

## James, The Christian's Attitude Toward Trials

James 1:1-2

8/8/1999

The book of James, chapter 1. James, chapter 1. We'll start reading together at verse 1, and we'll read down through verse 4. James, chapter 1, verses 1 through 4.

“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

Now, we often speak of Christianity as being a belief—and it is. We believe in Christ. We believe in the Bible. We believe that we shall go to Heaven. We believe a lot of things. But Christianity is far more than *just* a belief, although it certainly encompasses that.

Christianity is also a *life*, a pattern of behavior, a pattern of conduct that flows *out* of our beliefs and is demanded by those beliefs. As Christians, we not only believe certain truths, we also *live* in a particular fashion. And it is the combination of these two things—a proper belief and a proper pattern of conduct—that constitute a true profession of Christianity.

Now in the book of James, the author does not address the area of belief a great deal. He assumes that these people to whom he is writing are informed about and committed to proper beliefs. What James focuses upon primarily is their *behavior*. He focuses on the true nature of the Christian *life* and its proper pattern of conduct in their personal behavior. This is where the people of his day were primarily lacking—not so much in what they believed, but in how they *acted*.

Now I believe the same problem exists in our day among ourselves as well. Most Christians can provide reasonably orthodox answers as to what they believe. But the way in which they *act* is contrary to the Scriptures to a far greater degree than what they believe is contrary to the Scriptures. In other words, the state of our beliefs, as a general rule, are in far better condition than the state of our conduct. We believe like Christians, but oftentimes we do not act like Christians. And this letter that James has written is an effort to remedy that condition. He addresses a wide range of behaviors in a wide variety of areas, and he makes it very clear what constitutes true and proper Christian conduct in each of them.

Now the first area of conduct he addresses is our response to persecutions and to trials, in verses 2 through 4. What he says to them—“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into different trials, knowing this, that the trial of your faith works patience. Let patience have her perfect work that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing”—he makes it very clear that believers go through trials, but that we are not free to *respond* to those trials with despair, or with anger, or with a rejection of God.

You see, despair and anger and rejection of God in response to trials is what characterizes the *unsaved* as *they* go through them. James is telling us there is to be a distinctively Christian response to trials, and he makes it very clear what it is. He tells us that the Christian response to trials is one of joy, it is one of faith, and it is one of patience. And it is precisely our response to trials that proves whether we really are Christians at all.

Now anyone can act like a Christian and talk like a Christian when things are going well and everything is calm and favorable. But the truth of our commitment to Christ is *proven* in the way in which we respond to trials. True Christians will react to trials in a distinctively different way than non-Christians and false Christians. And that reaction to trials will be one of joy, of faith, and of patience.

So what we want to do together this evening is examine the reaction that James calls us to as Christians and see how we can apply this to our lives. And so what we are going to be doing this evening is considering together our attitude towards trials, and we want to look at our attitude towards trials in three particular areas.

**1A So in the first place then this evening, let us consider together our attitude towards those who are in trials—our attitude towards those who are *in* trials.**

Now James addresses those to whom he is writing as his “brethren.” Notice verse 2. He says, “My *brethren*, count it all joy when you fall into different kinds of trials.” Now those to whom he is writing, he calls them brethren, thus identifying them as fellow Christians who have the same spiritual Father that he has, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those who are Christians are all part of the same spiritual family. There is an invisible and yet very real union between them so that because of this union between us, and because of our common relationship with our heavenly Father, fellow Christians are rightly called brethren.

Now it is out of this spiritual relationship that James has with those to whom he writes—the fact that they are brethren—it is out of that spiritual relationship that he has with them that he writes to them, showing concern, number one, for them; and secondly, concern for how they bear the family name and reputation in the midst of those trials.

Notice first of all that he demonstrates concern for them. Now if we are all part of a spiritual family, then we cannot be indifferent as to the trials and difficulties that our fellow family members are going through. And James wasn’t, either. When he saw his brethren going through trials, his response was not one of indifference. It was not one of silence. It was not one of a lack of care. But rather, when he saw them going through trials, he showed great concern for them, and part of that concern was expressed in the writing of this letter.

