

**JAMES 1:1-4**  
**“ARE YOU KIDDING ME?”**

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to James chapter 1 and I promise you, we will begin reading this letter that James wrote this morning. Last week we had an introduction to this letter and I believe that it is important to lay a strong foundation so that as we build upon the structure of this letter, things won't fall apart, or we won't become confused by what is going on or what James is saying.

You see, some feel that this letter is in opposition to what Paul wrote regarding faith. Paul, over and over again, shows us that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone!

And then they read this letter that James wrote, and they come to the conclusion that James is speaking of a works salvation. Not at all. What James is saying is that true faith will be manifested in the things that we do and the things that we say!

I don't want to offend anyone this morning, but if you think coming to church is what your faith is all about, then your faith is really empty. We gather together to worship the Lord, to study His Word, to apply the things we have learned to our lives and to encourage each other, to pray for each other!

The real Christian life begins when we walk out those doors and we enter the world. How are you living your faith when you do that? That is the point that James is making, and he wants them to evaluate their lives because I believe there were some problems with these believers and James is addressing them.

Warren Wiersbe put it like this in regard to their spiritual immaturity. He wrote, “These Christians simply were not growing up. This gives us a hint as to the basic theme of this letter: *the marks of maturity in the Christian life*. James used the word *perfect* several times, a word that means “mature, complete”. By “a perfect man” (James 3:2) James did not mean a sinless man, but rather one who is mature, balanced - grown-up.

Spiritual maturity is one of the greatest needs in churches today. Too many churches are playpens for babies instead of workshops for adults. The members are not mature enough to eat the solid spiritual food that they need, so they have to be fed on milk (Heb. 5:11–14). Just look at the problems James dealt with and you can see that each of them is characteristic of little children: Impatience in difficulties (1:1–4); Talking but not living the truth (2:14); No control of the tongue (3:1); Fighting and coveting (4:1) and Collecting material “toys” (5:1)”

- Warren Wiersbe

So, the focus of James, as he wants to see them mature in the faith, is that faith that is real works practically in one's life. True faith is a faith that works in spite of what may come your way. In spite of the trials, the difficulties you face in this life. Again, not for salvation but to identify us as Christians.

The breakdown of this letter is as follows. And we are going to keep simple.

***THE BELIEVER AND SUFFERING*** – JAMES 1

***THE BELIEVER AND SERVICE*** – JAMES 2

***THE BELIEVER AND HIS SPEECH*** – JAMES 3

***THE BELIEVER AND A SEPARATED LIFE*** – JAMES 4

***THE BELIEVER AND THE SECOND COMING*** – JAMES 5

So, over the next several months, as we are going through this letter of James, these are practical lessons that we need to not only understand but apply to our lives. James does not spend

several chapters on doctrine, as Paul did many times, but he just plunges into how we are to live out our faith.

And in the days that we are living in, with the challenges we face in this life, it is good to be reminded how we are to live out our faith and thus, I think this study will help all of us in our walk with the Lord.

I have called this study this morning, “*Are You Kidding Me?*” because it is dealing with the suffering we face in this life and what James has to say should be our response to it. I think you will understand why I have titled it that way as we read through these verses!

With that said, let’s begin reading in James chapter 1, beginning in verse 1 and let’s see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word this morning.

## JAMES 1 VERSE 1

As this letter opens up, the writer tells us who he is, “**James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.**”

Remember in our introduction last week, we saw that the writer of this letter, James, was the half-brother of Jesus and the head of the Christian church in Jerusalem.

Now we might not think much about that, but imagine if you were related to someone famous. Would you use their credentials to elevate yourself? Most people would!

But not James. He doesn’t say, “**James, the brother of Jesus.**” (Wink, wink!)

He must have been a humble man because James places himself with every believer, he doesn’t exalt himself but in humility he says that he is a “**bondsman of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.**”

A bondsman was a slave who could be let go by his master and was, but he has freely chosen to remain a slave and serve his master. He then would be taken to the doorpost of the house and an awl would be used to pierce his ear and a ring put through it showing that he was a bondsman, freely serving his master.

We might not think too much about that today, but, according to one writer, notice where James placed himself, “A slave, a bondsman, one who is in a permanent relation of servitude to another . . . Among the Greeks, with their strong sense of personal freedom, the term carried a degrading connotation.” (Hiebert)

But James understood where he stood and thus, it was not important that Jesus was his brother, but that Jesus was his Lord and Savior and His DOULOS or bondsman!

