

TRIALS ARE THE GARDEN WHERE GOD GROWS OUR FAITH!

In Luke 17:5, the apostles said to Jesus, “**Increase our faith.**” How many of you—by show of hands—want your faith to increase? I’m sure that is true of most **church-goers**—and it certainly should be true of every **born-again child** of God! There’s a difference, right? Not every church-goer is born again; not everyone who goes to church is a child of God and on their way to heaven!

Before talking about how to increase our faith, let’s review what we’ve looked at so far.

First, we’ve seen that **persistence in prayer** is an indicator of faith. Second, we’ve noted that the **Person of faith**—the “object” of our faith—has to be God! Our faith can’t be in our prayers...or our persistence in prayers...or even in our faith—it must be in God and His Word!

And last week, we looked at Matthew 6:33—a **promise** that requires faith. **What** does Mt 6:33 say? **Why** does that promise require faith? Because—humanly speaking—it doesn’t make sense that the way to **have your needs met** is to not focus on having your needs met!

This morning, we are going to look at another truth regarding faith: **Trials are the garden in which faith grows.** In other words, God sends trial to produce—and to increase—our faith!

Does the Bible really say that?

Yes, it does! Take your Bibles and turn to James 1; please follow along as I read verses 1-6. We will be focusing our attention on verses 2-5. From these four verses, we will be looking at the reality of trials...and the realization regarding trials...and the response we should have to trials.

1. The reality of trials

Vs 2 “My brethren, count it all joy **when ye** fall into divers temptations.”

To help us better understand this verse, we’re going to start at the end of it and work toward the front.

--“Divers” **does not** mean someone **who dives**—it is an old English word that means “different” or “various.” The word is still used today—but is now spelled with an “e” at the end of it: “diverse.”

--“Temptations” here does not mean being tempted to do something you shouldn’t—like Eve being tempted by Satan in the garden of Eden. Instead, it means “adversity, affliction, trouble, and trial.”

--“Fall into” is an interesting phrase and comes from a combination of two Greek words: *peri* (which means all around; surrounded by) and *pipto* (which means to fall). Combining the two, we have “falling into something that is all around.”

--It is used of the man who “fell among thieves” and was later helped by the Good Samaritan. Pretty good way to describe trials, isn’t it? Trials are **not something we go looking for**—they are all around us and we fall into them!

Notice James **does not say** “if ye fall into various trials”—he says **when!** Trials **will** happen—we can count on it! If we are **not in one** now, we will probably be in one soon! I don’t say that to **discourage** you—I say it to warn you! Trials are a reality of life! We know that from experience—and we know it from the Bible. In fact, we are told **not to be surprised** when trials come!

I Peter 4:12 “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:” We’ll come back to “count it all joy”—the 1st part—in a little bit...

Next, let’s consider... **2. The realization regarding trials.** Vs 3 “Knowing this...” **What** are we to know? **What** is it that we are to perceive and realize...and understand? “...that the **trying** of your faith” does **something**. What does it do? Before we look at that, let’s think about what “trying” means.

We can tell from how it is being used in the sentence that it doesn’t mean **trying something on**—like a piece of clothing—or **trying a new sport** in school. It means “testing.” The same Greek word is found in **I Peter 1:7** and is translated “trial.” “That the **trial** of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth...”

What does God want us to know about the trying—the testing—of our faith?

God doesn't leave us wondering! We have... A. The declared pronouncement that testing grows our faith
What does the testing of our faith accomplish...and bring about...and result in? **Patience**

But **patience** is not the same thing as **faith**, is it? No—but in a way, “Yes!”

Patience here means more than the ability of a parent **to answer a toddler's “why”** question for the umpteenth time...or **calmly sending misbehaving teens** to their room...or **not getting angry** when someone cuts you off on the freeway! It means endurance...and perseverance...and steadfastness. It means “keeping on keeping on” even when things don't look very promising.

Isn't that **what faith does**? Faith keeps you going...it keeps you enduring...it keeps you steadfast...and it doesn't give up or quit—in spite of the circumstances.

God's declaration, then, is that your faith being **tested—by trials—is good**! It brings about an endurance in you that God desires you to have—and that you should desire, too!

James is not the only one who taught that truth, though—Paul did, too!

Romans 5:3 “And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that **tribulation worketh patience**;”

Notice the end of the verse: “tribulation worketh patience.” What is “tribulation”? Trials; trouble. What does it do? The same thing James says it does: it “worketh”—meaning brings about—perseverance.

