

When the Going Gets Tough...

James 1:2-4

September 26th, 2021

You know it's probably gonna be a bad day when:

- You put both contact lenses in the same eye.
- Your wife says, "Good morning, Bill"... and your name is George.
- Your twin sister forgot your birthday.
- Your car horn goes off and remains stuck as you follow a motorcycle gang on the highway.
- The bird singing outside your window is a buzzard.

It's hard to be happy in the face of difficulties! But, seriously, all people endure hardships. And some of the hardships we face are difficult ones indeed. We live in a fallen world, meaning things in this life are often not the way they're supposed to be. Our sin, the sins of others, and the sins of the world ensure that we will face adversity in our lives. Many of you have come through some extremely trying things over the last 20 years I've served Trinity Church. And, some of you are in the middle of things that try your faith presently. Fortunately, for the Christian, God has placed dear people in our lives who help us endure and even overcome heavy trials and testing.

John Wesley once wrote, "I visited one who was ill in bed; and, after having buried 7 of her family in the space of 6 months, had just heard that the 8th, her beloved husband, was cast away at sea. I asked, "Do you not fret at any of those things?" She said, with a lovely smile upon her pale cheek, "Oh, no! How can I fret anything which is the will of God? Let Him take all besides: He has given me Himself. I love, I praise Him every moment."

How does one get to that point in life in the face of great suffering? The text of sacred Scripture before us this morning gives us the answer.

Just last Sunday, we began a new sermon series. Today is the second sermon in a series on the New Testament book of James entitled, *James: Practical Theology*. This letter is perhaps the earliest of the 27 New Testament books written, likely somewhere around 44 AD, which is even older than the 4 gospel accounts. After his greeting in verse 1, James wastes no time in getting to the heart of the matter with verses 2-4.

James 1:2-4:

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, **3** knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. **4** But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."

In today's text, James teaches a process of maturation for the believer in Jesus Christ. The life of a Christian is one of joy. Joy doesn't just happen; it is the result of being refined by trials and testing. Such trials and testing result in patience, and patience in the face of trials is how believers in Jesus mature or become complete.

Interestingly, though, the prevailing mindset is that nothing good could come from bad. But, such a thought doesn't measure up to the teaching of the Bible. Joy isn't merely happiness; happiness is a wonderful thing, but it is circumstantial, meaning happiness comes and goes as do the good things or bad things in life. Joy remains steadfast in both good and bad times.

Marshal Andre Massena, one of Napoleon's generals, suddenly appeared with 18,000 men before an Austrian town which had no means of defense. The town council had nearly decided to surrender when the old dean of the church reminded them that it was Easter and begged them to hold services as usual and to leave the trouble in God's hands. This they did; and the French hearing the church bells ringing joyfully concluded that an Austrian army had come to relieve the place and quickly broke camp. Before the bells ceased ringing, all the Frenchmen had vanished.

The incident has often been duplicated in individual lives. They have rung the joy bells in the face of pain, sickness, poverty, fear, loneliness, and all other trials. Then the joy bells have conquered. Speedily, the foe has slunk away. Speedily, the bell ringers have found themselves in possession of the field. For no enemy is quite so strong as faith accompanied with good cheer.

Notice how James refers to his audience (verse 2) - "My brethren." James loves the fellow believers in Christ to whom he writes this letter. And, so should we likewise love those with whom we share the Christian faith. Christians are part of a universal, world wide family; we are the family of God. As such, we are brothers and sisters.

The next words in the *NKJV* are "Count it all joy." Some versions of the Bible have "Consider it all joy." Whether "Count" or "consider," they mean the same thing. The meaning is to make a deliberate and careful decision to experience joy even in times of trouble. Three examples:

- In **2 Corinthians 7:4**, Paul told the Corinthian Church, "Great *is* my boldness of speech toward you, great *is* my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation."
- In **Acts 5:40-41**, speaking of the Sanhedrin Luke wrote, "...when they had called for the apostles and beaten *them*, they (the Sanhedrin) commanded that they (the apostles) should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name."
- Later in **Acts 16:25**, Luke wrote of Paul and Silas who at midnight "were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them."

What does James tell us we are to count it all joy about? Look at the rest of verse 2, “when you fall into various trials,” What? Is this some kind of spiritual masochism James espouses? Rejoice when we fall into various trials? James didn’t stutter, nor did he repeat himself. James instructs us, Church, to count it joy when we are being tried. That is because trials produce character.

Trying circumstances are the adversities God uses to test the faith of the believer. The specific testings are different for some Christians than others. Missing out on a promotion or pay raise, getting the pink slip, physical setbacks or limitations, a serious medical diagnosis, a broken relationship, rebellious children, being the target of an untrue rumor or allegation, the list could go on. We’ve all had them, and we will be subject to more of them in the future.

