

James 1:1-4 (Missing Beginning)

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[0 : 00] These Jewish Christians who have fled persecution and are scattered all over the world. They are no longer living in their homes. They've been displaced as strangers and sojourners in foreign lands.

! In an earthly sense, they have lost everything. They've been relocated, separated from family, likely, and friends, livelihood. They are looking for work. All the issues of displacement. But James begins his epistle by explaining to these scattered Christians how they should respond to such difficulties. And this leads us to the second point, point number two.

True believers embrace their trials with all joy. So verse two reads, Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter trials of various kinds.

Now the emphasis of verse two is not on trials, but on our response to such trials. But before we can really appreciate what James is saying, we have to understand what a trial actually is.

[1 : 05] Some interpret this as both difficulties and as temptations. But this is extremely dangerous. So the semantic range for the grammar term of this word can allow for temptation.

In this context, it clearly does not. So whether intentional or not, if someone holds this interpretation, in other words, if they're saying this could mean temptation as well, they would essentially be saying that we need to rejoice over our temptation.

And I just can't imagine that. Oh, I'm angry and I want to kill my brother. Rejoice! You know, like, that's not what James is saying. Right? That would be absurd. James has in mind difficulties alone. So difficulties or trials are various in their kinds, as James states. A trial could be a disease, a financial burden, a bad government, a difficult person, a terrible parent, a natural disaster, and so on and so on.

Those are trials. Think about Job when he lost his family in a day, his livelihood, his wealth, everything stripped from him. Those are trials. But James commands an interesting response to such circumstances.

[2 : 18] He tells us we are to respond to difficulties, to trials with all joy. In verse 1, James says greetings to his audience. And the Greek word here is *karein*, which literally means rejoice or to rejoice.

So he's already hinted at what he's going to tell them in verse 2. He's going to tell them to rejoice in the midst of their trials. And that word *consider*, he says *consider it all joy*.

That word is in the imperative case, meaning it's a command. He's not asking them. It is a commandment. A commandment that has the same authority, weightiness, and importance as obeying any other commandment.

Now what does all joy mean in this text? Am I supposed to smile when tragedy strikes my family? Is that what James is saying? And the Greek word for all in this text likely carries the idea of intensely rather than exclusively.

Meaning James is not saying we are only to respond to trials with joy. That we can only express joy at trials. He's saying that we are to intensely express joy during trials at the very least.

[3 : 29] So what does that look like? As I read earlier in Luke's gospel, Christ prayed for the cup to be removed. Again, a technical expression referring to the wrath of God. He said, let the wrath of God be removed from me so that I might not have to endure it.

And recall he did so literally sweating drops of blood. But this was not a small thing that he was about to endure and he understood that. Nonetheless, he did endure the cross.

And the author of Hebrews gives us an interesting insight into Christ's thinking during that day of days. He says in Hebrews 12 verse 2, So notice how Jesus did not just have the anticipation of intense joy, but he also despised the shame.

He did have an intense joy, but nonetheless, because he looked, excuse me, he did have an intense joy, not because he looked forward to the pain, the wrath, or separation from the father, but because of the prize that awaited him, sitting at the right hand of the father with his bride ransomed. So I want to suggest, then, that in a scenario where tragedy strikes our family, we are right to mourn the loss, or any trial. We are right to mourn the loss, to despise the shame, so to speak, or to react in certain ways that we wouldn't normally associate with joy.

[5 : 04] Even so, alongside those various reactions, we are right to find joy in God in the midst of those moments, taking comfort in the future grace that he has for us in glorification.

And we'll see more of that in a moment. It's good to say now, though, with certainty that joy is not our exclusive response to trials, but it is a mandatory response we are to have by faith.

Practically, then, we embrace trials by prayer, by fasting, by reading the word of God, and putting our trust in its promises. Only in this way is it possible to endure trials with the joy of the Spirit, by walking in the Spirit, as Paul commands us.

So we are commanded to count trials as all joy, but why? On what basis are we able to count trials all joy? And this leads to our third point, found in verses 3 through 4.

Point number 3, we must be useful to God. So again, James writes, For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

[6 : 20] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. So James tells us we are able to count our trials with all joy because we know that the testing of our faith produces steadfastness.

And to clarify, James is not talking about faith in the sense of our genuine salvation. After all, James is writing to true believers.

What he is addressing is the perfection of our faith, meaning our sanctification. We know that trials test our faith, and God uses trials to grow spiritual maturity in us.

And I want us all to appreciate the logical consistency of the Bible in this regard. Psalm 25, verse 9 says, God leads the humble in justice, and he teaches the humble his ways.

Trials can accomplish a number of things in our lives, but they always, at the very least, humble us. Whether you face sickness, the loss of a loved one, financial insecurity, all these circumstances remind us that we are not in control, nor are we self-dependent.

[7 : 38] Some of you may know, some of you may not, but when I was seven, I was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis. As a result, I experienced a lot of pain loss, dehydration, a lot of pain, weight loss, constant urge to use the restroom.

