

James 1:1–18

Why and How Trials Are All Joy for Believers

Thursday, December 21, 2023 • Read James 1:1–18

Questions from the Scripture text: Who wrote this (v1)? Of Whom is he a slave? To whom is it written? What is their current condition? What does he call them in v2? What should they count joy? How much of it should they count joy? What do these trials produce (v3)? What does patience work (v4)? What will they end up lacking? What might they currently lack (v5)? What should they do about that? What is God like? What will His response be to their request for work-perfecting patience? How mustn't they ask (v6)? What is the person like, who is unsure that he actually wants God's work to be perfected (v6–8)? What must a lowly brother glory in (v9)? What must the rich glory in (v10)? Why (v10–11)? Who is blessed (v12a, cf. v2)? What will happen to him at the end of these trials (v12b)? What will he receive (v12c)? To whom has the Lord promised it? What mustn't one say in trials (v13)? What can't happen to God? What doesn't He do? How do we experience temptation to sin—by what are we drawn away and enticed (v14)? To what does desire give birth (v15)? What does sin bring forth? What are they in danger of (v16)? Rather than enticement to sin, what is actually coming from God (v17)? What does this verse call Him? What, in His character, makes it certain that this goodness will never be interrupted by an enticement to sin? What has He done to believers, in this invariable goodness (v18)? What role do they have in the display of His goodness?

How should Christians respond to trials? James 1:1–18 prepares us for the second serial reading in public worship on the Lord's Day. In these eighteen verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **believers should respond to varying trials with all joy, because of the invariable goodness of God, in Whose providence those trials come.**

All joy. James, the half-brother (in Mary) and brother (through union by the Spirit) of Jesus writes this letter (v1a). The church is described as the “12 tribes scattered”—the church is in exile, not yet gathered to her Home (v1b). But the Lord, Who brings them through “various trials” (many different kinds of trials, v2), does so only, always, continually—invariably(!)—for their good (v17).

The type of trial varies (v2), but the perfect goodness of the Fatherly goodness of God toward them never does (v17). He made a statement about Himself, and how He rules from the heavens, by the lights that He put there in Gen 1:14–19. There would be no time at which a light, which He has given in His goodness, would not shine in the exactly appropriate amount upon His creatures. But it is in the perfection of His working, as He brings many sons home to glory, that He makes steady (but spectacular) display of His invariable goodness.

God's sovereign work, even as He sanctifies us, is the key to “all joy.” It is all from God and all for good.

Perfecting faith. This is only true for believers. We can't say that “this trial is for good, in order to bring out perseverance (v3), wisdom (v5), and more faith (v6)... unless we are believers to begin with. It is the believer who, having had these things brought out by the trials (same word as “temptation” in v12), has proved himself and is approved before all. These are all proofs of being in the same condition as that in which we find the man in Rom 8:28—loving God (end of v12). Those who are “called according to His purpose” must surely “receive the crown of life.”

But there is no crown without crosses. Thankfully, while God is invariably good, believers are not static. They are dynamic. They grow. God works on them. We will not grow in patience/perseverance without pain (v2–3). We will not grow in wisdom without going through those challenges that make us to cry out for more of it (v4–5). God gave us the faith in the first place. He knows precisely what to bring us through, in order to perfect that faith.

Purifying priorities. There is a foolish way of reading v6–7, as if there is some sort of power of self-assuredness that guarantees that we can name whatever we wish and obtain it from God. Ironically, this is almost exactly the double-mindedness that this passage warns us against.

v8–10 helps us understand what the “doubting” is in v6. The word in v6 refers to a divided mind, which v8 also calls a “double” mind. This is referring to the one whose prayer in trial is not for things like patience, faith, wisdom, and love, but rather to be exalted and rich in this world.

What does the single-minded man pray for? He learns from Scripture what those good things are that the good God has designed for those who love him. And those are the things that the single-minded man prays for. He must not pray with a divided heart, hoping to have those things that are prioritized by the flesh, rather than faith.

But we also find other things coming out of us, when we go through trials: evil. This is because much of the flesh (and its desires) remains in us. It is exceedingly evil to blame God, when He sends us a trial in His goodness to sanctify us, and we respond not in the Spirit but in the flesh. When we say something like “that situation made me _____” (fill in the blank with any sinful response), then we are the fool in v13 who says, “I am tempted by God.” But God and evil are diametrically opposed. If any evil comes out of us, we have responded to the goodness of God with the evil that comes from within.