And so we are not just to look upon our own things, the Scripture tells us in Philippians 2 and verse 4, but we are to also look upon the things of others. And what that means is that we are to be *aware* of and concerned about what is going on in our fellow Christians’ lives. And we are not at liberty to simply have an attitude of disengagement or indifference towards our fellow believers. And the Bible tells us in fact, in First Corinthians 12, verses 25 through 26, that if one member suffers, then all members suffer with him. And if one member rejoices, then all members rejoice with him. Why? Because there’s an organic unity between us as Christians. And so what happens to one is of concern to all. And this concern is to such a degree that we are to enter into their very sufferings and their very joys that they experience in their own lives.

And so this is how we manifest love one to another, by having a concern for one another in times of difficulty in reaching out by both words and actions in order to help. And so James’ attitude towards those who are in trial is, first of all, he has a concern for them.

But secondly, he not only has this concern for them because of this organic unity he has with them as fellow family members, but he also has a great concern for how they bear the family name and reputation in the midst of their trials.

Now you know that when one family member does something that is notorious and wrong, it tends to bring shame upon the rest of the family members, and especially upon the father of that family, who is responsible for the conduct of those who are under his authority. And so if we are all part of a *spiritual* family, we will have concern for how others who are suffering uphold the family name and reputation.

Now, a godly response as James describes in verses 2 through 4, that is, one of joy and of faith and of patience, is going to have a powerful testimony to the lost. And it will bring honor upon God and credibility to the genuineness of Christianity because it is clearly a supernatural response, markedly distinct from the response that the ungodly give to *their* trials.

Therefore, we, like James, need to encourage one another to respond in a godly fashion to difficulties. When you see a brother or a sister in Christ going through a hard time, not only should you show concern for them, but you should also *encourage* them to respond in a godly way to that difficulty so that there will be a strong testimony of the credibility of their faith and of the glory of God. For us to respond like the ungodly to trials that come into our lives is to say by our actions that Christianity is really no different from no religion at all, and that God makes no real difference in our lives regarding the things that really matter.

Therefore, for the sake of upholding the honor of God and the reality of Christianity, we need to exhort one another to respond well to difficulties, and this is precisely what James is doing. And we encourage one another to respond well to difficulties, not merely to uphold some false image before the world and to perpetuate a sham; but rather, we do so because there really are the power and the principles available to enable us to respond with joy and faith and patience.

But we can all too easily *fail* to employ what really is there for us, and thus convey the false impression that Christianity is at its core empty and vain. Now Christianity is *not* empty and vain at its core, but an ungodly response will seem to indicate that. And so by helping those in trials to have a response of joy and of faith and of patience, we not only uphold the truth of Christianity and the honor of God, but we also help the one in the trial to endure it in the easiest possible way and to gain the greatest possible benefit from it. James wasn't saying, Now look, you guys need to act this way lest people find out the truth. But no, he is saying, You need to act this way because this really *is* the truth. Don't miss out on the truth and respond in an ungodly way, and thus bring shame upon the family name and the reputation of our Father.

And so this, then, is the first thing that James addresses in dealing with these people regarding their attitude towards trials. First of all, he deals with our attitude towards those who are *in* them. And what he is saying by his example and by his statement is that when we see our brethren going through trials, we need to have a concern for them and we need to exhort them to respond well to those trials for the sake of the glory of God, the testimony of the Gospel, and their own personal benefit. Because if they respond *well* to the trial, they will be blessed in it instead of falling before it and winding up in a situation that is worse than when they began.

**2A But in the second place this evening, notice our attitude towards the trial itself. Having seen our attitude towards those who are *in* the trials, notice what our attitude towards the trial itself should be.**

He says, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into different kinds of trials.”

Now he tells them to “count it all joy.” As a general rule, people are controlled *by* their feelings, rather than being in control *of* them. Irrespective of what the Bible says, and irrespective of where their responsibilities lie, the plea that is given for an excuse to responding poorly to trials is that “this is the way I *feel*.” Or they’ll say, “I just have these *feelings*,” as though there is nothing that can be done about it, and they are simply the helpless victims of the feelings that happen to come upon them when they are in the midst of difficulties.

But by this command—and it is a command—James is making it clear that we can and must control and command our feelings and attitudes, and that we have a duty to do so. Now, he does not say that we will *naturally* feel joy when we have trials. But he does say that we are to *count it* all joy when we have trials. And counting it all joy when we have trials is a rational process of controlling our attitude, our perspectives, and our thoughts in order to produce a proper state of mind regarding them, a state of joy in the midst of them.