Again, for many, this is a hard concept, they don’t want to be a slave to anyone. But our Lord gave us His example that we are to follow. He told us in Mark 10:45, “**For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.**”

I want you to also notice that James speaks of “**God and the Lord Jesus Christ.**” So, he is speaking of God the Father but then he calls Jesus “**Lord.**”

Now here is the question. Is James saying that Jesus is not God?

Not at all and again, that would go against what the rest of the Scriptures are teaching us of Jesus, that He is God.

The Greek word for “**Lord**” is KURIOS and “Hellenistic Jews used kurios as a name for God; the non-use of the article gains in significance when it is remembered that o kurios, ‘dominus,’ was a title given to the early Roman emperors in order to express their deity.” (Oesterley in Expositor’s). Thus, James considered Jesus God.

And it is important for us to understand that Jesus is God because Jesus Himself said in John 8:24 said, **“Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am [He], you will die in your sins.”** In other words, if you do not believe that Jesus is the Great I AM, Almighty God, then you will die in your sins. That is pretty serious!

In John 10:31-33 listen to what we are told, **“Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, ‘Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?’ The Jews answered Him, saying, ‘For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.’”**

And please understand that this was not a one-time teaching by Jesus that the Jewish religious leaders misunderstood. In the Greek they are saying that Jesus was continual making this claim that He is God, not just a one-time statement! Thus, the Jewish religious leaders knew exactly what He was saying, who He was claiming to be and that is why they wanted to put Him to death!

We are told in John 20:28, as Jesus appeared in His resurrection body to the disciples, **“And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’”** Thomas called Jesus God and Jesus did not correct Thomas because what Thomas said was true!

Paul in Romans 9:5 said, **“of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.”**

So, James is attesting to the fact that Jesus is Almighty God and he has surrendered his life to Jesus, he is a bondservant of Christ!

So, James is the writer of this letter but who is he writing to? We don't have to guess because James tells us, **“To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.”**

James makes it very clear that he is writing to Jewish Christians who have been scattered abroad or to those Jews living outside the land of Israel.

Why did these Christian Jews leave the land of Israel? The reason they fled was because of the persecution they were facing because of their faith in Jesus.

In Acts 8:1, after Stephen was martyred for his faith in Jesus, we are told, **“Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.”**

Then, in Acts 11:19 we read that this scattering is moving farther out as we are told, **“Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.”**

Now why didn't James write to Gentiles? Please understand that when the church was started, it was primarily Jewish, there were no large numbers of Gentiles who were saved early on.

Only later on did the door open for the Gentiles to hear of the Good News, the Gospel message and thus, by the time we get to Acts chapter 15, many Jews were questioning the salvation of the Gentiles because they were not keeping the Law of Moses.

And we see that James steps in, as the head of the church in Jerusalem, and he tells them that Jews and Gentiles are saved by Grace through Faith and not by the Law through works! (Meeting took place around 48 A. D.)

In saying that don't come to the conclusion that this letter from James is not for us. These were Jewish Christians and we are Gentile Christians and we are one in Christ. There is no

difference between Jew and Gentile as some like to say. That means that these lessons are for all believers to learn and apply to their lives!

You see, the reason James wrote this letter was to encourage them, give them hope, to strengthen them in their faith. To allow the trials they were facing in the Lord to strengthen them not destroy them, to help them to grow. And the reality is, how we handle these trials shows the genuineness of our faith, if we truly live what we say we believe!

And finally, we see that James uses the salutation “**greetings**” or CHAIRO, (khah’-ee-ro) in the Greek.

It is a little different greeting than Paul’s “**Grace and peace.**” But this was a typical Greek way of opening a letter and it means to rejoice or be glad, which is an interesting way to open a letter to a group of people that are facing hardships, persecutions, trials in their lives! People that were struggling with immaturity.

Why did James open up like this? I believe he expected them to be encouraged by this letter and their despair would change to joy as they would look at the situations they were facing from a different perspective. That they would mature in the faith and not remain babes in Christ.

I don’t know where you are at right now, but if you are struggling, if you feel that you are not growing or maturing in the faith, I pray that this letter would encourage you to look at your life’s situations from a godly perspective instead of a worldly one and I truly believe your sadness will turn to joy in the Lord.

And for all of us, there are none who will not experience trials in their life, so this is for all of us to learn from.