So, trials advance sanctification in at least four ways. First, trials bring out what virtue the Lord has already produced in us, encouraging us about His work in us. Second, trials give us opportunity to identify what is lacking and ask God for it. Third, trials bring out what remains from our former nature, so that we can target it. Fourth, trials remind us that we are not yet at that glorious destination to which the Lord is taking us. He brought us forth according to His will, so that our wills might be more conformed to His, as we align ourselves with the world to come (v18).

What different sorts of trials are you going through now? How has your certainty about the unchangeable goodness of God to you helped you put the trial(s) in the correct perspective? How is your praying, within those trials, reflecting the priorities that we learn in this passage? What good have you seen the Lord produce in you? What sin has been exposed? How are you targeting it?

Sample prayer: Lord, thank You for Your unchangeable, invariably perfect goodness toward us! Forgive us for how we have chafed against various trials that You have sent in that goodness. Rather than seeking that sanctification that You lovingly give us, we are often double-minded, aiming at comfort and glory in this world. We have even blamed circumstances for sin, not realizing that this is really blaming You Yourself for our sin. O, forgive us such dreadful wickedness! Thank You for giving to us Your own Son, our Lord Jesus, to be all of our righteousness before You. Grant that Your Spirit, by Whom You have brought us forth, would keep conforming us to Christ's image, that we might prove to be the firstfruits of the new creation, we ask through Christ Himself, AMEN!

Suggested songs: ARP197 “Christian Unity” or TPH509 “Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me”

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. PLEASE BE AWARE of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via hopewellarp.org)

James chapter 1, verses 1 through 18. These are God's words. James, a bond servant of god and of the lord jesus christ. To the 12 tribes, which are scattered abroad. Greetings. My brother, and Count it all joy. When you fall into various trials. Knowing that the testing of your faith, produces patience.

But let patients have, it's perfect work. That you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of god. Who gives to all liberally and without reproach? And it will be given to But let him ask in faith with no doubting. For he, who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

For let not that man. Suppose he will receive anything from the lord. He is a double-minded, man. Unstable in all his ways. Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation. But the rich in his, Humiliation. Because as a flower of the field, he will pass away. For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat.

Then it withers the grass. That's flower falls in this beautiful appearance parishes. So the retroman also will fade away and is pursuits. Blessed is the man who endors temptation. For when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life. Which the lord has promised to those who love him.

But no one say when he is tempted, i'm tempted by god for god. Cannot be tempted by evil. Nor does he himself tempt anyone? But each one is tempted when he has drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then when desire has conceived gives birth to sin. And sin when it is full grown.

Brings forth, death. Do not deceived my blood brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above. And comes down from the father of lights with him.

There is no variation or shadow of turning Of his own. Will he brought us forth by the word of truth? That we might be a kind of first trips.

Of his creatures.

Amen, that since it's reading of gods, Inspired and inherent word.

The James who wrote this was. The half brother of Jesus. According to the flesh, through Mary. But it is the full brother of Jesus. By the Holy Spirit. And the union that he has with Christ, the only begotten son, And therefore, in relation to the Father, Whom he calls even here in verse 17.

The Father of lights. And yet he is happy to be a Slave of God. And the slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. Recognizing, and thinking of things according to Their heavenly realities. No doubt in his sinfulness. Growing up with Jesus as the big brother in the home. There are many times.

Um, that he resent it. His holy and righteous and perfect. Older brother in the house. But that is a way of fleshly thinking. Then now he is glad To be his slave. We are still in the world. And this world is not our home. There's James addresses this to all Christians.

He refers to them as the 12 tribes. Who are scattered abroad? Probably meaning. The 12 who are the spiritual descendants not of the patriarchs nest so much. As of the apostles. And yet identifying that the people of God are not in their homeland that this is a time of exile.

And so, he starts his letter. Addressing the issue. Of trials. And really tells us is that we should consider our trials. All joy. Why Would we count it all? Joy, not just a little bit of joy. Not just pretty joyous. My brethren counted all joy. When you fall into various trials.

Well, the reason why in whatever type of trial, The word various meaning, many kinds. Of trials. The reason why in every type of trial, we should still can't enjoy. Is because while the trials may vary the God in his provenance, We come into the trials does not vary. And so the various trials in verse 2, have their counterpart.

With the Father of lights with whom, there is no variation in verse 17. So yes, we may have many kinds of trials, various trials. But God is invariably good. And he is invariably doing us good. And so the, the thing that enables us to Count it all joy. Is focusing on.