You see, the feelings we have are a direct result of the mindset and attitudes that we possess. And as we control our minds and our attitudes, guess what—our feelings will change. And so what he is saying here is that you need to, by a conscious volitional act, generate a state of mind and attitude that will produce a disposition of joy in the midst of trials.

Now you may be asking, What kind of perspectives and thoughts will enable me to have an attitude of joy in trials? Well, I’m glad you asked. Because it’s important for us to understand that we do not obtain joy from the afflictions and trials themselves. To obtain joy from afflictions and trials themselves is to be an abnormal masochist—one who derives pleasure from pain. To do this—to derive pleasure from pain and joy from afflictions—is not to be spiritual; it is rather to be perverted. Only someone who is grossly perverted enjoys trials and pains and afflictions and difficulties and has joy from them as its source. No one in their right mind counts pain and trial as a source of joy. In fact, the Bible everywhere militates against such an attitude.

For example, in Hebrews, chapter 12 and verse 11, it says, “No chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous.” In other words, when you’re going through the trial, it’s not a joyous thing—the trial isn’t. Rather, it is a source of grief to you. And it ought to be a source of grief. It’s the universal experience of Christians that trials are grievous.

First Peter one and verse 6 says to those to whom Peter is writing that “now for a season if need be, you are in heaviness through manifold trials.” And this is the exact same word that is found in James 1 and verse 2. He’s saying, when you go through these temptations or these trials, you are in *heaviness*. And Peter does not rebuke them for being in a state of heaviness with reference to their trials.

In fact, this was the experience of Christ Himself in Mark 14 and verse 34, when He said in the Garden of Gethsemane, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful under death.” Now was He in the

midst of a trial? You bet He was in the midst of a trial—in fact, the greatest one He would ever face in His life. And He said, with reference to that trial, “My soul is sorrowful.”

So this is a normal and proper and expected response to trials themselves. Trials themselves bring grief, they bring heaviness, and they bring sorrow. And so it is not the trial itself that provides the basis for our joy. For it to do so is not for us to be spiritual, but to be perverted and to be unlike Jesus and those to whom Peter is writing, and it is to be unlike those to whom the author of the book of Hebrews is writing.

Well what, then, is the basis for our joy if it is not the trial itself ? - and it is *not* the trial itself. Well there are several things that when rightly considered enable us to have joy in the midst of trials, even though the trials themselves cause grief and heaviness and sorrow. You see, it is not a contradictory thing to have grief and heaviness and sorrow with regard to the trial itself, but *in* that trial to have an attitude of joy and of faith and of patience at the same time.

For example, we see our Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He says, with reference to Himself, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death.” And yet we read in Hebrews 12 and verse 2 that we are to be “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the *joy* that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down on the right hand of the throne of God.” And Jesus had a perspective of joy at the very same time He was saying, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death.”

And in the same way, those to whom Peter is writing in First Peter 1 and verse 6. He says that you people have an inheritance, beginning at verse 4, that is “incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away.” It’s “reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time, Wherein,” that is, with reference to this salvation, “you greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, you are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being found more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, you love; and whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” So at the very same time these people are in heaviness through manifold temptations, they are also rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

And so it is not the trial itself that brings the joy, but rather, it is other things that when rightly considered enable us to *have* joy in the midst of the trials, even though the trials themselves cause grief and heaviness and sorrow. You know, God never denies legitimate human emotions, and He never says, when something bad happens, we’re not supposed to have grief and heaviness and sorrow. But what He is saying is that, overlaying that grief and heaviness and sorrow that is a legitimate and proper expression of the human heart, there is to be this overriding perspective and principle of joy—joy that is unspeakable and full of glory. And so Jesus had joy when He was in His deepest grief. And so did the believers to whom Peter was writing. And this is precisely what James exhorts his readers to as well.

Now what are these things, then, when rightly considered enable us to have joy in the midst of trials? Well, I have listed several of them here. You might be expecting me to run right on to verse 3, but we’re not going to do that today. We will do that next Lord’s Day evening, God willing.

First of all, then, the things that enable us to have joy when rightly considered in the midst of trials is, first of all, the recognition that God is in control of them—the recognition that God is in control of them.

