important to note that "firstfruits" were originally an Old Testament expression that referred to the first and best harvest crops. God expected these as an offering. Giving Him the first crop was an act of faith that he would fulfill his promise of a full harvest to come.

In the same way, we are the first evidence of God's new creation that is to come (2 Peter 3:10-13). No matter what we deal with in this life, a future glory awaits us and that is our ultimate hope today.

In what ways are you thankful for hard times in your life?

How can you prepare yourself for future trials?

- Walk in the spirit.
- Put on the full armor of God.
- Live in community with other believers.
- Meditate on Scripture.
- Confess sin.
- Practice daily repentance.
- Flee temptation. Pray.
- Pursue and rely on Christ's strength in calm and steady times.

John 14:27 John 16:33; 1 John 4:4

It's been said that you're either in a trial, going into one, or just coming out of one. Sounds encouraging, right? Well, maybe not so much. But the reality is that we have a choice in our *response* to life's challenges. We can actually choose to be joyful in life's difficulties.

The same plea that James offered to the Christian Jews during the *diaspora*, he offers to us. He urges us to know and experience God's love during our trials. Trust that He'll use the mountains of life to mold us. Offer Him our praise even before we see any answers.