To the Lord is Him. He has made us to be to himself. His children. He is the God of light, but he is to us the Father of light to me, is made us to be to himself as children. And what he is doing in us. Perfecting his work.

He's already brought us forth by the word of truth, as verse 18 says. But the work of making us into the air, conforming us to the image of the Lord Jesus. This is a work that is ongoing. We are the first fruits of the new creation. This is a time of being scattered abroad.

This is a time of exile. Uh, this world very much is not Or home. Although, we must act in this world according to The character of our heavenly Father. Because this world is his just as much as the new evidence and the new earth. Are his. But we may count it all joy because he is invariably good and he is invariably doing this good and specifically, He is preparing us.

For glory. And so he refers to the trials and verse 2 as The testings of faith in verse 3. And that which produces perseverance. And that, which Uh, perfects the work. Is the testing. So, it's not the Untested faith. That perseveres We actually need pain. In order to learn perseverance.

We actually need to. Have difficulty. In order to see our need for wisdom, we need to be brought To an end of ourselves. The Lord wants to bring us. Is going to bring us is bringing us. To a place where as verse 4 says, at the end, we lack nothing.

We can hardly even imagine what that would be like. To lack nothing. To have perfect faith. And perfect perseverance and perfect wisdom. And perfect. Love. Um, To draw from. The. With end of verse 12, We, we can't even imagine what that will be like. But we may know that that is what God is doing.

And therefore, we Mustn't, resist or chafe against. The wisdom and love and goodness of God that never changes. Even as he brings us through trial. Because we know that he is bringing us to the place. Where we lack nothing. And so whether it's more faith that we need. Lord, I believe help my unbelief.

Or more perseverance. That I need which is really the word that is being translated, patients the end of verse 3, Lord, give me to persevere. Give me to endure. Or if it's more wisdom that we need. Which is really an overarching word for all the things that we need to live, according to the fear of the Lord.

Has the spirit, makes us skillful in life as the spirit. Enables us to live in a way that responds rightly to the reality of God, and the relationship that God has given us with himself. That's wisdom. And so faith is a sort of wisdom and patience as a sort of wisdom perseverance, sort of wisdom.

And, When he gives us the trials. He trains us in a dependence upon the Lord. Because the trial shows us what we lack. And makes us to cry out to him. In prayer, it provokes us to ask him. But verses 6 or 8, teach us. That we mustn't. Ask simply in order to be done with the trial.

No, we must prioritize. What the Lord prioritizes. Not the flesh. But the spirit, this is what it means when it says, let him ask in faith without uh with no doubting. The word for doubting or doubts in verse 6. Is a word that refers to having a divided mind.

And this is paired with in verse 8, The man who has a double mind, who is unstable. And we can see in the continuing application of it and versus nine through 11. What this double-mindedness or this divided mind would be. Uh, lowly brother who doesn't realize. That the low circumstances and the low state.

Through which the Lord has brought him. Is actually something to glorious. Because, Although God is bringing him through a low estate. He is bringing him to An exalted estate. And so, rather than the lowly brother, looking at his circumstances, looking at his current condition and saying, I sure wish I didn't have to go through this.

He should say. I am so glad That God knows exactly how to bring me. To that, which Christ has earned for me. And so the lowly brother, glorious in his exaltation. The rich. Brother. Glories in his humiliation. He doesn't say, oh, I am rich. I'm so comfortable. Look at how people admire me and honor me.

Now, he knows. That this is so much lower than that, which God is bringing him to, so he's not full of his current richness. He considers even the richness that he has now to be low by comparison to what God is bringing him to. And so he glories in his humiliation.

Even the pursuits that he That he pursues even those. Um, Pursuits of his in this world. He knows that they are going to fade away. And that his pursuit of them will fade away. And so whether poor or rich, they're not double-minded. They're single-minded. Aiming. At God's glory. Not only in what they do, but especially in what God does in them.

This is the prayer of faith. That verse 6 is talking about. Not a prayer that Self-assuredly asks, God for what we want. That's not faith. Faith is to have our minds formed

and confirmed. In whatever god says. And so to ask in faith, it's not like some Uh, power prayer or where?

Uh, where we are, really sure that we are going to get whatever god. Uh, whatever we want from god, no. To ask in faith is to submit to god's priorities and not be double-minded. Not be. Asking god. On the one hand, for the things that we know from the bible, we should really be asking for But on the other hand secretly, expressing our desire to god.