Now, it is a source of joy to know that the God who loves us *so much* that He gave His only begotten Son for us has also sent this trial, is in control of this trial, and will sustain us in the *midst* of this trial. We are not left in the hands of a cruel and indifferent fate. We are not left in the hands of chance.

Sometime back, I was reading story about a guy who went to Vietnam. And basically, what he was saying is there are so many things that were out of his control, whether he lived or died, got hit by a bullet or didn't. It was entirely left up to fate and chance. And I thought to myself, what a hopeless perspective. You see, for the Christian, he recognizes that every trigger that's pulled, that every bullet that flies, every bomb that's dropped, is preordained and directed by God, who is in complete and absolute control. And that the Christian is immortal until God *wills* for him to die, and when He wills for him to die, who would want to go on living?

You see, that's the source of joy that we can have in the midst of trial. War is a very ugly thing. But when you realize that God is in control of this trial, and that He has sent this trial, and He will sustain us in the midst of this trial, that He's *managing* it—that can give us joy and peace and contentment in the midst of it. You see, if all we have to look forward to in our future trials and our experience in them is a cruel and indifferent fate and the whims of chance, there is no possibility for joy in those trials. But we can rejoice in the knowledge that *love* has sent the trial, *wisdom* is managing the trial, and *goodness* will deliver us *from* the trial at the precisely proper time.

And so knowing God's presence, knowing God's care, and knowing God's management of the situation will give us joy in the midst of our trials. Because we realize Somebody's in control of them who has our best interests at heart, and that can make us happy.

Secondly, the second thing that enables us to have joy in the midst of trials is the recognition that God will give us the strength and resources to cope with it—the recognition that God will give us the strength and resources to cope with it. Now we, unlike the world, are not left to our own strength and resources in the midst of trials.

Now, trials can be difficult and demanding and very taxing upon us. But the joy comes from knowing that the very same God who *sent* the trial will also give us the grace to endure the trial and the strength to overcome it. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us, and that includes triumphing over our trials. And the strength that He gives is both real and powerful, and knowing that we can draw upon it at *any* time by prayer gives us joy in the face of difficulty, knowing that we have strength from God that is equal to the trial we face, and we will never run a deficit of resources with which to deal with it.

No adversary but God can make us fail in the midst of a trial. And if God be for us, who can be against us? Paul said in Second Corinthians, chapter 12 and in verse 9, this very penetrating statement with reference to this subject of trials. Second Corinthians 12 and verse 9, he says, "And God said to me, My grace is sufficient for you: my strength is made perfect in [the context

of your] weakness.” And so Paul says, “Most gladly therefore will I *glory* in my infirmities.” That is, I will have joy in them. Why? Because in them, the power of God rests upon me. And so you see, to have a greater sense of God’s power and grace operating in our lives *during* the trial than we ever had *before* the trial is a great source of joy to us.

So this is the second thing that enables us to have joy in the midst of trials, is the recognition that God will give us the strength and resources in order to cope with it—knowing that no trial is going to overwhelm me, and that God will give me the resources to deal with it, is a real source of joy.

The third thing that enables us to have joy in the midst of trials is the recognition that suffering for Christ is rewarded by Christ. Suffering *for* Christ is rewarded *by* Christ.

Now these trials that God brings into our lives and of which James is speaking very oftentimes arise as a result of our commitment to Christ and our faithfulness to Him. And in Matthew, chapter 5, verses 10 through 12, He says, “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven. For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”

And so when these trials come to us as a result of pursuing a righteous and godly course of action, we can recognize that that suffering we have, though in and of itself it’s not pleasant, and in and of itself it is a source of grief and sorrow, yet we can have an attitude of joy *overlaying* that and *overriding* it by the recognition that our sufferings are not in vain, and that Christ will reward our suffering for Him.

And so our attitude towards persecution and reviling and slander is one of what? Rejoicing. Why? Because we think reviling and slander and persecution are great things—and we’re just thrilled to death to have them being done to us? No. Those things are a source of grief and sorrow and unhappiness. But the *joy* comes when we recognize that Christ will recompense us for our sufferings for Him.

Fourthly, this brings us to our fourth point, that which enables us to have joy in the midst of trials—fourthly, is the recognition that our losses upon earth are recompensed in heaven. The recognition that our losses upon earth are recompensed in heaven.