And to combat that, I took medicines that caused sleep issues and depressions, and I took those medications in heavier doses than normal for most people, and for much longer periods of time than doctors would normally recommend.

And at age 14, I had my colon removed because I wanted to be rid of this disease. And as a result of that, I had an ileostomy bag for almost two years before I was able to return to normalcy.

My medical history kept me from joining the military, which was my lifelong dream as a kid. I had a brother in the Air Force and a brother in the Army, so I was going to be a real man and join the Navy.

And that's more a joke against my brothers, just to be clear. But I'll tell you, as a kid, I was committed to beating colitis. I wasn't going to let it keep me down or get in the way of my life.

[8 : 50] I had big plans when I was a teenager. Now, I want you all to listen very carefully, though. That was my plan, but that is not how it went. By the age of 13, I had been considering suicide as a serious option for a few years.

I was brought very low, and I was beaten down by my disease, my trial. And it wasn't just my disease. I was questioning God, and I didn't know how a good and holy God could let this happen to me.

At the same time, I was realizing what a wicked person I was. I wasn't saved at the time, but I didn't realize that. It was not until my greatest trial of having an ileostomy bag as a freshman in high school that I began to seriously explore the Bible in my faith.

And I knew at this point I wasn't saved, but I didn't know how to get saved. For me, it was a matter of just praying the prayer, but I had already tried that, and it just didn't work.

And I will never forget meditating over the command to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and realizing I had never done that obediently in an ounce with a single

one of those categories.

[10:16] I failed in all of them. More importantly, I felt helpless to serve him in any capacity because of my physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional state.

It was a real piece of work, and I knew it. But that is when it happened. I grew in my understanding of God's grace for undeserving sinners like myself, and I had many conversations with my dad about what I was learning and realizing.

In fact, my dad often turned to James 1, 1 through 4, to talk to me about how God uses trials for our good, and that we should count it all joy, knowing that God is producing a better and more sure and a more fruitful faith.

And it was at that time that I was convicted of my sin by the Holy Spirit, working through the Word, which my dad was faithful to share with me, and I repented and placed saving faith in Jesus Christ, not by my doing, but by his grace, he began that work in me.

And don't miss that. My very moment of salvation was brought after God had used a trial to humble me, a trial that lasted almost a decade.

[11:34] I was humbled, and at that time, God taught me. He humbled me, which was his grace toward me, and then he taught me, which was more grace toward me, and then he saved me, which was all the more grace toward me, and I could go on and on.

And I know for many of you it's a similar story. He lavishes grace upon those whom he saves, Ephesians 1, 8. And I'll tell you, I learned during those years, not perfectly, but I learned during those years to count my afflictions as all joy.

I could tell you stories of how, as a teenager in high school, with a colostomy bag keeping me from sleeping, that I sang hymns to myself going to bed, or how I rushed home from school because I was excited to read my Bible, or how I threw things out that distracted me from the Lord because I realized the joy to be found in worshiping him and obeying him.

And yes, I still cried at times. I still got frustrated. I was still disheartened with my difficulties. My trial. But I was always able to keep my eyes ahead on the Lord because of this passage and others like it, because I knew God was transforming me in the midst of that trial.

Now just imagine the reason for hope that James is giving to these dispersed Jewish Christians and their affliction. He's not denying the hardship of the difficulty.

[13:00] He is not ignoring the severity of their circumstance. He is not even telling them to get over it. But he does command them to have joy because they know God will accomplish much greater things with them through this trial, mainly their sanctification.

It is a chain effect. James says that trials produce steadfastness, and steadfastness has its own effect. Verse 4, perfection and wholeness take place.

So it is important to realize here, James is not talking about a sinless perfection in this life that we will obtain. After all, in James 5, 16, he acknowledges that believers still sin and need to seek repentance and forgiveness.

But he is still talking about true perfection nonetheless. Now some interpret this word in light of its usage in the Greek Old Testament, which carries the idea of maturity, that it would produce maturity in you.

They would say then that James is saying trials produce maturity, which they certainly do. And let me be clear, this is a very viable interpretation. There's a lot of merit for this view, and I very well could be wrong.

[14:20] Still though, I actually do interpret this as true moral perfection. That is how the Greeks use this word in moral philosophy. And more significantly, Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount taught us to be perfect in the Sermon on the Mount.

He used the same word in Matthew 5, 48. Jesus says, therefore you must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. So notice for Jesus, being perfect, or the Greek word teleos, is equated to God the Father.

So God is not merely mature. He is perfect in every respect. And even if you take this word as meaning mature, then Jesus is saying be perfectly mature, because God is not adequately mature. He is perfect in all things. Be teleos, be perfect, as your heavenly Father is teleos, perfect. So James must have Jesus' teaching in mind from the Sermon on the Mount as he writes this.

And this is not surprising. James' entire epistle is very similar to the Sermon on the Mount. In fact, many scholars think it is a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, but I'll geek about that with

you later.

[15 : 34] But how is this all going to come together? How can James tell believers to repent if they are in sin and yet talk about this perfection? And again, I think it is true moral perfection that he's talking about, but that moral perfection that we'll experience once we die, once we are with Christ in heaven or when Christ returns.

