

James 1:2-4 — Patient endurance in trials

Last week we introduced the book of James, looking at its background and a brief overview of James, the brother of Jesus, life. Warren W. Wiersbe sums up the entire book nicely:

“The epistle of James is a practical book that discusses living the faith. It contains echoes of the Sermon on the Mount and the book of Proverbs, both of which are practical. If we truly practice our faith, it will be seen in how we face trials (chap. 1), in the way we treat people (chap. 2), in what we say (chap. 3), in how we deal with sin in our lives (chap. 4), and in our prayer life (chap. 5).”

This week we continue in chapter 1. Here is the big picture for the next couple of weeks. In summary, verses 1-11 talk about the wisdom of God. We need wisdom in trials so that we don't waste our suffering and miss the spiritual growth that should result. If we trust God, then the trials will work for us and not against us; but we must be sure that our hearts are fully yielded to God. If our hearts and minds are divided, then the trials will tear us apart. This week we will cover chapter 1 verses 2-4 — what I believe are the key verses of the book of James.

James 1:1-8

**¹ James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.**

² My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Patient Endurance in Trials

James 1:2-4

² My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

v **² My brethren:** James is addressing the Messianic Jews, the believers among the 12 tribes of Israel scattered across the world — but of course it still applies to us as well.

v **² Count it all joy when you fall into various trials:** Notice first that it's **when**, not *if*, you fall into various trials. Trials are a part of life. Trials are what God uses

to cause us to grow in our joy, faith, hope, and love for Him. This promise of trials is repeated in:

2 Timothy 3:12 - Yes, and everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

John 16:33 - "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

v 2 **Trials**: There are three main ways we experience trials. Firstly there are difficult circumstances like health issues, financial issues, relationship or family issues, etc,. Secondly, there are the temptations to sin and the consequences of our sin. Thirdly, there is the persecution that we will suffer as believers, if we are living as believers.

v 2 **Count it all Joy**: Joy in trials? How does this work? It's not that we enjoy the trials; but rather that we look forward to the benefit of the trial and experiencing God's strength working through us in the trial. James describes the first benefit of trials as being **patience**, which means having endurance, the ability to persevere, to be steadfast. This then leads to us becoming integrated, whole, mature, or **perfect and complete**— in other words we become more like Jesus, which is glorious. We'll find out more as we go.

First, let's quickly consider two other scriptures that are similar to these verses in James before we go on to explain the verses in James.

Romans 8:28-29

²⁸ And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. ²⁹ For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

Here we are told that everything, yes, even the trials, work for our good. How? We become like Jesus — again, we become perfect or mature and complete.

Romans 5:1-5

¹ Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. ² Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, **and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.**

³ We can **rejoice**, too, **when** (*not if*) we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop **endurance** (*or patience, same word as in James 1:3*).

⁴ And endurance develops **strength of character** (*similar idea to perfect and complete in James 1:2*), and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.

⁵ And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.

Notice here that the trials don't lead to disappointment, but rather hope and love as **we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory**. As you can see, this concept of trials producing joy is frequently referred to in the scriptures.

There are many more but we don't have time to read them all now. Back to James chapter 1:

v 2 **Count it all joy:** It's important that we have the right perspective about trials, whether they be temptations to sin, being persecuted for our faith, or difficult circumstances. When we have a reason for doing something, or hope, then it all becomes worthwhile and much easier to endure. Here are some examples:

Consider a pregnant woman in labour. Was she looking forward to the labour? No. Is she enjoying the pain caused by the contractions? No. Does she enjoy being extremely uncomfortable and exhausted? No. Is she looking forward to the final minutes of excruciating pain as she pushes the baby out of her? Definitely not! But within her she has a deep seated joy and a confident hope and expectation that no amount of pain or agony can overcome — her baby will soon be delivered, and at that moment, that's all she's thinking about. That's what keeps her going. That's her focus. Then when the baby is finally delivered and she is holding him in her arms, she has no regrets about the ordeal of child birth, and will willingly go through it again and again for future children. This is an example of counting it all joy, of actually looking forward to the trial, while not actually enjoying the trial, because you know the beautiful fruit or ultimate good that will come from the trial.

Another example is Jesus agony, both physical, spiritual and emotional, both in the hours leading up to the cross and the hours on the cross. What kept Him going? The joy set before Him.

Hebrews 12:1-4 - Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. ² We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. **Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honour beside God's throne.** ³ Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up. ⁴ After all, you have not yet given your lives in your struggle against sin.

Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame: There are two main reasons that Jesus would have joy. Firstly it would be that He was pleasing the Father and would soon be back with the Father, sitting at His right hand. Secondly, there was the strong desire of the Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to be back in fellowship with mankind — and Jesus' sacrifice on cross made that possible for anyone who chooses to repent and believe.