Notice, if you will, Hebrews, chapter 10, verses 32 through 34. Hebrews, chapter 10, verses 32 through 34. The writer to the Hebrews is saying to these Hebrew Christians, “But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after you were illuminated”—that is, after you were saved—“you endured a great fight of afflictions, partly while you were made a gazing-stock, both by reproaches and afflictions, and partly while you became companions of those that were so used. For you had compassion of me in my bonds and took”—notice—“*joyfully* the spoiling of your goods.” And how did they take joyfully the spoiling of their goods? Because they were just really glad to have their stuff thrashed? No. It says here, “knowing in yourselves that you have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.”

So it is the recognition that these things that we have, really, are not all of that great a consequence; they’re not eternal anyway; they belong to God; He can dispose of them as He sees

fit; and the recognition that in heaven the possessions that we possess there will make those that we have here on earth seem like mere dirt clods in comparison.

And so when persecution comes and it results in the loss of personal property, or when someone comes along and steals stuff from you, do you run around saying, “Boy, I’m really glad somebody stole stuff from me.” No. You say, I’m really upset that somebody stole from me and violated God’s Eighth Commandment, which says, Thou shalt not steal. But I know that whatever was taken from me, I have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. And that all the blessings and riches of heaven will far more than compensate for any losses that I have received upon this earth in the cause of Christ.

Fifthly—the fifth perspective that enables us to have joy in the midst of trial—is the recognition that suffering for Christ is proof that we will be glorified with Christ. Suffering for Christ is *proof* that we will be glorified with Christ.

Now in the book of Romans, chapter 8, verses 16 through 18, Paul says this. Romans 8:16 through 18, he says, “This Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.” Now those are all wonderful things to assert. How do you know that they’re true? Notice the next phrase, “if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.”

You know, one of the things the Bible tells us is that all those who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. And so when you’re living godly in Christ Jesus and persecution comes, what that should do as you go through those persecutions and sufferings for Christ is it should give you the confidence that in fact you will be glorified with Christ. For those who share in Christ’s glory up in heaven are the same ones who share in Christ’s persecutions here upon the earth. And if we are unwilling to suffer for Christ here and now, then He will be unwilling to have us glorified with Him then and later.

And so the recognition that suffering for Christ is proof that we will be glorified with Christ is a great source of joy in the midst of trials. I mean, do we like it that we’re suffering? No. But the joy that *comes* in that suffering is the recognition that, you know, the fact that I’m suffering for Christ is the ground of assurance I have that I will be glorified with Him.

Notice, if you will, First Peter 4, verses through 19, which conveys the same idea in a little different language. First Peter 4, verses 12 through 19. He says, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.” And we’ll comment on this a little more under our third point. But we should *expect* that we will have trials. And we should expect that they will be *fiery* trials, that is, very painful and difficult trials. And he’s saying, when you go through these things, don’t think this something *strange*.

He says, “But”—ah, what’s that next word? “*rejoice*, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, you may be glad with exceeding joy. If you be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are you, for the spirit of glory and of God rests on you. On their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters.” There’s no joy in that kind of suffering.



Verse 16, “Yet if any suffer as a *Christian*, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin with us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore, let them that suffer according the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.”

Now without going into all the details of the passage, one thing immediately leaps out, and is simply this: Those who suffer for Christ are those who have every reason to rejoice and be happy, because when His glory is revealed, they will be glad with *exceeding* joy, because they will be invited by Him to share in that glory with Him.

And so the people to whom James was writing were certainly under persecutions, and persecutions are a source of many of our trials and of our difficulties and hard times. When we stand for the truth and people lash out at us with their words and with their actions, well you just have joy, in that this is the demonstration that we will be glorified with Christ.

Sixthly, that which enables us to have joy in the midst of trials is the recognition that suffering is something that God entrusts to His most worthy servants. Suffering is something that God entrusts to His most worthy servants.

Now if you're a military commander and you have an especially dangerous commission to go on, who do you send out on it? Your very best soldier. You don't send a guy who doesn't care, or the guy who's undisciplined, or the guy who's somewhat unmotivated. You take the man who is the sharpest and the best-trained, the one who is the highest in your esteem, and you send *him* on it—because you recognize the degree of the likelihood of success is in direct proportion to the quality of the individual that you entrust for that dangerous mission.

