

Count it all joy

Good day dear listeners,

During the course of life every individual will experience pain, suffering and anguish of some sort. The question isn't, "Will we experience trials and hardship?" but "How will we manage and cope, without allowing the challenges of life to ruin us or mess us up mentally or emotionally?" Sometimes the things we, or our friends and family, experience seem extremely senseless and meaningless. It can easily leave us wondering, "What's the point? What good do calamity, adversity and trials produce?"

The Bible, as the Word of God, speaks to these questions in various passages. One of these is James 1:1-4. James addresses people who are going through severe struggles – they are being persecuted for what they believe and feeling intensely the heat of hatred and threat of death. This is why he wastes no time in providing them with a word of encouragement. He writes, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." James encourages his readers to consider it pure joy when they face various trials -- literally when they fall, perhaps without warning, into the **potholes** of trials. These Christians are encouraged to maintain a joyful disposition regardless of how shaken they are by trials.

The people to whom James writes needed to hear this. Opposition, persecution, and rejection appeared to be more the norm than the exception. After the death of Stephen, a persecution arose that caused the church in Jerusalem to be scattered. Believers sought refuge in Judea, Samaria, and the outlying regions of the Mediterranean coast. They faced rejection because they were Christian; they were denied work, refused help, and left in the dire straits of poverty. Yet these people are encouraged to hold fast to the certainty of knowing: God is at work even in the midst of difficulties.

What this passage underlines is this: trials are not sent to cast doubt on God's promises but to enrich faith. The Lord prods and pokes people out of their securities and outward support systems so that they should get on their knees in a confession of their great need.

A key word in verse 2 is "count" – count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds. The word James uses indicates that when you face trials, you must evaluate; you must let the situation pass through your thought process in the light of God's design and purpose and let the final outcome be joy. Such joy is learned. If I value the comforts and conveniences of life **too highly** and cannot handle it when things don't go the way I want, trials will upset me. If I have the idea that everything has to be running perfectly to be happy I will soon be discouraged. If I live only for the present and forget the future, trials will fill my heart with gall instead of gladness and the slightest frustration and set-back will drag me down.

James instructs his readers to consider it pure joy, even when there is nothing positive about the entire experience, even when we stand all alone, and the light at the end of the tunnel is obstructed by the freight train of horrific trials. Though tears fill our eyes and anxiety threatens our hearts we can have joy when we believe that through the trial the Lord is fulfilling his purpose. The Sovereign Lord is leading the way, directing every situation to the eternal benefit of his people. That gives fullness of joy; a pure, total and complete joy in the Lord. Trials pledge better things to come.

Joy in trials causes believers to consider it a privilege to have their faith tested -- not because the trial is so pleasant. They know that through such tests the Lord is drawing them closer to himself. When trials are absent, we easily become careless, complacent and comfortable in our coming and going.

The proper and Christian reaction to trials and trouble is not humanistic resignation but joyful acceptance. Knowing the will of God in trials, and leaning on Jesus, makes it possible for children of the Lord to sing even as tears of grief roll down their cheeks. They can sing praise to the Lord while standing at a grave side. With the ache of loneliness, the pain of physical, emotional and mental ailments, the strain of stress and anxiety they can still sing and make melody to the Lord in their hearts.

James encourages us to a transformed thinking that will happen by a careful study of God's Word. We are to have a joyous attitude in trials because they draw us closer to the Lord. In the context of speaking about trials James writes, "for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness". When he says, "for you know" he is talking about knowledge gained from experience. By going through trials or by seeing others go through them we learn that the testing of faith works endurance. Trials are meant to produce something **very beneficial** for ourselves and for others who see God at work in us throughout the time of testing.

The Lord tests believers by means of various difficulties to increase our level of endurance. He doesn't test people to make them fall but in order that they should persevere. Athletes will go through vigorous training, exercise and discomfort because they know it will increase their endurance. Similarly, the Lord tests us through trials to strengthen our endurance levels. Implied in the word testing is the idea that what the Lord intends to do with the specific trial will be completed successfully. What a comforting thought! When feeling paralyzed by an affliction, pressured by the weight of trials and temptations, God assures those who trust in him that they can go on in his strength. God preserves his children in such a way that they will persevere to the end.

Trials are designed to produce a tenacity of spirit that holds on under pressure while waiting God's time. Every time we come through a trial we are established and strengthened in our faith. The Lord tests our faith to produce greater endurance for greater service so that we may be mature and complete.

James 1:4 concludes, "And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." In other words let God do his work in our lives when he sends trials. Let endurance do what God wants it to do. The word "perfect" does not mean sinless here but has the idea of getting us to the place where the Lord wants us to be. Being perfect means being complete, and being complete is to be whole; acting according to the purpose for which we have been created.

Dear listeners, giving a proper response to trials requires our undivided hearts. James says, "Let steadfastness have its full effect." The Lord wants your minds to be set on one thing, namely, his service. You are to live for him with the totality of your being. The trials that you are confronted with in life are meant to lead you to greater endurance, which in turn must result in seeking the Lord with your whole being.

The only way out of a trial is to go through it. The Lord does not promise people a life without trials but he will give safe passage in and through the storms. Live by faith in Jesus – believing in him you can know without a shadow of doubt that God the Lord is your strength and your salvation. I pray that you will not be overwhelmed by afflictions but that you are able to find strength in him who provides you with what you need to endure and persevere throughout the days of your life until you will stand before God to receive in full the riches of his grace.