

Count It All Joy
James 1:2-3

James 1:2-3 reads, “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.”

As a whole the epistle of James is written with a focus upon the daily character and conduct of the believer. It is filled with imperative instructions, exhortations, and even correctives. James, the brother of Jesus (Galatians 1:19), was the leader among the pastoral leadership of the church at Jerusalem. (Acts 12:17; 15:13-21; 21:18; Galatians 1:19; 2:9) Therefore, as a pastor James originally wrote this epistle under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit to the Jewish believers who were scattered throughout the empire of Rome. His Holy Spirit inspired purpose was to provide pastoral counsel for a spiritually mature walk in the lives of these believers.

The opening matter about which this epistle provides pastoral counsel concerns the troubles, trials, and tribulations of our lives. Yet the truth of this opening passage does not simply give us words of comfort as we face the afflictions of this life. Rather, this opening passage confronts us with an instruction for our attitude as we face the afflictions of life. Grammatically the single sentence of **James 1:2-3** can be divided into three parts. First, there is the exhortational imperative of the main clause – “My brethren, count it all joy.” Then there is the contextual incident of the subordinate clause – “When ye fall into divers temptations.” Finally, there is the motivational information of the participial phrase – “Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.”

I. The *Universal Dilemma* of troubles, trials, and tribulations.

Brethren, in this life we all must face the universal dilemma of many troubles, trials, and tribulations. Throughout our lives we all must face “divers temptations.” (Note: the word “divers” is an older spelling of the word “diverse” with the “e” on the end.) Now, in this context the phrase “divers temptations” refers to the many, various trials and testings of our faith. In **verse 3** these “divers temptations” are described as “the trying of your faith.” These testings of our faith will be diverse. They will come against us from many different sources, in many different forms, on many different levels, and to many different degrees. They may be circumstantial problems, financial difficulties, physical weaknesses, mental troubles, emotional sorrows, spiritual struggles, divine chastenings, future uncertainties, relational conflicts, malicious persecutions, etc. In addition, every such testing, no matter the source, form, level, or degree, will carry with it a temptation to be weak in faith and to turn away from our Lord. In the troubles, trials, and tribulations of our lives, we will be tempted to yield unto such sinful attitudes as dependence upon ourselves, doubt of our Lord’s goodness, discouragement in our spiritual walk, weariness in well doing, anger and wrath in our spirit, bitterness and hatred against others, envy of others’ benefits, worry over our difficulties, complaint over our situation, disobedience against our Lord’s will, etc.

Furthermore, the “falling into” of this passage refers to that which we might encounter unexpectedly and unawares. Like the man who “fell among thieves” who were waiting in ambush, we “fall into” the many, various troubles, trials, and tribulations of this life. We

do not purposefully plan and pursue them; but in the path of our lives, they seem to lie in ambush along every step of the way. In fact, no matter how well we may prepare and plan, we will inevitably “fall into” these diverse temptations. In this passage we do not find the word of uncertain possibility “if,” but the word of inevitable probability “when.” It is not *if* we might fall into diverse temptations. Rather, it is *when* we will fall into diverse temptations.

Even so, Job’s friend Eliphaz declared the truth in **Job 5:7**, “Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” Just as many sparks fly forth from a fire, even so many troubles fly forth in our daily living. In addition, just as the passing sparks are quickly replaced by more sparks, even so the passing troubles of our lives are quickly replaced by more troubles. Yea, Job himself lamented in **Job 14:1**, “Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.” Even God’s own dear children must face troubles and tribulations; for in **John 16:33** our Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed, “In the world ye shall have tribulation.” Thus in **1 Peter 4:12** the exhortation is delivered unto us believers, saying, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.” It is the universal dilemma that in this life we must pass through many seasons of suffering and heaviness “through manifold temptations.” (**1 Peter 1:6**)

II. The *Required Demeanor* of “all joy” in our hearts.

So then, what is the right response that we are to have toward the many, various troubles, trials, and tribulations that we encounter in our lives? What is the attitude that the Lord our God desires for us to display toward these testings of our faith? What is the required demeanor that we are to have as we go through these troubles, trials, and tribulations? The imperative with which **James 1:2** begins gives answer, “My brethren, count it all joy.” This is the command of God’s Word -- “All joy.” In fact, in the original Greek the phrase “all joy” is located at the very beginning of the sentence, giving it the place of primary emphasis in the instruction. This is the demeanor that is required of us if we would walk pleasing unto the Lord our God -- “All joy.” This is not some passing moment of joy, or some half-hearted claim of joy. Rather, this is a spiritual fullness of joy in the manifold testing and trying of our faith. This is a willing acceptance, an uncomplaining endurance, a trusting patience, and a God-directed rejoicing in the trials of life.