And so it is in Christianity, God does not allow just any of His people to suffer, because He recognizes that those who are *weak* in their faith and *feeble* in their commitment are not to be trusted with sufferings—because they will likely fall down under them and leave a lousy testimony with reference to them.

Who does He choose for great sufferings? Well, men like Job—the very best there was endured the very worst there was because he was the one who God esteemed above all others. You remember the accusation of Satan is that, If you do this and that to Job, he'll curse you to your face. Now there's plenty of people if God *had* done this and that to them, they *would* have cursed Him to His face. So God didn't just entrust this little episode to just *anyone*.

And so in Acts, chapter 5, verses 40 through 41, we see this perspective on the part of the apostles. They had been imprisoned. They had been commanded *not* to preach the Gospel in the name of Christ. And it says in verse 40, and speaking of Gamaliel, “...to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go”—and boy, were they depressed. That's not what it says. It says, “And they departed from the presence of the council, *rejoicing* that they were counted worthy to suffer for his name.”

We oftentimes tend to pity folks who are suffering. I think rather we should pity those who are not. Suffering is something that God entrusts to His most worthy servants. And He gives the easiest time to the weakest people.

So these, then, are attitudes that we should have with reference to the trials that we go through. These are the attitudes that we should have towards the trial itself. It should be an attitude of counting it all joy, not because we're masochists and we like pain, but because of these six perspectives that we can have in the *midst* of the difficulty—the recognition that God is in control of them; the recognition that God will give us the strength and resources to cope with them; the recognition that suffering for Christ is *rewarded* by Christ; the recognition that our losses upon earth are recompensed in heaven; the recognition that suffering for Christ is *proof* that we will be glorified with Christ; and the recognition that suffering is something that God entrusts to His most worthy servants.

And we see that it is precisely these perspectives, these six perspectives I have set before you, that in each instance cause people to have joy in the midst of trials. Now this is not an exhaustive list, and next Lord's Day evening, God willing, we will discover even more reasons as to why we can count it all joy when we fall into various trials. But these certainly should be sufficient to help us to be joyful in *any* trial.

**3A And that brings us to my third and final point this evening, and that is, having considered those who are *in* trials, and our perspective and attitude *towards* trials, thirdly, consider together the nature of trials themselves. Consider together the *nature* of trials themselves.**

I know my outline is not very alliterative tonight, but I couldn't come up with anything better, so you're just going to have to live with it.

Now notice what he says in verse 2—James, chapter 1, and verse 2. He says, “My brethren, count it all joy”—notice—“when you fall *into* divers temptations.” The first thing we want to notice about the nature of the trials themselves is that they are fallen into—they are not sought out. They are fallen into; they are not sought out.

Now there's little joy to be had in afflictions and trials when we intentionally bring them upon ourselves by our sinful and foolish choices. In Matthew, chapter 6, Christ taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer, “Lead us not into trials.” It's the exact same Greek word as is James 1:2. Lead us not into temptations. Now God does not *tempt* anyone with evil, so clearly, the meaning of the word is, “Lord, don't lead us into *trials*.” And if we are to pray and ask *God* not to lead us into trials, then certainly, we ought not to be leading *ourselves* into them.

In First Peter, chapter 4, and verse 15, the passage that we just read in your hearing not but a few minutes ago, he says—he says, “If you be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are you.” But then in verse 15 he says, “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.” In other words, it's one thing if troubles come to you because you're doing right, but it's quite another when troubles come to you because you're doing wrong. And we lose our comfort in our suffering when there is *guilt* in our sufferings.

Now you remember that when Jesus was tempted with His forty days in the wilderness, Satan took Him to the pinnacle of the temple and said, “Cast thyself down.” Because the Scripture's right, He

will “bear thee up lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.” And what was Jesus’ response? Did He willingly cast Himself into a trial, into a difficulty, into a source of pain? He did not. In fact, He declared that it would be wicked and sinful to do so. He says, that’s putting the Lord your God to the test. It is one thing for God to put us into a trial. It is quite another for us to put ourselves there out of some masochistic desire for some kind of glory or out of a sinful choice and a pursuit of folly. Trials are not to be sought out. Trials are not to be rushed into. In fact, every lawful means possible is to be sought out to avoid them and to mitigate them. A perverse ambition for martyrdom is entirely alien to true Christianity.