In other words, he's not saying we'll experience this sinless perfection in this life, but that we will grow in obedience as a result of trials until that work is finished, until we die or Christ returns. Now, some of you might hear that and be tempted to think, well, that's a rotten deal. I suffer through trials in order to learn to be more submissive to another. That sounds rough. But that is an unbiblical view of obedience, an unbiblical view of God's law and what it means to grow in obedience.

A good biblical perspective on the law and obedience to us as believers can be found in Psalm 119, verse 17 through 24. The psalmist writes, Deal bountifully with your servant that I may live and keep your word.

Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. I am a sojourner on the earth. Hide not your commandments from me.

[17 : 01] My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times. You rebuke the insolent, the cursed ones who wander from your commandments.

Take away from me scorn and contempt, for I have kept your testimonies. Even though princes sit plotting against me, your servant will meditate on your statutes, your testimonies, meaning your laws.

Your laws are my delight. They are my counselors. So notice, the psalmist views the law as wondrous, delightful, as a counselor, and the psalmist wants to obey them and to know them.

This psalmist would embrace trials with all joy because he would understand that trials lead to the very thing he's asking God for, obedience. And going back to that initial question, on what basis do we rejoice in the midst of trial?

I want to add more specifically that we count trials as all joy because trials lead to obedience, and obeying the Lord is the means by which we enjoy God.

[18 : 18] Here the apostle Peter writing about this to believers being massacred by Emperor Nero. So Peter writing to other persecuted Christians. He writes in 1 Peter 1, 6-9, In this, meaning suffering, in suffering you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found, and catch this, may be found to result, so this trial and this joy, they result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Again, Peter, along with James, is saying that our very obedience is the means by which we enjoy God. This is the resultant joy of going through a trial.

It all results in the praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. So we want to live, then, in a spirit of obedience, even in the midst of trials.

It is our joy knowing that God will use trials to produce fruit in our lives, to make us more like him so that we may, verse 4, lack nothing. God wants us to grow in obedience and lack nothing so that we can be useful to him, even in this life.

[19 : 59] Again, Peter writes in 2 Peter, chapter 1, verses 3 through 8, He says, His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

Verse 5, For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue or faith with obedience, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

And here's the key verse, verse 8, For if these qualities are yours, and are increasing, and you're growing, you're becoming more perfect, more whole in these things, they keep you from being

ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So in application of that third point, let us pray that we would be useful to God with the expectation of trials, that verse 2 implies.

They will come. He says, When trials come. And we should desire to walk through them by faith, knowing the result. In closing, I want to offer a few brief applications in light of our scripture this morning.

[21 : 39] Application number one, James is not a systematic theology. And what I mean by this is, we often approach epistles as if they're merely theology of the apostles presented in some sort of abstract, systematic, detached way.

And don't get me wrong, the epistles are full of wonderful, rich, deep theological truth and reflection and teachings. But they are so much more. I prefer to think of them as applied theology.

So notice James is applying his high theology, this deep, deep, wonderful theology, with great intentionality, firmness, delicacy, love, and compassion in the manner of his writing.

He says, Consider it all joy, my brothers. He's writing to brothers and sisters in the faith. So we too then should show great, a great deal of care and concern by the way we approach our brothers and sisters when they are going through trials.

It's easy for us to overlook others' trials at times, especially if their trial seems small to us. Not everything is on the same level as death or cancer or some other significant trial that you can think of.

[22 : 54] But nonetheless, someone is going through something. But nonetheless, when someone is going through something that we think of as lighter, that person is still going through something.

And that trial may be overwhelming to you, to them and not to you, because they might not have the faith or the theological depth that you have. Let's have compassion on that person.

How easy would it have been for Christ to dismiss all of our concerns in light of what he went through, and yet he is a high priest who sympathizes with our every weakness.

So let's show love to our brothers and sisters in this way. And application number two, learn to love God's law. How often have we heard preachers in our time and in our country talk about the law as though it were a bad thing.

And it's true, the law cannot save us. Only Christ can save us by grace. But even so, both the Old and the New Testament speak very highly of the law, including Paul.

[24 : 04] The writers of the Bible unanimously love the law. And why? Because it reveals the character of God. Specifically, I'd encourage you to go and read Psalm 119 on your own.

It's the longest chapter in the Bible, and one of its main themes is an expression of love for God's law. And why? Because, again, it reveals God.

It is who he is. And this is important, because if we do not put on the mind of Christ for the law, then we will not be able to endure trials with all joy.

To do so, we have to have that expectation of obedience. Our joy has to be in living rightly before God. So this is intimately connected to embracing trials with all joy.

Now, before we pray, I want to close us with looking at James 1, verse 12. I'm going to read it without explanation. It will be preached on later, but this was James' encouragement to his brothers and sisters in the faith.

[25 : 11] And so it still stands as an encouragement for every believer of every age in the midst of trials. So he's writing to these dispersed, displaced Jewish Christians, these persecuted Christians.

And he writes, Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial. For when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life. He will receive salvation, which God has promised to those who love him.

Let's pray.