Now as we read on we will see James admonish these Jewish believers and us regarding the trials we face in this life. And we will be looking at four points that James makes, and they are as follows:

***COUNT IT ALL JOY – JAMES 1:2***

***TESTING OF OUR FAITH – JAMES 1:3***

***THE RESULTS OF THAT TESTING – JAMES 1:3***

***LEADING TO MATURITY – JAMES 1:4***

So, we are going to read through these three verses and then break them down and see the lessons that the Lord has for us regarding these trials we face in life.

#### **VERSES 2-4**

As you might have guessed, this is the reason I have called this study, “***Are You Kidding Me?***” I mean, really, “**count it all joy when you fall into various trials**”? But that is exactly what James is saying.

Remember that James is writing to these Jewish Christians so that they may grow up, that they may mature in the faith. And I think we see a contrast here between spiritual and carnal believers and it is seen in how they handle trials, what is manifested in their lives when these things come upon them, and they will!

For a carnal Christian, their life is focused on God blessing them, and blessing them, and again, blessing them some more. It is an earthly perspective and because of that, when difficulty comes their way, they are upset, they are angry, they may even not go to church because they are not getting what they want. I know, sounds like a child throwing a temper tantrum because they did not get what they wanted, and I guess, that is the picture. It is all about material possessions!

But for the mature Christian, the Christian who is walking in the Spirit and not the flesh, they look at life from a heavenly or eternal perspective. They are not looking to gain more and

more treasures on this earth, but they are looking to lay up for themselves treasures in heaven as they take up their cross and follow Jesus. As they deny themselves and live for the Lord!

The carnal Christian sees trials, troubles as some kind of satanic plot to destroy their happiness but for the mature Christian, they understand that these things have come and will come upon their lives and through them they will continue to grow in the Lord, mature in the faith!

Now let me say this before you are discouraged and throw in the towel! I believe that in our life we struggle with being carnal and we also see that we are growing, maybe slowly, but we are growing, we are maturing.

The idea is not to beat yourself up and throw in the towel but to forge ahead in the faith. If you need to repent and get right with God, do it and move on in your relationship with Him!

What I want you to see here, and I think that is what James wants you to see, is that if you are struggling with what you are going through, maybe a carnality issue for you, get refocused on the Lord and see these things that are happening in your life as a positive thing. That it truly is a blessing from God in which you will grow by!

Now let's look at this a little closer. First of all, we see that James starts out running here and he tells us "**when you fall into various trials**" not "if."

You see, trials are all around us, you can't escape them and that is not the issue. The issue is how you handle yourself through them. Trials are going to happen, not might, not if, but "**when**" they do happen, then you need to walk accordingly. Trials are unavoidable.

Now let me also say this. I am not talking about you walking into trials. Like you are going out and drinking and you get drunk, get in your car and you get pulled over by the police and you are arrested for drunk driving. That is not what James is talking about here. Not that we are walking into some sin and God is going to bless that. You will be accountable for your actions! You will pay the fine and it will be a big one!

What James is saying is that when these trials or situations come into your life, when you just fall into them or they happen, God is working. It is not that when we sin that God is not working in us, He is, but that is not the point that James is bringing out here.

And James tells us that we are to "**count it all joy**" when these things come upon our lives. Notice that James did not say, "**count it all happiness!**"

There is a difference, a big difference. You see, happiness is based on outward circumstances. And the problem with that is that those circumstances are always changing and what brought you happiness one minute may bring you anger or sadness the next!

For instance, Tony V. and I were very happy at the start of the football season. We had great hope in the bears and their new quarterback. And then the season started, and that happiness was turned into sadness!

Now don't laugh, your happiness was turned into sadness this season also with the Packers. But, the point is that our happiness is based on outward circumstances and those can change very quickly.

But joy is different. Joy is based in the Lord and He never changes and thus, we should be joyful in our life. And the idea here, the point that James is making is that we are to make a deliberate and careful decision to experience joy even in times of trouble!

Listen to what Peter tells us in I Peter 1:6-9, "**In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having**

**not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith - the salvation of your souls.**”

And we will look at this more as we read on but make no mistake about it, trials help us to grow and they show that our faith is real. In all the trails that Job suffered, we are told of this man, **“In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.”** Job 1:22. Don’t let trials make you bitter; let them make you better in the Lord!

