

James – Life after Faith
James 1:2-4
“How to Smile in the Face of a Trial”

1. Josiah Henson was a former slave who escaped to Canada, and became instrumental in the abolitionist movement. Once, Henson was introduced to the Archbishop of Canterbury.
2. The bishop was so impressed with Henson’s manors and speech that he asked him which university he had attended. Henson responded, “The university of adversity.”ⁱ
3. While it is not natural to enjoy or even appreciate adversity, for God’s people the things which try us and test us are the things that make us spiritually strong, and eventually form us into the people we should be.
4. It is with this end result in mind that James makes what appears to be an absurd statement in verse 2. He says, *“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.”*
5. The word “temptations” in that verse refers to any experience in life that tests us and tries us. James asserts that we should consider it a joy when enter in to those testing experiences.
6. Usually, we only rejoice about trials when they are over. However, through James, the Spirit of God wants to teach us to look at trials in such a way that we can rejoice, even in the face our difficulties.
7. The Scottish preacher, Samuel Rutherford, was exiled from his congregation, and imprisoned for his preaching. He suffered greatly in his life, and yet he could say, “Oh what I owe to the file, to the hammer, to the furnace of my Lord Jesus.”
8. In this text we are reminded that some of the greatest graces of the Christian life can only be obtained through the trying of our faith. As we look at this text, we find some principles that teach us how we can smile in the face of our trial. Notice first of all, James points us to:

I. THE PERSPECTIVE REQUIRED FOR OUR TRIALS

1. Look again at verse 2. James challenges us to *“...count it all joy when ye fall into diverse temptations.”* To count the presence of a trial in our life as a joy requires a unique perspective.
2. Pastor Johnny Hunt, in his book on James helps to illustrate the benefit of a different perspective. Imagine you are told that a man was stabbed in the stomach with a knife by his best friend. That sounds tragic. However, when you

find out that the man's friend was a doctor, and that he was removing a ruptured appendix, the pain is still real, but the story is no longer a tragedy.ⁱⁱ

3. In verse 2, James is not teaching us to smile *in spite of* our trials, as if they did not exist. No, he is encouraging us to take a different perspective with our trials, and to find the joy in them based on how we look at them.

4. Notice a couple of things James teaches us here about the perspective required for our trials. First of all, James reminds us of:

A. How varied trials can be

1. Look at the phrase in verse 2, "diverse temptations". The word "diverse" is translated from an interesting word. My dad referred to it as "a Technicolor word". The word translated "diverse" literally means "multi-colored".

2. James is reminding us that our faith can be tested by all sorts of different experiences. For instance, at times our faith can be tried when we face the black drape of death, and have to stand over the coffin of a loved-one.

3. Sometimes, the trying of our faith takes the form of a fiery-red passion that seems to overwhelm our thoughts and desires.

4. At other times, our faith is tested in the gray fog of depression, when hope seems to hide itself from us.

5. The colors and contents of the experiences may change, but as tests and trials they all seem to drain upon our devotion, and fight against our faith.

6. Right now, your marriage may be strong, but your health may be weak. Another man has no physical problems, but his marriage is crumbling around him.

7. Though your trials are a different shade, you both are experiencing the testing of your faith. James reminds us that our trials aren't always dressed alike, but they are all a test of whether or not we will trust God.

8. Notice something further about the perspective we need for our trials. We need to see not only how varied trials can be, but also:

B. How valuable trials can be

1. Look again at the seemingly strange statement James makes in verse 2. He says, "*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.*"

3. We need to understand that James is *not* saying that trials are enjoyable. They are certainly not. What James is saying is that we can look at them with joy, based on what we understand about them.

4. The key to understanding this is the word “count”. It is translated from a word that was used as a mathematical term. It literally means to “look ahead.”

5. In other words, we can rejoice when a trial comes into our life, because we can look ahead to the end result of that trial, and what it can and will produce in our lives.

6. You see; the point James is making in this text is that trials and tests are actually a productive part of the Christian experience. As we will see, they produce things in us that we cannot get in any other way.

7. One writer points out that at the root of the word translated “temptations” in verse 2, is a word that used to describe the way a little bird would test out its wings.

8. The writer says, “Testing is not meant to make me fall, but to make me fly; not to make me stumble, but to make me stand...”ⁱⁱⁱ

9. James reminds us that when we find ourselves surrounded by a testing, trying situation, we must view it with the right perspective - one that sees the ultimate value of a test. That leads us to a second truth we draw from this passage.

10. Notice not only that James points us to *the perspective required for our trials*, but notice also further that we see:

II. THE PATIENCE RECEIVED THROUGH OUR TRIALS

1. Look now at verse 3. James tells us to consider it a joy to face a trial, “*Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.*”

2. Notice that word “patience”. In our vocabulary, the word simply means the ability to wait. However, the word that James uses means much more than that.

3. The word James uses speaks of endurance. The word translated “patience” in verse 3 was used in a military sense to describe soldiers who were ordered to hold their positions even in the face of fierce combat.

4. In other words, James tells us that we can be glad when a trial comes because its end result will be the development of endurance in our lives. We will be better able to stand against the battles of life when we have gone through them before.

