

The joy of trials? (K. Payne)

1. Examine James 1:2-5. Study carefully verse 2. What does it mean to "consider it all joy?"

Note the word "consider". We have a choice concerning how we will view our trials. Are trials really divine paybacks for sin or a God sent opportunity to grow in spiritual maturity? It is so easy to *react* to difficult circumstances rather than carefully and thoughtfully *respond* to them. To *react* is natural. *Responding* to that same situation demands discipline. The issue is not what I feel like doing, but rather what should I do. Is God in control or am I alone? Trials offer a Christian the opportunity to make a conscious choice to think naturally or supernaturally.

We are told to consider our trials an occasion for joy. At first glance this seems like an odd statement. Why would I consider a difficult circumstance I am facing a joy? Joy is usually associated with happy circumstances not stressful ones. In the English language we often use the words "happy" and "joy" synonymously. But in the Greek language, which the New Testament was originally written, these two words can represent two very different thoughts. Happiness was a word typically used to express feelings, which were a result of external circumstances. The word "joy", however, could be used to express the idea of inner contentment in spite of external circumstances.

James tells us to consider our trials a joy not happiness. There is a **big** difference between the two concepts.

As Christians we often feel the pressure to pretend that things, which hurt us, don't really hurt. We do not have to pretend we like all of our trials. But we can still experience contentment in spite of them. When our circumstances are positive, we can be happy. Just like a non-Christian.

But when our situations do not go the way we would like we can experience something our non-Christians friends cannot. We are able, by God's grace, to experience peace in the midst of chaos. Why? Because God is still in control and He loves us! *"Current circumstances may not be the way I would have planned things, but God I choose to trust these issues to You. You will make sense out of the things that do not make sense to me."*

Living by faith and in His peace, because He is in control, or living on an emotional roller coaster because I have mistakenly presumed that either I am in control or no one is in control, is a choice. Sooner or later, every Christian will be given the opportunity to trust God in the face of circumstances that simply seem too complicated to understand from a rational perspective.

Like it or not, we are not the masters of our own fate. We are neither master nor God, and fate, blind chance, does not guide anything. We are His workmanship, created in Him for good works, which He has planned (Ephesians 2:10). We sometimes forget that God is neither a distant relative who does not care, a colleague who needs our opinion or a cosmic Santa Claus who can be manipulated. Trials provide Christians the privilege of standing on biblical truth and remembering who is the creator and who is the creation.

2. What does James say about the timing of trials in verse 2?

Have you ever noticed the word "when" in this verse? How many times have you hit a snag and thought to yourself, *"I wonder what I did to deserve this?"* The thought is basically that trials can be avoided and are some sort of punishment or pay back from God who is mad at us.

The fact of the matter is that trials are a normal part of every Christian's life. The verse does not say consider it joy "if" you encounter various trials, but "when" you do. Trials are inevitable. They are going to happen. Trials are one of the means God has chosen to help us develop character and spiritual maturity.

The joy of trials? (K. Payne) (page 2)

A common misconception is that trials are a sign of God's anger; instead, trials are often an indication of God's love, care, and concern. He is still in the active process of making us stronger. Trials are not a mistake. They are part of a divine design to equip Believers for effective daily living in a world hostile to the things of God and those who consistently represent Him.

3. What does James mean by "various" in verse 2?

Have you every thought how easy life could be if you only had to fight one battle at a time? And if that battle were always the same one it would be even more convenient. Even a slow learner would catch on sooner or later if the challenge were always the same. Our God is creative and so are the trials He uses to help us grow. Trials come through a variety of means. Special ministry demands special preparation. Although God's purpose for trials is the same for all of us, the means are not.

How many physical trainers working with professional athletes considering focusing on only one muscle group? Athletes who hope to compete at a world-class level know they must develop their whole body, not just part of it. Developing a great upper body, but weak legs, or visa-versa is a recipe for athletic failure, even if it is done sincerely. Likewise, it should be no surprise that since God uses our trials to make us "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" that He will necessarily have to use various trials to develop and mature different areas of our life, all for the purpose of making us more useful in service to Him.

When I accept good circumstances with joy but accuse God of injustice regarding personal trials there is very little difference between the way I choose to handle life and the way my non-Christians friends do. They may credit the stars or their own ingenuity for good situations and curse their karma, bad luck, Mother Nature, or God for obstacles regarding their plans, but both responses are very similar.

It does not require a Christian commitment to enjoy life when things go well. Who doesn't smile when plans come together as anticipated? As a Christian, one way I can effectively demonstrate the reality of my faith to skeptical friends is by choosing to remain content in the face of adversity. How impressed are you with an individual who accepts the good and blames others for problems? That method for handling difficulties is as old as the Garden of Eden.

Considered to be of the literary genre *logic*, commentators have noted that James has more figures of speech and imagery using nature than all of the letters of Paul! This letter was intended to be read publicly similarly as a sermon and was most noted for its emphasis on Christian conduct.

"Scripture has but one sense, which is the literal sense." William Tyndale (1494-1536)

The joy of trials? (K. Payne)

1. Examine James 1:2-5. Study carefully verse 2. What does it mean to “consider it all joy?”

2. What does James say about the timing of trials in verse 2?

3. What does James mean by "various" in verse 2?