But it is a choice we must make. We can experience the joy of the Lord in our lives or the sadness and anger because of what has come upon our lives.

And please understand that I am not downplaying what you are going through or making it as nothing. I am not saying, “Don’t worry . . . be happy!” I am not saying that we should be like the Stoics and not have any emotions at all, no matter what we experience in life.

What I am saying is that in spite of all you are going through, keep your eyes focused on the Lord. Let me share this with you and hopefully it will help you now if you are going through a difficult trial, or down the road when you do go through a difficult trial, because you will. We are told,

Several years ago the Presbyterian pastor Lloyd John Ogilvie underwent the worst year of his life. His wife had undergone five major surgeries, plus radiation and chemotherapy, several of his staff members had departed, large problems loomed, and discouragement assaulted his feelings. But he wrote,

***The greatest discovery that I have made in the midst of all the difficulties is that I can have joy when I can’t feel like it – artesian joy. When I had every reason to feel beaten, I felt joy. In spite of everything, [God] gave me the conviction of being loved and the certainty that nothing could separate me from him. It was not happiness, gush, or jolliness but a constant flow of the Spirit through me. At no time did he give me the easy confidence that everything would work out as I wanted it on my timetable, but he was in charge and would give me and my family enough courage for each day: grace. Joy is always the result of that.***

James did not say, “Consider it pure joy *if* you face trails” but ***“whenever.”*** Such trials are a part of every believer’s life. We are to thoughtfully find joy in our own *diaspora* experiences – when we feel alienated, disenfranchised, unpopular, even when difficulty and tragedy come our way which have no apparent connection with our Christianity. Such joy may seem irrational, but in Christ it is perfectly rational.

- R. Kent Hughes, James – Faith That Works, pp.18-19

What we need to be careful with is that we don’t begin to bargain with God. “Lord, if you do this then I will serve you!”

Jacob did this when he was on the run from his brother Esau. We are told in Genesis 28:20-21, as Jacob was in Bethel, **“Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father’s house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God.’”**

Jacob is still Jacob, supplanter, heel-catcher, dealer and-so-on. Here he is dealing with God, if God blesses him with these material things, then he will serve Him.

And Jacob is going to learn submission, to submit to God and trust in Him and the Lord will use his uncle Laban to teach him these lessons. In fact, before he truly surrenders, he will wrestle with God. But again, it will take some time, but he will grow!

But don’t make deals with God, you surrender to Him and walk accordingly. He is the Master and we are His bondservant. Never forget that!

We don't want to be Jacob; supplanter, heel-catcher, dealer and-so-on. We want to be Israel, governed by God!

And no matter what may come our way, and it will, He loves us and wants what is best for our lives. It is not that He wants to hurt us or harm us but to grow us!

Now let's deal with this word, "**trials.**" It is the Greek word PEIRASMOS, (pi-ras-mos') and it is the same Greek word that is used for "**temptations.**"

Here is where some struggle because we are told in James 1:13, "**Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.**"

Now as you read that it seems like James is contradicting himself, but he isn't. Yes, God does not tempt us to sin, **NEVER!**

Then what is going on here? In James 1:2 these trials that come into our life are from God and He will use those things to help us to grow, to help mature us. I think we are all in agreement there.

But, on the other end of the spectrum is Satan. And as much as God will use these things in our lives to test our faith Satan will use the same trials to tempt us to sin. He will exploit the things we are experiencing to tempt us to do the wrong thing!

Do you see the difference? God uses the trials in our lives to build us up, and Satan tempts us to destroy us. And these trials come in various ways, they are multifaceted. But don't ever blame God for what you have done, God doesn't tempt us with evil, Satan does!

Just look at the life of Job who went through a variety of trials in his life. And listen to the response of Job to the trials he faced, the first group of trials you might say. We are told in Job 1:20-22, "**Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord.' In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.**"

Job's relationship with God was not based on what God gave him, like Satan thought it was, but it was based in God Himself and that did not change.

After all of that we see the health of Job affected and we see the faith of Job's wife in this trial that has come upon Job and is affecting his wife. She said, "**... 'Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!'**" Job 2:9.

At this point Job could have just gave up. He could have just thrown his hands up in the air and said, "What's the use? All this has come upon me and now even my wife is against me and she wants me to curse the God I love and just die!" Obviously not the ministry of encouragement for Job's wife!