B. The declared purpose for the testing of our faith

I mentioned earlier that we “fall into” trials—meaning we don't go looking for them. That is **our perspective—but not God's**! Trials don't randomly come—**God sends them**! Why? Because God wants the testing of our faith to produce endurance and steadfastness in us. But James—and ultimately, God—does not end there. Look at vs 4 “But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

“Perfect” here does not mean sinless perfection. James is not saying that when your faith is tried—and your perseverance grows—that you will **become sinless**!

“Perfect” means mature; “wanting nothing” at the end of the verse means **lacking nothing**.

What God through James is saying then, is this: “Let endurance have its maturing work, so that you become mature and complete, lacking in nothing.”

God wants us to grow **in faith**—and He wants us to **grow up** as Christians. And the testing of our faith is what “grows us up!” God not only declares that truth—He gives us examples in His Word.

So let's think about... C. The demonstrated proof that testing grows our faith

Abraham is probably the most well-known example of someone in the Bible whose faith was tested. Mark your spot here and turn to Genesis 12. We're going to “fly through” some verses here, but I want you to see them for yourselves.

--Follow along as I read verses 1-4. Here we see that Abram was 75 years old when God promised that He would make of him a great nation.

--Ten years go by, and Abram still has no children.

--Look at Gen 16:1-2. Here Sarai encourages Abram to have a child with her Egyptian servant Hagar!

--Gen 16:16 we see that Abram—at 86 years of age—has his first son: Ishmael.

--Thirteen yrs go by with no word from God. In Gen 17:1, God breaks His silence and appears to Abram when he is 99.

--In Gen 17:5, we see God changing Abram's name to Abraham and in 17:6, God repeats His promise to make of Abraham a great nation.

--Jump ahead to vs 15. God changes Sarai's name to Sarah. Now vs 16. How did Abraham respond?

--In Gen 17:17, we see Abraham has a hard time believing.

--We see his unbelief again in vs 18: “O that Ishmael might live before thee!”

--Now vs 19. God specifically says Sarah herself is going to have a son—and to name him Isaac!

Talk about a test of faith! Twenty-five years they waited—and in Gen 21:5 it says, “And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him.”

But the testing and trials of Abraham were not over. Many of you know what happened next, right?

Turn to Gen 22, follow along as I read verses 1 and 2. Here we see what I believe is **one of the most**—if not **the most**—difficult test ever given to a man!

How **could God ask** for such a great sacrifice—and how **could Abraham be willing** to do such a thing? In vs 3, we see Abraham going to the place God told him. How old was Isaac? We don't know, but we do know from vs 6 that Isaac was old enough to carry a good-sized load of wood up a mountain. My guess is that he was right around 16.

--Now Gen 22:9-10. **Why** was Abraham willing to do the unthinkable? Was it because he knew God **would stop him**? No; **that's not why** he was willing to obey. He was willing to obey the most difficult thing God ever asked a man to do because his faith had grown through all the trials he had experienced.

In fact, his faith had grown to the point where he believed that **if he killed his son**, God would bring **him back to life**! How do we know he believed that? Because God tells us as much in **Hebrews 11**! Let's turn there so you can see it for yourselves.

--Look at verses 17-19. That, my friends, is faith!

But that faith did not happen overnight! It took years—**probably close to 40** if Isaac was 15—for Abraham's faith to develop to that point. **But trials are what grew his faith**—not a flowery bed of ease!

Now back to James 1. First, we have the reality of trials—"when ye fall into divers temptations;" Second, we have the realization: God wants us to know that the trying—the testing—of our faith brings about perseverance—which in essence is more faith.

Lastly, let's consider... **3. The response to trials**

How does God want us to respond when trials come? Our text gives us three responses.

First... A. Rejoice; "count it all joy"

Vs 2 "My brethren, **count it all joy** when ye fall into divers temptations."

Pretty easy to see from the context that "count" here does not mean to list numbers in consecutive order like 1,2,3, and 4. It means to consider...to deem...to account as...to think of...

In the Greek, it is in the imperative—meaning it is a command.

I shared with the folks a couple of weeks ago how "funny"—meaning strange—we view commands sometimes. We would never dream of doing certain things God **commands us not to do**—but we sadly disobey **this command** on almost a daily basis!

In fact, one of the main reasons I was drawn to this verse and this subject was because of **how inconsistent I am in my own response** to trials.