Even so, in **Matthew 5:11-12** our Lord Jesus Christ pronounced the blessing and gave the instruction, “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” Again in **Luke 6:22-23** He proclaimed, “Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man’s sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.”

Yea, in **1 Peter 4:12-14** the exhortation is given, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be

revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.” Then **verse 16** adds, “Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.” Finally, in **2 Corinthians 12:9-10** the apostle Paul gave testimony, saying, “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

III. The *Purposeful Decision* of counting trials as “all joy.”

Now, certainly “all joy” is not our natural response to the troubles, trials, and tribulations of our lives. If we seek for this attitude of “all joy” within the response of our natural thoughts and emotions, we will not find it. Our thoughts and emotions do not naturally view the trials of life as enjoyable events. Thus a purposeful decision in obedience to our Lord is necessary. When we face any given trial, we must purposefully decide to “count it” as an “all joy” event. We must purposefully and obediently decide to regard and esteem that trial with “all joy,” not with hesitant resistance, but with heart-felt joyfulness.

IV. The *Divine Design* of testing and proving our faith.

Yet since this attitude of “all joy” toward the troubles, trials, and tribulations of our lives is not natural to our thoughts and emotions, where shall we find the ability to respond in this manner? This ability can only be found in our Lord as we set our faith wholly in Him. We must know and understand that this is the divine design in the “divers temptations” that we encounter in our lives -- to try and to purify the depth of our faith in Him. From the Lord’s perspective, the many, various troubles, trials, and tribulations of life are all intended for the “trying of your faith.” By the Lord’s design, these “manifold temptations” are permitted and provided “that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” (**1 Peter 1:7**) In our Lord’s estimation, the quality of our daily faith in Him is far more precious than that of even the most pure gold. Therefore, just as we pass gold through the fire in order to purify its quality, even so our Lord’s proves our faith through the fiery trials in order to purify its quality.

So then the foundational characteristic of the matter is the depth of our faith in the Lord. This is what the trials of life are intended to prove and to purify, and this is the way that we might be able to count these trials of life as “all joy” events. We must set our faith in the Lord and thereby find our joy in the Lord. Concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, **1 Peter 1:8** reveals, “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” Thus the instruction is given in **Psalm 32:11**, “Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.” Again the instruction is given in **Psalm 97:12**, “Rejoice in the LORD, ye righteous; and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.” Yet again the instruction is given in **Philippians 4:4**, “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.”

As we walk each day by faith in our Lord, we shall find Him to be our strength and our song. Yea, He will be the strength *for* our song of “all joy” throughout the many, various troubles, trials, and tribulations of this life. Even so, in **Habakkuk 3:17-19** the prophet Habakkuk gave testimony, saying, “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds’ feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.”

V. The *Motivational Development* of spiritual growth in our lives.

In addition, as we come more and more to understand our Lord’s objective in the trying of our faith, we will be more and more motivated to have an attitude of “all joy” toward the trials of our lives. Our Lord’s objective is to develop spiritual growth and endurance in our lives. This motivational development is revealed in the truth that the trying of our faith “worketh patience.” In this context the word “patience” refers to more than a spirit of waiting without complaint. It refers to the spiritual character of patient, faithful endurance. It refers to the patient continuance and consistency of spiritual maturity. It refers to a characteristic of spiritual stability and strength in the walk of godliness. This is the characteristic of spiritual maturity that our Lord desires to develop in our lives. The many, various troubles, trials, and tribulations of our lives serve as the trying of our faith; and the trying of our faith effectually develops the spiritual character of patient endurance in our lives. Brethren, our Lord is far more concerned about our growth in spiritual character and maturity than about our enjoyment of life’s comforts and pleasures. Even so, as we unify our priorities with those of our Lord, we also will value our growth in spiritual character maturity over our enjoyment of life’s comforts and pleasures. Yea, then we will be motivated to regard and esteem each trial of our lives as an “all joy” event, knowing that such trying of our faith will produce spiritual growth and develop spiritual maturity in our lives. We will “count it all joy” because we value and desire the spiritual character of patient endurance.