But that is not what Job did. Job said to his wife, "**... 'You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?' In all this Job did not sin with his lips.**"

Notice the different responses to this similar trial this husband and wife faced. She sinned with her lips and he praised the Lord.

You see, can you count it all joy as these trials come upon your life knowing that God has a reason, a purpose and we might not always understand what that is, but can we trust Him?

Paul said in Hebrews 11:1, and this is from The Amplified Bible, "**NOW FAITH is the assurance (the confirmation, the title deed) of the things [we] hope for, being the proof of things [we] do not see and the conviction of their reality [faith perceiving as real fact what is not revealed to the senses].**"

And Paul said in Romans 8:28, **“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”**

The Amplified Bible puts this verse like this, **“We are assured and know that [God being a partner in their labor] all things work together and are [fitting into a plan] for good to and for those who love God and are called according to [His] design and purpose.”**

How many things work together for good for those who love the Lord? Is it most things, many things, a lot of things, a few things?

No, it is **“all”** things work together for good and *ALL* means *ALL!* The question is, “Do you believe it?” Because if you do, you will count it all joy when you fall into various trials!

I like the way that Warren Wiersbe put it in his commentary on James. He said, “Our values determine our evaluations. If we value comfort more than character, then trials will upset us. If we value the material and physical more than the spiritual, we will not be able to ‘count it all joy.’ If we live only for the present and forget the future, the trials will make us bitter not better.” You see, perspective is everything!

Let me put this into perspective for you because if we encounter trials in our life, and we will, I think we will be able to get through them because we have the correct perspective of things.

Paul said in Romans 8:18-25, **“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.”**

Now as we read this I think we believe it *UNTIL* we are in the midst of a trial and it seems like it will never end! But Paul wants us to have a correct perspective of the situation.

Even if the trial lasts a lifetime, when you compare that with eternity, what is ahead, there is no comparison. But, again, when you are going through a trial it is hard to even think about eternity because it feels like that is how long this trial will last. It won't, get refocused, get your eyes on the Lord and rest in Him and His Word!

So, we have looked at two important points here so far. First of all, we looked at how we are to respond as we go through various trials, ***COUNT IT ALL JOY!***

We also looked at this second point regarding ***THE TESTING OF OUR FAITH!***

We are going to now look at the third point that James brings out here and that is ***THE RESULTS OF THAT TESTING!***

Remember, the idea here is that ***WHEN*** we fall into various trials, not if, we need to know that God is working.

The Greek word for **“knowing”** is GINOSKO, (ghin-ocē'-ko) and it speaks of knowing something more than just information or facts, but from a personal experience.

You see, it is trusting in God in the present situation I am facing knowing how He has taken care of me in the past, how He was with me then. It is that past experience with God that



then gives me confidence now because I have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, I know that by experience, firsthand experience!

I like the way that Isaiah 33:6 puts it. Isaiah tells us, **“Wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times, And the strength of salvation; The fear of the LORD is His treasure.”**

You see, it is knowing the truths of God, and then applying them to your life otherwise your faith is empty.

God is testing our faith, seeing that it is real, helping us to grow. And please understand that God knows all about our faith, thus, these trials are for us, not for Him. These trials will show us what is in our own heart.

Now this may shock some of you, but faith is not grown through trials, it is tested through trials! Remember what Paul said regarding faith and how it grows in Romans 10:17, **“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”**

Our faith grows as we read God’s Word, as we apply God’s Word to our lives and then the evidence of our faith is seen in how we endure trials. God is showing us what is inside of us, what we are made of you might say!

Notice though, what faith produces in our lives. James tells us that God is producing **“patience”** in our lives as we go through these trials!

This comes from the Greek word, HUMPOMONE, (hoop-om-on-ay’) and it speaks of active endurance.

This Greek word comes from two Greek words: *hupo* (under) and *meno* (to stay, abide, remain).

So, this word basically means, “to remain under.” And the picture is that of someone who is under a heavy load and they choose to stay there instead of trying to escape!

Thus, trials produce endurance or patience in our lives. And each time we face a trial, as we endure through it, our endurance will be strengthened, it will grow as we learn to depend more upon God and less upon our own strength.

You see, being steadfast, immovable in a trial just shows that we trust in the Lord and His promises to us.

Think of long distance running. You just can’t go out and run 26.2 miles without training. And as you train you will be pushing yourself more and more. You will endure pain, but you press on for the goal, to finally be able to finish the race and not just finish it but to finish it with joy that you were able to complete a Marathon – 26.2 miles.