Notice here that in both examples, Jesus and the mother in labour, the trial was only temporary, as are all trials. We must always, always remember that our lives down here are only temporary. The bible describes our lives as a vapour or a flower of the field which will soon wither away. So even if the trial lasts our whole life, it is still very temporary in the light of eternity.

Consider what Paul had to say about our trials in:

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 - That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. ¹⁷ **For our present troubles are small**

and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! ¹⁸ So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.

I love Paul's perspective; "For our present troubles are small." Listen to what he endured:

2 Corinthians 11:23-28

²³ I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. ²⁴ Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. ²⁶ I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. ²⁷ I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. ²⁸ Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches.

Maybe many of us soft western christians need to drink a cup of concrete so we can harden up! According to Paul, these are only small trials. But they were to Paul because of his perspective. Again, what kept Paul going? His eternal perspective.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

¹⁶ That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. ¹⁷ For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! ¹⁸ **So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.**

Now let's come back to James chapter 1 verses 2 and 3 and see what we can learn:

v 2 **When you fall into**: what this means is that we don't go looking for trials; they just happen to us — we encounter them unexpectedly — we **fall into** them. This means that we must always be ready, always walking close to the Lord, feeding on the word, being in prayer, enjoying fellowship, always having our eyes fixed on heavenly or eternal things, always looking to the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our Great God and Saviour Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13); because, if we are ready, if we are walking close to the Lord, then we will overcome the trial. But, if we aren't ready, if we aren't walking closely with the Lord, then the trial will overcome us. We must always be ready. In this sense the trials test our faith to see if it is genuine or not. We'll come back to this soon.

v 2 **Various trials:** What this means is that trials come in all shapes and sizes, all different kinds. Sometimes the more difficult trials are easier to get through because we are more likely to ask for God's help than if it were only a small trial. Often a trial from an unexpected source will catch us off guard. We must be vigilant because our enemy the devil seeks to devour us (1 Peter 5:8).

v 3 **Patience:** David Guzik says that **patience** "is the ancient Greek word *hupomone*. This word does not describe a passive waiting but an *active endurance*. It isn't so much the quality that helps you sit quietly in the doctor's waiting room, as it is the quality that helps you finish a marathon. The ancient Greek word *hupomone* comes from *hupo* (under) and *meno* (to stay, abide, remain). At its root, it means *to remain under*. **It has the picture of someone under a heavy load and choosing to stay there instead of trying to escape.**"

I don't know about you, but my natural desire is to escape the load, to relieve the pressure, to live a comfortable life, free of anything that would cause discomfort. Indeed, this is what motivates all who are controlled by their sinful nature. It's important to remember that this is the temptation we all face when going through a hard time; my sinful nature will do anything it can to be rid of the thing that causes me the discomfort — whether it is being tempted to sin, being persecuted for my faith, or going through difficult circumstances.

What does escaping the trial or burden or heavy load look like?

1. **Temptation: Instead of resisting sin we choose to sin, so that we will no longer have to battle the temptation.** We are like the well equipped but poorly motivated Afghan National Army dropping their weapons and running for their lives when the poorly equipped but highly motivated Taliban army moved in. We all know how hard it is to continue to strive against sin, how it can wear us down, and how easy it is to simply cave in to the desires of our sinful nature, even though we have been given everything we need to overcome the desires of our sinful nature (2 Peter 1:3-4). What we need is more **patience** (*hupomone*), the virtue that will give us the strength to endure or persevere. Patience or endurance is like a muscle that needs exercising. The more we choose to submit to God and obey Him, choosing to remain under the heavy load according to His will, then the more able we are to submit and obey — we get stronger.
2. **Persecution: We will compromise our faith to avoid being persecuted;** meaning that we will no longer stand up for what we know is right. Remember that the wicked can only prosper when the righteous stay silent.
3. **Difficult circumstances: We will also do just about anything and be willing to go to extreme lengths to avoid any difficult circumstances.** For example, many get divorced to escape the burden of their difficult marriage. Many cheat or steal to ease their financial pressure. Many take drugs or alcohol or pursue various pleasures like movies and TV and gaming to escape the stresses and burdens that life puts on us. We all want out from the heavy load that threatens to crush us. But we must always remember this; the heavy load will never crush us — it will only make us stronger. Jesus gives us this promise in:

1 Corinthians 10:13

The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, **He will show you a way out so that you can endure.**

Look at the last words of this great promise. The way out is not actually a way out as we would like it to be, in the sense that it's an end to our suffering or temptation or persecution; rather, it's a promise that we will be given the strength to endure, to bear up under it. Again, the way out here is actually defined as the ability, not to escape the burden, but instead to bear or endure the burden, for as long as God allows it, and as hard as He allows it to press down on us.

So basically, we can either choose to stay under the heavy load, whatever form it may take, and develop endurance or strength of character, become whole, mature, integrated and complete (godly character); or we can run from it and remain weak, seeking our own comfort and pleasure above everything else.