And so James clearly views these trials that these people are into as trials not of their own making, but rather, trials that they have fallen into through maybe a lack of foresight, or through the actions of others, or through some unusual providence of God. But they are not ones in which they sinfully determined to do it anyway, even though they knew aforetime what it would bring to them.

We all have great sympathy for and bring comfort to those who accidentally injure themselves. And if someone is purposely taking a knife and going like this on their arm, we’re not going to have a great deal of sympathy for them. And so these are things that are to be ordained by God; they are not things that we are to push ourselves into.

So what we have here in this phrase is certainly a denial of any masochistic attitudes, any self-infliction of trials, or any perverse ambition for some kind of martyrdom. We have a duty to make our lives as free from trouble as possible, and we are to employ every means possible to do it that is lawful. And then, if and when they come, we can say that we are suffering for the sake of Christ. God has brought this as an act of training, or to develop faith, as it says in the next verse, patience; or for some other reasons. And we can then rejoice in it.

But notice secondly, as to the nature of these trials, not only are they fallen into, not sought out, but secondly, they’re of a very wide variety. They are of a very wide variety.

Now he says here, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into different kinds of trials.” We have a list that Paul has given to us of the different kind of trials that *he* fell into in Second Corinthians 11, verses 24 through 28, when he says, “Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils my mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and in thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.” So this is an indication of the *variety* of trials and difficulties that people can fall into—certainly not an exhaustive list, but an indicative one.

But the point that I want to make is this: Trials are diverse. They’re not the same for everyone. Trials are tailored to the need at hand, which are in various people, various. Different people need different trials at different times in their lives for different purposes. Some people need a trial for maturity, others for correction, others for a testimony to others, others for preparation for service, and a whole host of reasons as to why God would bring a trial into our life.

And so this explains something of the inequality of trials. Some have this, and some have that, some have more, and some have less. And just as we do not raise our children all the same, with identical methods of correction and of nurturing, in the same way, God does not deal with all His children the same way either. Each of us has a custom dealing from God with reference to trials that is perfectly tailored for us and our needs, and so we would not expect one trial to be like the other, or for all people to have the same *kinds* of trials in the same ways.

And I just want to say to you, that whatever trial God has brought into your life, He custom-designed it just for you in order to produce in you grace and glory. And you need to remember that. It's not an accident that you are in the situation that you're in, but rather it's God's providence that has brought you there, and His wisdom has constructed it, and His grace and power will sustain you and accomplish His purposes in you through it.

The third thing we want to see about the nature of trials is that, not only are they fallen into, not only are they of a wide variety, but thirdly, they are to be *expected*. They are to be expected.

Now in verse 2 he says, "My brethren, count it all joy *when* you fall into divers temptations." He doesn't say "if," he says "when." And the point he's making here is that it's *going* to happen to you sooner or later. And don't think that some *strange thing* is happening to you if you are falling into some kind of a trial or difficulty. You remember we read about that in First Peter, chapter 4, in which he says, "Beloved, think it not *strange* concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you." He's saying this is standard fare for the people of God.

In fact, First Corinthians 10, and verse 13, says that they are *common* to man. "There is no temptation or trial *taken* you but such as is *common* to man, but God is faithful, for will with the trial provide a way of escape that you may be able to bear it." But the point is, is that they are common. And so therefore, it is not to be viewed as some strange thing that is occurring. Paul told people in Acts 14:22 that they must "through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

In John 16:33, Jesus said, "In the world, you *shall* have tribulation." Now the joy is, "be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." You see, that's the source of the joy. But the point is, is that you will have tribulation in the world. And when Paul wrote to that brand new church in Thessalonica that was only a few months old, in First Thessalonians, chapter 3, and in verse 3, what he said to them with reference to their trials is that they should not be *moved* by these afflictions because you "know that we are *appointed* thereunto." And so if the Captain of our salvation, as Hebrews 2:10 says, "was brought to maturity through sufferings," then certainly that is going to be the case with His disciples.

And so as we go through these sufferings, let us recognize that they are standard fare. It is not a mark that God is mad at us or that He hates us or doesn't care about us, but rather, it is quite the contrary. It is a mark that we are worthy to suffer for His name's sake, and that we shall have a share in the joy and the glory, because we have had a share in the sufferings. May God help us to count it all joy when we fall into them.