Free a butterfly from its chrysalis, and the struggle of liberating itself, and you destroy its life, for the butterfly will never develop the strength to soar as it should. Trials produce character.

“We do not rejoice over the trial itself, nor do we (fake) indifference to pain. Rather, disciples should be like women who rejoice to learn that they carry a child. A woman knows she faces nausea and painful childbirth, but she rejoices because she looks past the adversities of the process and sees the end- the birth of her child. So it is with the Christian.” (Dorani, 21) Trials produce character.

As you likely know, gold is one of the most valuable materials on earth. It has been used for centuries as money, but it also has many uses in industry, manufacturing, and even space flight. One of the traits that makes gold so useful is that it can be shaped and formed so easily. In fact, a single ounce of gold can be flattened out to cover 300 square feet.

But gold ore dug out of the ground contains many other elements that must be removed prior to the gold being useful. The refining process for gold involves intense heat. Gold melts at a temperature of almost 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit. That incredibly high temperature is required for gold to be ready to be used.

The Christian life involves much the same process. Sometimes we are surprised when “bad things happen to good people.” But the Scripture tells us that fiery trials are part of God’s refining process for our lives. Rather than griping or complaining when trials come, we should rejoice as we think of the end result they will produce.

The next step follows in verse 3, “knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.” **The character that trials produce in the Christian is patience.** Patience is both a virtue and it is a fruit of the Spirit. Patience is the capacity to accept or tolerate delay, trouble, or suffering without getting angry or upset.” It is accepting a difficult situation without giving God a deadline to handle it.” (London, *The Minister’s Little Devotional Book*, 100) The key to benefitting from trials is patience.

Some are reluctant to pray for patience because they believe it means God will put them in a situation or circumstance where they will have to exercise patience. As a fruit

of the spirit, God expects us to pray for all of the fruit of the spirit - whether joy or patience or any of the rest (love, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control). We should want to develop patience because it makes us more like Jesus and it pleases God.

So, trials and testing are intended by God to develop patience in us. Patience (perseverance) leads to spiritual maturity or completeness. That's verse 4 - "But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."

As people who've been redeemed of their sins by the Lord Jesus Christ, we must realize that we are not yet perfect, nor will we be perfect until such time as we are in glory with the Lord Jesus Christ. This side of glory, no one is perfect - in fact, we're often far from it. But perfection should be our goal.

Jesus said to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 5:48**), "Therefore, you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect." This is the standard that God demands of His people - His own perfect character. We grow closer to this goal as we go through trials not asking why they are happening to us, but how we can become more like Jesus through them. As we do that, we realize the joy that is only possible as we persevere through trials.

After they had all been tried, found guilty, and sentenced to die, 26 Christians were marched to the place where crudely made crosses stood. Almost 3 months earlier, they had been arrested in Kyoto, Japan, and charged with following Christ. One of the convicts was Ibaragi Kun.

Seeing how young Kun was, an official took him aside and urged him to recant his faith to save his life. Looking the official in the eye, Kun said confidently, "Sir, it would be far better if you yourself became a Christian. Then you could go to heaven with me."

The officer stared, startled by the young man's faith. Finally, Ibaragi asked, "Sir, which cross is mine?"

The bewildered official pointed to the smallest of the 26 crosses. Young Kun ran to the cross, knelt before it, and embraced it. When the soldiers began to nail his hands and feet to the cross, he did not cry out in pain. He courageously accepted the path God had laid out for him.

The crucifixion of the 26 Christians on November 23rd, 1596, was the beginning of a period of intense persecution of Christians in Japan. Over the next 70 years, as many as one million Japanese Christians were killed for their faith. Many would embrace their own crosses to follow the example of Ibaragi Kun, a very mature 12 year old boy.

The ABCs of Trials:

Although things are not perfect
Because of trial or pain,
Continue in thanksgiving
Do not begin to blame.

Even when the times are hard,
Fierce winds are bound to blow;
God is forever able—
Hold on to what you know
Imagine life without His love;
Joy would cease to be.
Keep thanking Him for all the things
Love imparts to thee.
Move out of "Camp Complaining"—
No weapon that is known
On earth can yield the power
Praise can do alone.
Quit looking at the future,
Redeem the time at hand.
Start every day with worship;
To "thank" is a command.
Until we see Him coming,
Victorious in the sky,
We'll run the race with gratitude,
Exalting God most high.
Yes, there'll be good times; and, yes, some will be bad, but...
Zion waits in glory...where none are ever sad!—Unknown