--Sometimes the hassles and pressures of life just **annoy me**—kind of like having a sliver in one of your fingers. It doesn't really stop you from doing what you want to do—but you would rather it not be there.

--At other times, they **discourage me** and kind of put me in what I call a "funk." It is kind of a "blah" feeling that you really can't put your finger on as to why.

--And still other times—thankfully not very often—it **almost overwhelms me** and kind of puts me on edge—like a ticking bomb ready to go off!

Needless to say, none of these responses are "counting it joy" like we are commanded to do!

So is James some kind of an "odd duck"—or a **lover of misery**—when he says that we should rejoice when we go through trials? **If he is**, so is Peter—and so is Paul!

I Peter 4:13 "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." **Peter** says rejoice in suffering for Christ!

What about Paul? What did Paul do when God sent him a "thorn in the flesh?"

II Cor 12:8 "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me."

What was God's response to Paul's request? He said "No"—without saying, No!

II Cor 12:9a "And He [God] said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness...."

What was Paul's response to God's decision to **give grace** to prop him up—rather than remove the thorn?
II Cor 12:9b-10 "Most **gladly therefore** will I rather **glory in my infirmities**, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰Therefore **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."

Paul **took pleasure in his trials**—he rejoiced in them—because while in the trials, he experienced God working in him and helping him.

Response #1? Rejoice

Response #2? B. Resolve to submit to what God is teaching you

We see that at the beginning of vs 4 "But let patience have her perfect work..." In other words, **let this perseverance-building process** take place in you! Don't fight it—willingly submit to it! That's what James is saying—and that is what Paul did—and what God wants us to do!

I think it is important to realize that when James says, "count it all joy" ...and when Peter says, "rejoice" when you partake of sufferings for Christ... and when Paul says, "I take pleasure in weaknesses," they are not telling us to "put on a brave face" and **fake it!** It is okay to show emotion through trials! We saw that not too long ago when **Mary wept** over the death of Lazarus—**and Jesus wept, too!**

But at the end of the day—and sometimes after a long **fight with our emotions**—we must settle on this truth: **God loves me...and wants to grow me through this trial!** And based on that truth, I need to submit to what God is trying to teach me so I can grow in my faith!

Response #1? Rejoice

Response #2? Resolve to submit to what God is teaching you

Response #3? C. Request wisdom from God

We see that in vs 5. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God..."

A lot of times we think of this as a new subject; James **was talking about trials—but now** he is talking about wisdom. It certainly is a different subject—and some of our Bibles have a new paragraph starting with vs 5. But some Bibles have verses 2-8 as one paragraph—meaning asking for wisdom is **connected to going through trials**. And if you think about it, **isn't wisdom what we need** when going through a trial?

Trials come in all shapes and sizes and "severeness"—and yet most of the time they put us in a position of **not knowing what to do!** Isn't that a good reason to ask wisdom from God?

I love **II Chronicles 20:12b**. The context is that a king of the southern kingdom—meaning David's line—is about to be attacked by his enemies. This is part of his prayer: "...for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee."

Isn't that a great attitude to have when going through a trial? 'We have no might—and we don't know what to do—but our eyes are upon you.'

Trials will come. As mentioned earlier, if you are not in the midst of one now, you probably will be soon! But we need to realize that God has a **purpose behind them**—He wants to grow our faith! He also has a way He wants us to respond. He wants us to rejoice...and resolve to learn what He is trying to teach us...and request wisdom from Him. Are you responding in that way?

So what would God have us do in light of His Word this morning?

1. First, ask yourself this question: How do I view trials?

--If you view them as God being mean to you—and not loving you—you have it all wrong!

--God loves you—and wants to grow your faith!

--Believe that...submit to that—and humbly ask Him to help you trust Him in the trial.

--Too often times we are wanting to get out of the trial that we fail to learn what God wants to teach us through it.

2. Second, we must realize this: Enduring trials increases your faith on earth—but it doesn't get you into heaven! I believe there are people who wrongly have this thought:

“I have suffered so much on earth, God has to take me to heaven!”

No, He doesn't! Suffering on earth doesn't qualify you for heaven—being sin-free is what qualifies you for heaven. And you can't be sin-free!

--But Jesus was sin-free—and died in your place so you could be forgiven!

Don't trust in your suffering—or your good works—to get you into heaven.

We must trust in what Jesus did for us—and only in that!

John 14:6 – “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

Don't think for a moment that you will be the one exception!