James is saying the same is true in our race for Jesus. You see, trials subject us to some pain but it’s designed by the Holy Spirit (our ‘Trainer’) to build our endurance so that we finish the race He has set before us.

Paul, in Hebrews 12:1-4 put it this way, **“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 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 has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.”**

As you go through trials, look to men and women of faith to encourage you.

Let go of those things that are weighing you down.

Put off those sins that are trapping you.

Run the race to win. The race of faith as you keep your eyes upon Jesus, the Author, the One who set the trail for us to follow. And the Finisher of our faith, the One who will see us through to the end!

Trials, difficulties will come our way, keep your eyes heavenward looking to the joy that we will have when we go to be with our Lord, when we are taken up into glory. Don't give in, don't give up, strive and fight to the finish line and remember, eternal life, abundant life does not begin when we get to heaven, it begins right now as we walk with our Lord!

It is as David said in Psalm 40:1-3, **"I waited patiently for the LORD; And He inclined to me, And heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, And established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth - Praise to our God; Many will see it and fear, And will trust in the LORD."**

Trials in our lives help us to grow, to mature in the faith, to develop perseverance or endurance.

Think of a butterfly. While it is in the chrysalis and struggling to get out, if you went over and helped it out, liberating it from this difficulty that it was in, that butterfly would be hurt by your actions. You see, it would destroy its life and it would never be able to soar through the sky. The difficulty, the struggle in getting out of the chrysalis was needed it for it to mature and the same is true in our lives as Christians.

We even see this with children. If we came alongside them and every time they faced difficulty, trouble and helped them out, they would never grow up knowing how to handle situations. Now I am not saying we don't help our children out, we do. But there comes a time when they must learn to fly like an eagle by getting out of the nest and learning how to deal with the difficulties of life!

Dick Seume put it like this,

Life on earth would not be worth much if every source of irritation were removed. Yet most of us rebel against the things that irritate us, and count as heavy loss what ought to be rich gain. We are told that the oyster is wiser; that when an irritating object, like a bit of sand, gets under the "mantle" of his shell, he simply covers it with the most precious part of his being and makes of it a pearl. The irritation that it was causing is stopped by encrusting it with the pearly formation. A true pearl is therefore simply a victory over irritation. Every irritation that gets into our lives today is an opportunity for pearl culture. The more irritations the devil flings at us, the more pearls we may have. We need only to welcome them and cover them completely with love, that most precious part of us, and the irritation will be smothered out as the pearl comes into being. What a store of pearls we may have, if we will!

- Lehman Strauss, James, Your Brother, p. 12

So as these trials come upon your life, don't run away from them. That is the easy thing to do but it will never help you mature in the faith. As I was growing up we had a saying that we are to attack the problem head on! Exactly, learn from it, grow from it, mature from those things that come upon your life! You can't run away from them because, as you do, no matter how far you run, that trial will come up again and you will have to deal with it!

Let me share this with you, it was from a Devotional that I am reading. It said,

Many people have a view of the Christian life that is excessively idealistic. They think it should be one uninterrupted series of mountaintop experiences. They read Christian books and magazines and hear personal testimonies of dramatic events and conclude that this is all of life.

In their dream-world, there are no problems, heartaches, trials, or perplexities. There is no hard work, no daily routine, no monotony. All is Cloud 9. When they don't find their life fitting this pattern, they feel discouraged, disillusioned, and deprived.

The true facts are these. Most of the Christian life is what G. Campbell Morgan calls "the way of plodding perseverance in the doing of apparently small things." This is the way I have found it. There has been a full share of menial tasks, of long hours of disciplined study, of service without apparent results. At times the question has arisen, "Is anything really being accomplished?" Just then the Lord would drop some token of encouragement, some wonderful answer to prayer, some clear word of guidance. And I would be strengthened to go on for a while longer.

The Christian life is a long-distance race, not a 50-yard dash, and we need endurance to run in it. It is important to start well, but what really counts is the endurance that enables us to finish in a blaze of glory.

Enoch will always have an honored place in the annals of endurance. He walked with God – think of it – for 300 years (Gen. 5:22). But we need not think that those were years of undiluted glamour or uninterrupted thrill. In a world like ours, it was inevitable that he should have his shares of trials, perplexities, and even persecutions. But he did not grow weary in well doing. He endured to the end.

