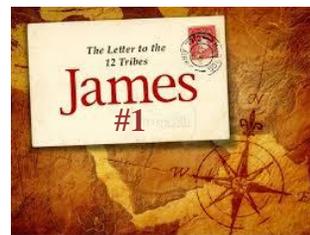




Chico Alliance Church

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## “Joyful Trials”

### Introduction

Before we examine one of the magnificent “trees” (passage) in this forest (letter), I will first provide a brief overview of the “forest”. Our task in Bible study is to first understand what God intended to communicate to the original readers. How did they understand the letter? Only then can we explore how it might apply to us today some 2,000 years removed from the original context. The core question is NOT “What does this mean to me?” but “What did God actually say to them that might apply to us today?”

The Writer and readers are plainly and succinctly identified in the first verse.

*James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings. James 1:1*

The consensus through time seems to identify the writer as James, the half-brother of Jesus out of a possibility of six others named James. James did not actually believe in Jesus until after the resurrection. Luke listed him as present in the upper room at Pentecost. Paul mentioned James as one individually visited by the resurrected Christ. In Galatians, Paul identified James as one of the pillars of the early church. Many believe that James was the leader of the Jerusalem church. James offered only one essential credential. The lack of further credentials points to the fact this must have been someone well known and deemed authoritative by the readers.

*“A bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ”*

Paul frequently embraced this term in his writings regarding himself. The term “bondservant” referenced one who voluntarily offered their devoted service and absolute submission to the master. On the one hand it points to the humility of the servant. On the other hand, it points to the significance of the servant in whom he served. None other than a bondservant of Almighty God, the Master and Messiah Jesus. It is one thing to be a bondservant to a stable owner. It is quite another to be a bondservant to the God of the universe. James could have pulled the “brother of Jesus” card but preferred bond-servant.

James addressed his letter to the twelve tribes scattered everywhere.

*To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad James 1:1*

It is clear James wrote to a Jewish audience. It is also clear from verse two that he wrote to a Christian Jewish audience. He called them “brothers” in Christ 14 times in this short letter. His use of brethren emphasizes a pastor’s heart and a loving connection despite a straight forward hard-hitting message. He focused on Jewish followers of Jesus scattered throughout the Roman Empire. By the time of this writing, tracing specific tribal connections had become impossible. The term became symbolic of any Jew living outside of their homeland. Many consider this one of the first recorded writings of the New Testament books.

### Purpose and Theme

- Behavior of Belief
- Ten Tests True Trust (Faith)
- Faith that Works
- The Practice of Righteousness
- Faith that is real
- Faith in Action

One commentator called James “a handful of pearls dropped one by one into the hearer’s mind. Some view it as a Reader’s Digest version of James’ sermons or writings. James referred to the Word of God as a mirror

exposing flaws requiring attention. His whole book is a mirror that exposes areas in our life that could use some attention. Paul calls us to TEST ourselves to see if we be in the faith. (2 Cor 15:3)

James serves as a test of whether we are really trusting God or not. How does genuine faith/trust act in everyday life situations? James cites numerous circumstances that test our trust in God and instruct us on how true faith should respond. He includes behavior concerning trials, prejudice, control of our tongue, response to the Word, suffering, persecution, temptation, anger, genuine faith, relational conflict, spiritual warfare, sin, prosperity and poverty, patience, weakness, prayer.

James serves as mirror to expose areas requiring attention as well as a mandate to make the necessary adjustments. His purpose is to urge us to improve our walk of faith not to condemn us. Christians are like raw diamonds submitted to the Master gem cutter who carefully cuts, and polishes surfaces to beautifully reflect our regenerated core. James centers on godly behavior that manifests because of our genuine faith. Not behavior driven by a desire to secure salvation but a Spirit-motivated desire to express a salvation already received apart from personal behavior or works.

Paul emphasized faith alone but did not ignore the new behavior that stems from it. James emphasized the behavior that stems from genuine faith. In keeping with his purpose, James included fifty-four life instructions (commands/imperatives) in this letter. Along with instructions for godly living, James included corresponding divine insights to help us follow those instructions.

