

**“Consider it pure joy when. . .” Suffer Successfully**

**James 1:1-3**

“Consider it pure joy when. . .” How would you finish this sentence? Most of us would assume joy comes from receiving lots of money, moving into a nicer home, having excellent health, great kids, a good marriage, etc. But James says just the opposite. James is the half brother of Jesus, a younger son of Mary and Joseph. At first, he did not believe in Jesus, and thought Jesus was out of His mind (John 7:5, Mark 6:4). But later he became a prominent leader in the church, and was part of the leadership at the Jerusalem Council.

James had intimate knowledge of Jesus and could have written about many things. But he wrote about painful trials because this was the most pressing issue for the church at this time. The believers were scattered outwardly due to persecution, and inwardly their lives were falling apart. James wrote this letter to help them develop a theology of suffering. He wanted them to find an anchor in God’s truth to enable them to suffer successfully.

After a brief intro and a one-word greeting, James goes straight to the point in verse 2. *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.* “Consider” – The imperative tense means that we are to adopt this attitude toward trials. It calls for a mental evaluation as a result of deliberation. We are to regard our trials as the grounds for “pure joy.” This command gets our attention and causes us to examine our worldview. We have two choices regarding how we “consider” a situation. 1) Temporal – This worldview focuses on the here and now, on what’s happening to me externally, on living by sight. 2) Eternal – This worldview has God at the center. Through eyes of faith, we believe that what we *don’t* see is more important than what we *do* see.

In the original Greek, “pure joy” are the first two words of the sentence in order to emphasize importance. “Pure” carries the idea of intensity. “Joy” is to be unalloyed, e.g. wholehearted and sincere. James is not asking us to enjoy or to like our trials. He is helping us to see beyond them. Hebrews 12:11 carries the same thought – *No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*

The verb “whenever you face” occurs only twice elsewhere in the New Testament. In Luke 10:30, Jesus used it of the man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and “fell among” thieves. It pictures the man as surrounded by thieves on all sides, with no way of escape. This verb also occurs in Acts 27:40 of a ship that unexpectedly encountered a sandbar where two seas met and, running into it, was shipwrecked. Have you ever been personally shipwrecked, totally at the end of yourself, with no more resources and no way out? If so, is this a good or bad situation? Our answer depends on our worldview. If we live by sight, we will view this as bad. If we live by faith, we understand that it’s always good when we come to the end of ourselves, because it forces us to turn fully to God.

“Trials” is a neutral word and can have negative or positive connotations, depending on the context. In this verse, James has in mind the proving and testing of one’s faith.

“of many kinds” – This phrase has the meaning of variegated, or many-colored. This means that trials can come in many shapes, shades, and degrees. James is not saying that we will all suffer every one of these trials, but that we may be subject to these different possibilities.

“you know” – This verb carries the idea not only of full mental understanding of truth, but also knowledge that comes from personal experience.

“testing of your faith” – This testing is in order to prove or disprove the genuineness or validity of faith.

In both theory and practice, we must know that God is both good and great. No matter what is happening around us, there is no “bad” in His goodness, and no weakness in His greatness. As we grow in our understanding, we will taste and see that the Lord is good. Our trust in the Lord will remain intact, no matter what the trial. We will come out with a stronger faith at the end of the trial. This is a good thing, and a cause for pure joy, because faith is more precious than gold (1 Peter 1:7).

If you listed the situations that have brought joy in your life, would your list include things like: no accidents, good health, promotion at work, family peace, lots of money, dream home? Or would it include: traumatic accident, loss of a child, job loss, loss of a grandchild, care of aging parents, cancer? Again, it depends on your worldview. As our personal application today, Gary and Judy Stewart will be giving their testimony regarding the trials in their lives, which include every item on the second list.

- Sermon concludes with the testimony of Gary & Judy Stewart.