That he would bend his will to become and conformity with ours. Such a mind, such a man. Should not suppose as verse 7, that he will receive. From the lord. And so we're to consider all our trials, joy, Um, As the lord uses them to perfect to supply. Uh, what is lacking?

To finish his work. Perfect. His work verse 4. As he purifies our Priorities. And so, When we go through trials, seeing what god is doing and learning in our trials to conform our desires to his When we sin under trial, we must be very careful how we think about it.

What we say to ourselves about it. We know that we are going to send sadly. Because although we are not in our sin, we are now in christ. We are in the spirit. We are new creatures. We are new people. In the lord jesus yet. Their remains sin in us, fleshliness in us.

From our former nature. So, When in the midst of temptation, we sin we must not blame god for the evil that we do. Now, maybe we will not be so bold and brazen as to say, God. Tempted me to this evil. And that's what it's talking about when not when faith comes out and is proved by our trial.

The way that verse 12 describes but when evil comes out the way verse 13 describes. So he says let no one say when he has tempted, i'm tempted by god. For god. Cannot be tempted by evil. That's the key right there. For understanding what verse 13 is talking. That's Um, talking about when we say that god.

Is to blame. For our evil, because of what we responded to. But, When we respond to our circumstances with evil, God was not tempting us to evil. What was he doing? He who is a father of lights, he who Never misses any good gift or any. Perfect gift. The only things he brings into our lives are good gifts from him.

There are others who do evil to us. But even when others do evil to us, it is a good gift. From him. From god. And so, when we think with respect to the fallen creature, or when we were think with respect to even the evil creature, We? Uh, we may say they have done me evil.

But god is always ruling an overruling. Everything. And he has never once done us evil for a moment. In fact, he has never once for a moment, done us any thing less than the best possible? Good. And so, when we say, This circumstance, this situation made me. And then you fill in the blank, with whatever sent it is that we have committed.

We need to realize that what we're really saying. If we say the circumstance, made me sin. Is that god has tempted me to evil. Because there's no circumstance that we come into. That is a part from God's providence. It's not god. Who makes evil come out of us. It's evil.

That makes evil come out of us. It's our own Leftover desires from our former nature. Each one is tempted when he has drawn away by his own desires. And our own desire, produces sin. And we must not tolerate that sin because what the sin produce, Sin, produces death. And so, when sin comes out of us, Whether it's in a heated conversation or a difficult situation, and Sin comes out of us, we need to say, aha.

Look. That my remaining sin, which if it had its way would kill me. Well, i'm gonna kill it. God uses. His good trials that he brings us through for the perfecting of our faith. To rustle up the bushes and bring our sin out into the open expose itself so that we can target it.

Not so that we can excuse it. Not, so we could say, Well, you know, it was a really hard situation and You know, that's why i said no. No. I send because i still am a sinner. I still have sin in me. And god gave me that situation. So that i could see this in.

So that i could hate this in. So that i could kill this in. Because he's a good god. And he's always only. Doing is good. So those are several ways. In which trials are a blessing to us. They do bring out what virtue of the lord has already produced in us.

They do give us opportunity to identify what is lacking, so that we will feel our neediness of god our neediness of perseverance our neediness. Of wisdom, our neediness of Um, of faith, our neediness of more love. They do bring out what remains from our former nature so that we can identify or remaining sin.

And target it and kill it. And they do remind us. That we are being prepared. For another world, we were brought forth by the word of truth. To be the first fruits of his creatures. And he is still. Perfecting his work in us. And so it reminds us that our good god is still doing That good work.

Of preparing us for glory. So those are several ways. Um, Each of you. Have your own particular trials that You have gone through or are going through, And certainly if the Lord spares you you shall yet, go through. And, We pray that the holy spirit will help us. To see our trials in this way.

To receive them in the context of the providence. Of the god. Who has redeemed us for himself. Brought us forth, given us faith in christ. And has now perfecting his work in us. That we may be brought out of our exile. And brought home. To glory. Amen, let's pray.

Father, we thank you that. You are unto us a father of lights that? Uh, you have given Greater lights for one purpose and lesser lights. For another purpose, just as you have, Given us easier times of life for one purpose. And various trials, trials of many kinds. For another purpose, but always And your perfect goodness.

Which never stops. Shining down upon us. And so we pray that you would help us. Each of us and whatever particular trial. We are facing. To see how you are being good to us. And these Several ways that we have seen in this passage So that we may count it all joy.

Rather than being discouraged. And rest in you and rejoice over you. And respond to you. So help us. Oh lord, we ask in jesus name. Amen.