This is a life adjustment and correction book.

*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17*  
James fall under the reproof and correction category.

After his address, James included a very brief greeting; “Greetings!”. That word comes from a base meaning “rejoice, be glad, grace.”

*As soon as we read through the letter of James we say to ourselves, ‘This man was a preacher before he was a writer.’ He addresses his readers as a preacher addresses his hearers, directly, pointedly. Do not be deceived, he says (1:16), or Do you want to be shown? (2:20), or Know this (1:19). He is capable of pounding on those whose errors he wishes to expose (4:13; 5:1); he calls attention with many a ‘behold’ to things he does not want them to miss (3:4-5; 5:4; etc.). Imaginary (but very relevant) objectors make their appearance (2:18); rhetorical questions keep attention alive (2:4-5, 14-16; 5:13); homely illustrations abound—horses, rudders, fires (3:3-6), springs of water, gardening (3:11-12) and farming (5:7)—and startling statements jolt the congregation awake: Count it all joy when you meet various trials (1:2); You do well. Even the demons believe (2:19). And over and over again the warmth of the vital relationship between preacher and congregation is maintained as the word Brethren, My brethren and My beloved brethren come through the lips straight from the heart (E.g. 1:2, 16, 19; 2:1, 5, 14; 5:7, 9, etc.).*

*The Bible Speaks Today - The Bible Speaks Today – The Message of James: The tests of faith.*

Verse two launches the first in a series of life tests that show how genuine faith or belief responds in a fallen world.

## **I. How Belief responds under trials 1:2-18**

James encouraged the readers to exercise a faith response when encountering life’s trials and difficulties which I call life instructions. James included nuggets of truth to help with perception adjustments that enable the implementation of his life instructions on proper response to life’s difficulties. I call those nuggets divine insights or perspective adjusters. In these first seventeen verses, James issued seven instructions requiring genuine faith along with twelve perception adjusting truths or divine insights to enable us to follow those instructions as we face the trials of life. He chose a shotgun approach where clear connection between the various verses is not always readily discernable. The connecting themes in these opening verses (2-18) seem to

be trials or struggle and the spiritual maturity that comes from faith in God to face them. We will explore these instructions and the corresponding truths over the next several weeks by identifying the both the life Instructions and the divine insights.

Don't do this because such and such will happen.

Do this because you will realize...

Our task is to discover what **God** said.

Embrace what **God** said.

Obey or apply what **God** said.

God recorded words to communicate the truth necessary for living godly in and ungodly world. Words determine meaning and insight, and this passage comes packed with some powerful and weighty words. We will pause to examine some of those key terms along our journey through James. Our first life instruction appears in verse two.

*Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. James 2*

### **A. Life Instruction 1 – Consider it all joy when encountering trials**

James included the context for obeying the command. “**When**” whenever, at which time, under what circumstance they happen. Whenever this happens, follow this instruction! “Consider it all joy”. Notice he says “whenever” not “if” you encounter trials. The term “**encounter**” means to fall into, be surrounded by, be encompassed by, be enveloped by. Luke used the term to describe what happened to the guy who “fell among” (encountered) robbers on his way out of Jerusalem (Luke 10:30).

These unpleasant encounters sometimes happen unrelated to any fault of our own. Later he deals with trials that come due to our own actions or choices. This context has to do with trials that encroach while living in a broken world.

James calls them “**various trials**”. These trials are diverse, variegated, multicolored. James calls these unexpected diverse circumstances “trials.” The term translated trials here can be problematic. As precise as Greek may sometimes be, it did not have separate terms to describe a positive test and a negative test. They used the same word for both. Positively it can indicate a trial intended to strengthen us. Negatively it can indicate a trial intended to tempt us to do something evil. The term refers to a testing being directed toward an end, to discover the nature or quality of the object or person tested.

Good end -- the trying or proving to show genuine and able.

Bad end -- to solicit to evil, apply stress to destroy.

Stressful circumstance (trial/test) intended to develop us – endure.

Stressful circumstance (temptation) intended to destroy us – resist.

