

# Wiseguy

Studies in the Book of James

Text

James 1:2-4, 12

Topic

James tells us that we should cultivate joy when trials befall us

Title

*"Joy r Us"*

Introduction

My iPhone wants to be helpful so it frequently auto-corrects the words I'm typing.

All too often, auto-correct fails. In fact there is a world of auto-correct fails on the internet. Like this one:

Hey my grandpa is in the hospital. I hope he gets better. :(

I hope he dies.

What???

Does; I hope he does.

Or this one:

I'm going to get a sandwich BRB

Okay. My whole office is complaining because I have tuna in my underwear.

Um. I can't exactly say I blame them.

LOL. I meant tuna in my Tupperware!

English can be a hard language, even without help from auto-correct. Take homonyms for example, which are words spelt and pronounced like another word but with a different meaning.

The word "hail" (h-a-i-l) can be a description of somebody or something as being special or good; or it can mean the small balls of ice that fall as rain; or it can mean to call to somebody to gain their attention.

Exactly how we define a word can make all the difference in understanding what is being said. That is no where more true than in the Bible.

The word we need to be careful to define today is "joy." It will make all the difference between what James says about joy being either a *bummer*, or a *blessing*.

I'll organize my thoughts about joy around two points: #1 You Cultivate Joy That Counts, and #2 You Anticipate Joy That Is Crowned.

## #1 You Cultivate Joy That Counts

(v2-4)

When I was first saved, someone told me that joy was **Jesus... Others... You.**

That's nice, I guess; I should always put Jesus and others ahead of me. But that isn't how the Bible says joy is produced.

Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit; we're told it is in Galatians chapter five.

Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, **joy**, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,  
Gal 5:23 gentleness, self-control...

Since it is compared to fruit, I can assume that joy is cultivated, over time, as I abide in Jesus. It is a by-product of my walking with Him, ripening more-and-more as I head homeward to Heaven, where my joy will be full.

The right environment to cultivate joy - its garden, you might say - is trials. Abiding with Jesus, in times of trials - joy blooms.

I would paraphrase this, "consider your trials the means by which God cultivates the fruit of joy."

William MacDonald said, "the fruit of the Spirit cannot be produced when it is all sunshine. There must be rain and dark clouds."

If you garden, you know there are certain flowers that only bloom at night. Evening primrose is one, and is strongly scented when it does.

It's in trials joy blooms, giving off a strong scent of Jesus.

Jas 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,

James calls them "brethren." It's one of his favorite words, and it means he considered them a part of his own spiritual family. They were definitely born-again.

James was writing, specifically, to Jewish believers who had been scattered from Jerusalem out into the larger world on account of persecution.

It was a severe trial, and it was accompanied by many other trials - depending on exactly where they ended up.

"Trials" mean adverse outward circumstances. It does not refer to inward solicitation to sin - or what we would call "temptation."

James will deal with temptation later in this chapter.

Trials can be things that befall everyone, believer and nonbeliever alike; and they can be things that befall believers on account of your testimony about Jesus.

Christians, therefore, have *double* (at least potentially) the trouble that others have.

"Fall into" is very descriptive. Jesus used it of the man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and "fell among" thieves. It pictures the man as being surrounded by the thieves on all sides, with no way of escape, and thus "falling" victim to their assaults.

"**When** you fall into" lets you know trials are unavoidable. You will, at many points in your Christian walk, be surrounded by adversities, afflictions, and calamities that are hard to bear.

You know why you will? Because the world we live in is fallen, dominated by sin and death; and while in it, we are assaulted by unseen but malevolent supernatural enemies who seek only to rob, kill, and destroy.

In that sense, each of us is walking on the road leading to the New Jerusalem but, along the way, we will be surrounded by supernatural thieves on all sides.

Or, if you prefer, we will be attacked by supernatural beasts. The apostle Paul once said, "I have fought with **beasts** at Ephesus" (First Corinthians 15:2). He probably meant demons.

Satan is described as a beast - as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

Isn't our Lion more powerful? Didn't Jesus, the "Lion of the tribe of Judah," defeat Satan, sin, and death on the Cross.

Didn't He cry out, "It is finished!?"

Yes, He did. It **is** finished - *but it isn't over*.

You see it in warfare all the time. A decisive battle is fought, and won. The war is effectively over. But the enemy fights on.

Confederate General Robert E. Lee's surrender of his Army of Northern Virginia on April 9, 1865, marked the end of the Civil War, but not its official conclusion. At least six other battles were fought after Appomattox.

Jesus rose from the dead, and He ascended into Heaven. He is seated at the right hand of God - in the place of victory.

The devil fights on.