5. Notice a couple of things James teaches us in verse 3 about the patience we get through our trials. Notice that he reminds us of:

A. Why we should desire patience

1. Look again at verse 3. Notice that word “trying”. It speaks of proving something, or testing something.
2. In other words, when a problem comes into our lives, whatever shade or shape it may take, it is an opportunity for God to prove us, and to authenticate our faith in Him.
3. The truth is; it is easy to proclaim your love for God and faith in Him when your world is good, and there are no difficulties pressing upon you.
4. However, true faith is not proven in the seasons of comfort. It is proven in the stress of a crisis! None of us enjoy the stress of a trial, but all of us should desire to prove the authenticity of our faith.
5. We don't like the things that irritate us, but we must recognize that those irritations produce some of the most valuable virtues a believer can possess.
6. Whenever an oyster gets a piece of sand inside of it that sand is an irritant, and yet the oyster does not spit it out. Instead, the oyster covers that sand with fluid from inside of its shell.
7. After weeks and months of covering that irritant, it is no longer a tiny, worthless piece of sand; it is a priceless pearl.
8. While we know that trials and tests are uncomfortable and irritating, we welcome them because we desire the pearl of patience they produce in our lives.
9. With that being said, think not only of why we should desire patience, but think also of:

B. Where we can develop patience

1. Look again at what James says in verse 3. *“Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.”* If the pearl of patience is what we desire, then James reminds us that it is only developed through the testing and trying of our faith.
2. Unfortunately, there are no shortcuts to developing the patience we need for the Christian life. Without the experience of trials, we cannot have the strength of endurance.

3. It is unfortunate that America's Favorite Pastime has become the cheater's favorite playground. In baseball, it seems you can't trust anybody's performance anymore.

4. The steroid era gave us super-players, with the muscles of He-Man, and numbers that made Ruth, Dimaggio, Mantle, and Maris look like little-leaguers.

5. Now we have found out that more of more of these sluggers took the short-cut of an injection to inflate their biceps and their statistics.

6. James tells us that there is no cheating – no shortcut in the Christian life. There is no injection that can automatically give you patience and endurance. It is only *through* the trials of life that we learn to face the trials of life.

7. A young preacher once asked an older man to pray that God would give him patience. The older man knelt down and began to pray that God would fill the young man's life with troubles and hardships.

8. The young preacher was bothered and confused by the prayer, but the old man said to him, "The Bible says that 'tribulation worketh patience.' That is the only way."

9. James reminds us that through our trials we can receive the priceless virtue of patience. Notice a third truth we draw from this text. We see here not only *the perspective required for our trials*, and *the patience received through our trials*, but notice also lastly that James points us to:

III. THE PROGRESS RESULTING FROM OUR TRIALS

1. Look now at verse 4. James says, "*But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*"

2. James has instructed us on how we should look at trials, and what we should learn from our trials; now he points us to how we should live in our trials.

3. He points us to the progress that trials can bring, and gives us some advice on how to live in the midst of a crisis. Notice the advice he gives us in verse 4. He tells us first of all:

A. Don't fight the process of a trial

1. Look again at verse 4. James says, "*But let patience have her perfect work...*" The idea here is that rather than resisting and resenting the presence of a trial in our lives, we should let the situation fulfill its God-given purpose in our lives.

2. In other words, rather than facing your trials saying, "Lord, take me out of this," James says we should face our trials saying, "Lord, teach me through this."

3. Our temptation is to fight the trial, and beg God to make it go away. However, the enduring the trial is more valuable to the believer than escaping the trial.

4. A man once visited a friend in the hospital who had undergone a very difficult operation. The man reminded his friend of how he had been through a very similar situation in his own life.

5. He advised his friend that there were two different attitudes he could take in his trial. He could take the attitude of Jacob in Genesis 42:36, where he said, "All these things are against me..."

6. On the other hand, he could take the attitude of Paul in Romans 8:28, where he said that all these things are working together for good..."

7. James encourages us in verse four not to fight against the process of our trials, as if these things were against us, but to see them as the process whereby God develops something good in our lives.

8. As James points us to the progress that results from our trials, his advice is, "Don't fight the process of a trial." Notice also that his advice is this:

B. Don't forget the profit of a trial

1. Look again at this fourth verse. James says, *"But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."*

2. James says that when process of a trial has been worked out in our lives, we can be "perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

3. James is not talking about perfection in the sense of having no flaws. He is talking about perfection in the sense of maturity and completion.

4. Think of it this way: An artist has in their mind the image of a completed sculpture. As they work with the clay, they will remove some here, and add some there, all with the goal of fulfilling that ideal that is in their mind.

5. God has an ideal of what He wants you and me to be. Through the process of tests and trials, God takes from us what we do not need, and gives to us what we do need in order to fulfill that ideal, and form us into the image of Jesus.

6. Through our trials, God is developing us, and maturing us - pushing us toward that place where we have all the virtues and all the values that are so perfectly displayed in our Savior.

7. Everyone sees the glory of victory as an athlete waves from the medal stand with the gold around their neck. What they don't see is the hours upon hours of training, exhausting workouts, and endless sacrifices that were made to get that victory.

8. James says, "Don't lose sight of the profit – the victory – that can be gained at the end of the trying of your faith."

1. One Sunday morning in a tiny, country church, the members took turns quoting their favorite Bible verses. When his time came, one old man stood up and quoted his favorite verse, "Grin and bear it."

2. When James urges us to "count it all joy" when we fall into trials and tests, he is not simply telling us to "grin and bear it."

3. The idea is that we are to view our trials with a bigger and better perspective than that which only sees the problem, and not the virtue the problem can produce.

4. Rather than facing our trials with gritted teeth and anxious dread, when we understand what our Lord is doing with us, we can face our trial with a genuine smile.

ⁱ University Education, *anecdote.com*, accessed 8/6/09

ⁱⁱ Hunt, Johnny, *The Book of James*, (3H Publishers, Woodstock, GA, 2003), p. 7

ⁱⁱⁱ Draper Jr., James T., *James: Faith & Works in Balance*, (Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL, 1971), p. 13-14