God employs outward stress to build and demonstrate the genuineness of our faith.

Satan tempts to break and destroy the stability of our faith.

It is clear later that God cannot and will not do the later.

TESTING by God is to:

Prove us -- is our faith genuine?

Probe us -- is our faith active?

Purge us -- what stands in the way of our growth?

It is used of a young bird “testing” its wings. Testing a drug to see if it functions as developed. Just as professionals must take state board exams to demonstrate their ability, God allows tests to show to us and others the presence and condition of our faith.

*“Affliction lets down a blazing torch for man into the depths of his own nature -- and he sees many things which he little expected to see. He finds his faith weak where he thought it strong, his views dim when thought them clear.”*

We face both in this life. James may have had the religious persecution of these scattered Jewish believers in mind. There are several references to such difficulties in the letter.

These trials are **inevitable**, it is when not if.

These trials are **diverse**. “various”

These trials are **unexpected**. “encounter”

According to Scripture, these trials are also **unavoidable**.

“In the world you will have tribulation”

“We must enter the kingdom through much tribulation.” Acts 14:22

“Don’t think it strange when trials come.” 1 Peter 4:12

No one escapes difficult times. Anyone who promises otherwise is selling something.

This instruction applies to whatever kind of trial comes and whenever it comes. So, what are we to do when a trial blindsides us out of nowhere? James calls for what seems to be an impossible or at least irrational response. It is the response of one who fully trusts their well-being into God’s hands.

### **“count it all joy”**

James implied joy or grace in his greeting. He instructed them to consider this encounter with life’s difficulty as a good thing. Treat them as an occasion for joy. The term “count” means to consider, reckon, count to be a reality, deem to be true, regard. The emphasis on “all joy” indicates a willful embracing of the benefits of trials. He emphasized the intensity of the joy not the exclusivity of the joy. Trials elicit a myriad of emotions.

James instructed these believers to consider trials occasion for genuine joy. This is not the only place Scripture links joy with suffering and trials. I love some of the suggestions offered translators into various languages.

“You should rejoice greatly”

“Your stomachs should feel very warm”

“Your hearts should dance”

“Your inner most being should ring”

“Consider yourselves fortunate”

“It is a great benefit when...”

This seems impossible and irrational to consider a trial an occasion for joy. That is why it requires a faith response. Faith is always based on truth or Biblical reality. Therefore, James provided the first perspective adjuster enabling joy in trials. Life instruction. Divine insight.

### **Perspective Adjustment 1 – Knowing testing produces endurance**

Both Paul and Peter urged the same instruction and insight. (Rom 5:3-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7)

*“knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.”*

James clearly provided some insight necessary to follow the instruction. The “knowing” enables rejoicing. Do this (count every encounter with trials an occasion for genuine joy) KNOWING something. What they were to know was that such testing of our faith produces endurance?

James employed a different word for testing here to emphasize the positive aspect. This word “test” referred to the refining of precious metal. Trials refine our faith by exposing and eliminating the impurities bound up in it.

“**endurance**” comes from two terms meaning to “remain under”. We remain under trials as they refine our faith. We resist temptations that seem to destroy our faith. This is an endurance that joyfully faces the trial to achieve the benefit. Endurance is not the final goal; which brings us to a related instruction.

## **B. Life instruction #2 – Continue enduring**

### **Perspective adjustment #2 – endurance brings maturity and stability**

*And let endurance have its perfect result SO THAT you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

The goal is spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity comes from continual endurance of trials by continually trusting Christ. When we bail out or crash and burn, or fail to respond with an attitude of joy, we will not grow spiritually. This scripture calls us to enthusiastically (joyfully) view each trial as an opportunity to embrace, not bitterly resist, those trials, knowing that trials produce endurance and continued endurance results in spiritual maturity and stability. The key is our faith in Jesus. The behavior of true belief (faith/trust) perceives trials as an opportunity to grow. Responding to trials with a different perspective exposes a failure to truly trust. It doesn't mean WE are failures. It simply means that we could use some perspective adjustment which will then help adjust our responses. Once we embrace the right perspective we will exhibit the right behavior.