I'm so thankful that Jesus choose to stay under His burden, to keep bearing His heavy load of persecution, trials, and temptation. Hebrews 12:4 tells us that Jesus resisted to the point of bloodshed in His striving against sin. For Jesus, the temptation to avoid the cross, to avoid suffering the wrath of God, was the heaviest of all burdens, yet He chose to stay under it, to endure it. We would all be damned to hell if He didn't.

Do you see now why patience or endurance is so important? It is the quality that is developed in us that gives us endurance and perseverance to run the race, the marathon called the christian walk. It is the quality that helps us to continue to say no to sin, to bear up under the load of constant temptation. It's the quality that helps us to endure persecution for the sake of the Gospel. It's the quality that gives us the strength to bear up under difficult circumstances — whether it be bereavement, sickness, physical pain, betrayal, financial difficulties, or shattered dreams. With patience or endurance (*hupomone*) we will keep fighting for our marriage and not quit and get a divorce.

v 3 Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience: It's important to understand that faith is *tested* through trials, not *produced* by trials. The purpose of trials is to reveal what faith we do have; not because God doesn't know how much faith we have, but so that our faith will be evident to ourselves and to those around us.

Trials are like an x-ray of our faith. They reveal what is going on on the inside of us. Just like we can't see if a bone is broken or not from the outside, so we can't really tell how much faith a person has until they go through a trial. Is it strong or is it weak? Anyone can praise God in the good times, but what happens to us when things get tough? Do we throw in the towel, seeking to get out from or escape the burden or load that God has allowed for our good, or do we willingly remain under it, trusting both God's love for us and His sovereignty or control over all circumstances.

Listen carefully. Remember that all circumstances are of God. God is in complete control. God allows Satan certain freedoms, like in the book of Job, but Satan is always on a leash. Satan can only hurt or tempt us as much as God allows him to. Always take comfort from the words that Jesus spoke in Matthew 10:29-31 about how our loving Heavenly Father exercises absolute control over our circumstances:

Matthew 10:29-31

²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. ³⁰ But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ **Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.**

Again, God cares about the sparrows, but He cares much more about us, so, **therefore, do not fear.** Always remember:

1 John 4:18-19

¹⁸ There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. ¹⁹ We love Him because He first loved us.

We must keep ourselves in the love of God (Jude 21) so we will not be tormented by fear. If we are experiencing fear, it can only be because we are doubting God's love for us and/or His sovereignty or control over all creation. No matter what our circumstances, persecutions, or temptations, we must never doubt, both that God is in complete control of all our circumstances, and that God loves us and is for us. Therefore, logically, His plan for our lives is always the best plan for our lives. It is always for our good; even if we can't see or understand that good.

v 3 **...the testing of your faith:** Again, it is our **faith** that is tested. But why? Because it shows that faith is important and precious—because only precious things are tested so thoroughly.

1 Peter 1:6-7

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

Spurgeon says; "Faith is as vital to salvation as the heart is vital to the body: hence the javelins of the enemy are mainly aimed at this essential grace."

Now we can ask the question, if trials do not produce faith, then what does?

Romans 10:17 - So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

God promises to supernaturally build our faith in Him as we hear, understand, and trust in God's word. The more we read God's promises, the more that they become a part of us.

Bitter or Better – Our Response to the Trial

v 3 **Produces patience**: David Guzik says; "Trials don't produce faith, but when trials are received with faith, it **produces patience**. Yet **patience** is not *inevitably* produced in times of trial. If difficulties are received in unbelief and grumbling, trials can produce bitterness and discouragement. This is why James exhorted us to **count it all joy**. Counting **it all joy** is faith's response to a time of trial."

v 4 **But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing**: This is not what you want to hear, but patient endurance develops slowly, over a long period of time. Like when we plant a seed, we must allow the flower the time to grow and come to full bloom if we are to enjoy its beauty.

Spurgeon reflects on his trials; "I have looked back to times of trial with a kind of longing, not to have them return, but to feel the strength of God as I have felt it then, to feel the power of faith, as I have felt it then, to hang upon God's powerful arm as I hung upon it then, and to see God at work as I saw him then."

Let's finish with these encouraging verses from Isaiah 40:28-31

²⁸ Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The everlasting God, the Lord, The Creator of the ends of the earth,
Neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable.

²⁹ He gives power to the weak,

And to *those who have* no might He increases strength.

³⁰ Even the youths shall faint and be weary,

And the young men shall utterly fall,

³¹ But those who wait on the Lord Shall renew *their* strength;

They shall mount up with wings like eagles,

They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.

Like Spurgeon, and many others, we can turn to God, trust in God, and experience His joy, love, peace, power and presence in our lives. I encourage you to trust God's promise that He will be with us in the trials.

Isaiah 43:1-3

¹ But now, O Jacob, listen to the Lord who created you. O Israel, the one who formed you says, "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine.

² When you go through deep waters, I will be with you.

When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you.

³ For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.