If you are ever tempted to quit, remember the words of Hebrews 10:36 (NEB), "***You need endurance if you are to do God's will and win what He has promised.***"

A noble life is not a blaze  
Of sudden glory won,  
But just an adding up of days,  
In which God's will is done.

- William MacDonald, One Day at a Time, p. 16

And that will lead us to our last point that is found in James 1:4, "**But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect [mature] and complete, lacking nothing.**" Our fourth point is this, all these trials that we face are, ***LEADING TO MATURITY!***

What is the intended goal of these trials in our lives? That we may be "**perfect**" and "**complete.**"

The word "**perfect**" is better translated "**mature.**" We are growing up in the Lord, maturing in the faith and moving towards an intended goal!

What is that intended goal? That we are "**complete.**" It has the idea of being "fully equipped." In other words, the trials you are going through right now are preparing you for the trials that are coming. You are learning to trust more and more in the Lord!

Peter tells us in I Peter 5:10, "**But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.**"

As patience or endurance grows in our lives the finished result is maturity!

Think of it like this. As we face trials with joy we do so because of the faith we have in God and His Word, that He is good, that there is no darkness in Him at all!

The result of that is endurance or perseverance in our lives and as that grows it will reach its goal of maturing us fully in the faith – we will be all that God wants us to be!

I am sorry to say that this is one of the main reasons many Christians never really grow up. They never exercise enough patience (they don't hang in there long enough) to give God time to work in their trials so as to build their faith. They are on the run every time the heat is turned up!

William MacDonald put it like this,

“Sometimes when problems come we become desperate and use frantic means to cut short the trial. Without consulting the Lord as to His purposes in the matter . . . By doing this, we actually may be thwarting God's program in our lives. And it is just possible that we may have to undergo a longer trial in the future before His particular purpose is realized in us. We should not short-circuit the development of endurance in our lives. By cooperating with God we will become mature, well-rounded Christians, lacking in none of the graces of the Spirit.”

- William MacDonald

Remember what I said as we opened up our study. The words of Warren Wiersbe as he wrote,

“These Christians simply were not growing up. This gives us a hint as to the basic theme of this letter: *the marks of maturity in the Christian life*. James used the word *perfect* several times, a word that means “mature, complete”. By “a perfect man” (James 3:2) James did not mean a sinless man, but rather one who is mature, balanced - grown-up.

Spiritual maturity is one of the greatest needs in churches today. Too many churches are playpens for babies instead of workshops for adults. The members are not mature enough to eat the solid spiritual food that they need, so they have to be fed on milk (Heb. 5:11–14). Just look at the problems James dealt with and you can see that each of them is characteristic of little children: Impatience in difficulties (1:1–4); Talking but not living the truth (2:14); No control of the tongue (3:1); Fighting and coveting (4:1) and Collecting material “toys” (5:1)”

- Warren Wiersbe

Here is the challenge to each of us.

***THAT WE WOULD COUNT IT ALL JOY IN THE TRIALS THAT COME OUR WAY!***

***THAT WE UNDERSTAND THAT TRIALS COME UPON OUR LIVES TO TEST OUR FAITH!***

***THAT ALL THAT WE GO THROUGH ARE FOR THE PURPOSE OF PRODUCING RESULTS IN OUR LIVES, THAT WE ENDURE TILL THE END!***

***AND ALL THAT GOD IS DOING IS LEADING TO MATURITY AND A COMPLETENESS IN OUR LIVES!***

Let me close with this for you to think about. We are told,

F. B. Meyer explained it this way: “A bar of iron worth \$2.50, when wrought into horseshoes is worth \$5. If made into needles it is worth \$175. If into penknife blades it is worth \$1,625. If made into springs for watches it is worth \$125,000. What a ‘trial by fire’ that bar must undergo to be worth this! But the more it is manipulated, and the more it is hammered and passed through the heat, beaten, pounded, and polished, the greater its value.”

Christian, are you wondering about the trials through which you are passing? With impatient heart are you saying, "How long, O Lord?" The heat of the flame and the blows of the hammer are necessary if you are to be more than an unpolished, rough bar of iron. God's all-wise plan, though it calls for the fire, produces the valuable watch spring of maturity. His very best for your life has behind it His perfect timing. - P. R. V.

- Our Daily Bread, February 23

May we never forget that! God is at work in our lives because He loves us!

Thus, **"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."** James 1:2-4.