At some point in the future, "the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms" of Jesus Christ. He will return, in His glorious Second Coming, and incarcerate the devil and his demons for a thousand years.

In the mean time, Satan remains the ruler and god of this world.

You are suddenly surrounded by adversities, afflictions, and calamities. How do you respond?

I couldn't help but picture a scene from *The Last Samurai*. Tom Cruise is surrounded by enemies who mean to assault him. In his mind, in slow motion, he dispatches them, one-by-one. Then the scene plays out in real time... and it's pretty cool.

I think we approach trials that way. We expect to have the skills to dispatch them quickly, and go on about our business.

It rarely plays-out that way. The enemies either won't stay down, or they just keep coming.

James will say, in the next verse, "let patience have its perfect work." Then, in verse twelve, he will use the word, "endures."

Patience... Endurance... *It sounds like we are going to be in the trials longer than we'd like.*

God is perfectly capable of delivering us from the trial. It's OK to ask Him to. But most of the time, in the age in which we are living, the trials run their course.

It's strategic; it's part of our victory, intended to reveal the strength of the Spirit-filled life over living without the Spirit.

There is no better example of this than the apostle Paul. He was suffering a severe trial. He called it a thorn in his flesh, and "the messenger of Satan." He sought the Lord to remove his affliction.

The Lord said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (Second Corinthians 12:9).

Then Paul surrendered to God's choice by saying, "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

Like it or not, God is most revealed when in our weaknesses He is made to appear strong. It is not weakness when God chooses to not heal you; it is strength - or it is intended to reveal a strength that can only be the result of God in you.

Superior weaponry usually means victory. It's just that we consider things like healing and exorcism to be superior, when, in fact, they are not. You see in the ministry of Jesus that those weapons did not lead to massive revival.

We read in First Corinthians 1:27-28,

1Co 1:27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;  
1Co 1:28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are

Weakness... Baseness... Despised. Those are the superior weapons God has in His arsenal, by which we are assured victory.

That brings us to the phrase, "count it all joy." Does that mean I make a choice to rejoice in my trial? To start praising the Lord?

Maybe; but I think something else is being said.

"Count" is a word that encourages us to determine how we are going to think about our trials. It suggests a certain mindset we ought to adopt about our trials.

We should consider trials "joy." Let me attempt a working definition of "joy."

**Joy is the settled assurance that God is at work conforming me into the image of Jesus; it is the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to work together for the good; and, as a result of those two things, it is my determined choice to surrender to the will of God in every situation.**

I believe, on paper, that God is doing a work in my life. I believe that He has begun a good work in me, and that He has promised to complete it - despite my frequent lack of cooperation. I believe that one day I will awake in the likeness of Jesus.



I see plenty of examples in the Bible of God keeping His word to work all things together for good. By His providence, God sees to it His plans and promises come to pass.

I want to surrender to His will, as that which is best and perfect for me. And I always think that I will, when given the choice.

BUT I cannot know if I really own these things *unless* and *until* I am in a trial and see my spiritual reaction.

**I won't know if my spiritual garden is producing "joy" without trials.** I can't have a settled assurance God is at work, and a quiet confidence that all things work together for good, unless those beliefs are tested by circumstances that seem otherwise.

I think I do pretty well believing God is doing a work in me; and that eventually all things will work together for good.

Most of us are successful in believing those things in our trials; at least, we are successful at the beginning of our trials.

Surrendering to the will of God - that's the place I stumble. I might start out by surrendering, but if the trial seems to linger, as so many trials do, I can lose my joy by becoming impatient:

- I quit seeing it as something that is changing me into the image of Jesus - especially if I'm going through the trial badly.
- I don't see how it could possibly ever work together for good.
- I try every which way to get out of it.

James must have experienced that impatience as well, because he addresses it next.

Jas 1:3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.  
Jas 1:4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Here are those verses in the New Living Translation:

3 For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. 4 So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

James refers to the "trials" as tests of faith. It's a different way of describing the same thing.

They are not tests to see you fail, but so He can produce fruit. But the Lord needs your cooperation.

You should not cave-in to impatience. Keep on believing that joy is being cultivated.

Patience in trials (testing) gives joy the greatest chance of maturing.

God is working to "perfect" you; to "complete" you; trials are a big part of how He is able to do it. One day, you will "lack nothing," having been resurrected or raptured to stand in the presence of God.

Before we move on to our second point, let me ask this question: Does "consider it all joy" mean that I cannot weep or grieve or be sorrowful in my trials?

Does it mean I must express joy by rejoicing in my circumstances?

The Pixar film, *Inside Out*, featured characters who represented various emotions in the life of a little girl named Riley. One of them was Joy. In her bio, we read,

Joy's goal has always been to make sure Riley stays happy. She is lighthearted, optimistic and determined to find the fun in every situation. Joy sees challenges in Riley's life as opportunities, and the less happy moments as hiccups on the way back to something great. As long as Riley is happy, so is Joy.

Is that what we are to do - stay happy? One commentator said you must make "the choice to rejoice," no matter how severe the trial.

Before you agree, let's look at the two people in the Bible who teach us the most about joy.

Jesus is the first example of joy. He was filled with the Holy Spirit; or we might say, He had the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

His joy must have been 100%, never wavering; He expressed perfect joy.

Yet He wept on several occasions:

- He wept at the grave of His friend, Lazarus.
- He wept over Jerusalem, for the disbelief of its citizens.

One of His names is "the Man of Sorrows."

Closer to us, but still more spiritual, is the apostle Paul. He actually said, "rejoice in the Lord always." But he also said to "weep with those who weep."

He didn't say we should tell them to quit weeping; or that they should make "the choice to rejoice."

I can cultivate joy no matter that my circumstances make me weep.

Don't burden believers who are in trials by insisting they smile. Encourage them to endure - knowing that they are becoming more like Jesus, and that all things work together, ultimately, for good.

## #2 You Anticipate Joy That Is Crowned

(v12)

If you are explaining something to someone, do you ever forget to say something important, then bring it up a little later?

James does something like that in chapter one. In verse five, he starts a new subject; but then he remembers he has something more to say about trials... And he brings it up in verse twelve.

**Jas 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.**

This is a little confusing to us because we are reading an English translation of what James wrote. The word "temptation" should be translated "trials." James will talk about temptations - solicitations to evil. But here, once again, he was talking about enduring adverse circumstances.

He was returning to his previous thoughts about trials. He wanted to finish his point about enduring.

First of all, you'll be rewarded for enduring by being "blessed."  
What might that mean?

One thing it might mean is that you will be brought into a closer fellowship with Jesus. Someone has expressed it in a poem:

*I could not do without Thee,  
I cannot stand alone,  
I have no strength or goodness,  
No wisdom of my own:  
But Thou, beloved Savior,  
Art all-in-all to me;  
And weakness will be power,  
If leaning hard on Thee.*

*I could not do without Thee,  
The years are fleeting fast,  
And soon in solemn silence  
The river must be passed:  
But Thou wilt never leave me;  
And though the waves run high,  
I know Thou wilt be near me,  
And whisper, "It is I."*

We are "blessed" to know Jesus in new, deeper ways when He is near us in our trials. He whispers, "It is I." As we "endure," He draws nearer-and-nearer.

The present tense of "endure" denotes that we bravely and steadfastly remain under the trying ordeal until it is ended.

It doesn't mean that we will never sink in defeat under a certain trial. We will; we do. Failure can be repented of and reversed.

James portrays us as enduring the trials and refusing to give up.

Enduring trials is our lot in life. What James said next looks beyond our lives on the earth, to eternity.

"... when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."

James reminds us that we each have a personal appointment, in the future, with Jesus. If you are a believer, you have eternal life as a gift. If you die, you will be absent from your body, but present with the Lord.

You might not die. Jesus promised to return for His church, to take us to Heaven; and that means we will not all die. Those who are alive at His coming will be raptured.

Afterwards, we will each "receive the crown of life." It could be a reference to being in Heaven. We will receive the consummation - the crowning moment - of eternal life.

It is most likely referring to a specific "crown" that will be given each of us. We do read, in the Revelation, that in Heaven, the church has crowns which we cast at the Lord's feet in adoration and worship.

Eternal life, and rewards in Heaven, are "promised to those who love Him." Was James establishing a scale of "love," and suggesting that we are falling short?

Was he saying that, at the Reward Seat of Jesus, our love-quotient will be revealed - sort of like a credit score?

I think "those who love Him" is simply a description of believers. It's another title for Christians. Of course we love Him Who first loved us. We are in a love relationship.

We can, for sure, leave our first love; Jesus warned us about that in His letter to the church at Ephesus, in the Revelation. Every relationship needs work.

You've heard it said, and probably said to someone yourself, that the Bible is God's love-letter to believers. If that's so, why do we always read it as if it were God's indictment of believers, with us always falling short and thereby disappointing Him?

"Those who love Him" - that's us, as opposed to nonbelievers. Rather than reprove you for not loving Jesus sufficiently, I remind you how blessed you are to be in a love relationship with your Savior.

He's coming for you; and until He does, He is with you, and He is working on you - especially in your deepest sorrow.