

# James 1:2-4

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*James challenges believers to rejoice in trials because a tested faith leads to becoming a mature Christian.*

James is laying out a logical set of dominoes that move from enduring trials to reaching maturity in the life of the individual believer. The knowledge of this relationship of moving from difficulties to completeness means that there can only be one response that makes sense when *various trials* come: to rejoice, *to consider it all joy*. James starts out with a directive for his audience to think of the trials that come in life (*various*, or all sorts of trials) as something to rejoice about.

Rejoicing here means to find delight and hope in the fact that a trial has come into one's life. James instructs the reader to make a choice. The choice is to *consider* the difficult circumstance encountered as a blessing, a matter of good fortune. To *consider* the difficulty *joy*. James is instructing his brethren to make a decision as an act of the will to rejoice in difficulty.

The word translated *consider* is also translated “rule,” “command,” or “govern.” James desires us to take charge of our reaction to difficulty, and make a choice to choose a perspective that is true. The true perspective is to *consider it all joy*. Not just some difficulties, or a part of the difficulty. But *all* of the circumstance.

James does not merely assert that this is a true perspective, he next explains the great value of *various trials*, why this is the case. By referring to *various trials*, James seems to be encompassing any sort of trial that might be encountered. The true perspective for any difficult circumstance that comes into our life is something of which we ought to decide, “This is a great opportunity, I should embrace it and be glad for it.”

In James's case, his focus is on the great benefit we receive for the *various trials* to be an instrument for *the testing of your faith*. This *testing* will prove out the maturity and quality of the believer's faith. It is like an assay of a precious metal, a test that demonstrates that “this is pure gold” verses “this is fool's gold.” The trials of life show us where we lack, and where we need to grow. This knowledge can lead us to develop maturity. And, as James will tell us in verse 12, spiritual maturity leads to the greatest rewards or benefits available from living this life (James 1:12). Therefore, trials are a huge benefit for which we should be grateful.

This faith has nothing to do with one's justification in the sight of God—a believer's acceptance by God. Just like physical birth, spiritual birth is a one-time event. Our new birth requires only enough faith to look upon Jesus on the cross, hoping to be delivered from the venom of sin (John 3:14-15). James here does not speak of birth, but of life. Of growing up, an ongoing process of growth. What is in view is a progression towards maturity. The *testing of your faith* is an extended event for the believer (*my brethren*) as seen by the fact that the effect of *the testing of your faith* is that it *produces endurance*. *Endurance* means that one does not quit, give up, or lie

down in the midst of difficulty. *Endurance* is a distinguishing trait for success in life. The kind of living faith James has in mind is faith that sees things through a process, a journey all the way to its end. It endures to completion. Fulfillment lies at the end, which is why *endurance* has such great value.

*Endurance* also has a specific effect, namely *to have its perfect result*. The *perfect result* contemplated here does not mean a flawless ideal which can only be reached in eternity, but rather completion or arrival at a point of ‘nothing else to add here.’ The Greek words translated *perfect result* have the root “teleios” (perfect) and “ergon” (result). “Teleios” (perfect) has the notion of maturity, completion of a result, or fulfillment of an era. “Ergon” (result) is the word from which we get the unit for work “erg” and the English word “ergonomic.” It is often translated “work.” So here the particular application of faith James has in mind is to complete a process of daily effort of becoming sanctified, set apart unto God, fully mature to serve. The process of reaching the *perfect result*, or full completion, requires trials to be overcome. Which is why we should rejoice that we have *various trials*.

Indeed, James uses these words *let endurance have its perfect result* with a final assessment that the one who has grown through the trial will be *lacking in nothing*. James is writing about life on earth as an issue of spiritual and practical wisdom, and asserts that his process of joyfully enduring trials is the means to acquire all that can be gained from living life on this earth.

*Endurance* here is making a long string of God-centered, good choices that create excellent results, as opposed to making a string of self-centric choices which will lead to poor outcomes. Good choices of action begin by choosing a true perspective. James is offering that complete maturity is possible for every believer in Christ. Each believer has the agency to choose to *consider* any trial as *joy*, knowing it produces *endurance*, to continue our journey of faith-walk until we are *lacking in nothing* that can be gained from this life.

While becoming perfectly Christlike in eternity is the inevitable endgame of a life on earth (see Romans 8:28-29), James is also talking about the practical endgame for the believer in this life. Just as one might say of a wedding, “It was perfect,” no one would mean there was nothing that could have been improved upon, that it was flawless. Rather, they would mean that nothing needed to be added to the event, it lacked nothing for the bride, bridegroom, and guests. The wedding was therefore “teleios”/fulfilled/complete/perfect.

In a similar way, the maturation of the believer can result in him or her being *perfect and complete, lacking nothing*. Life for each believer has this kind of possibility ahead; a place of arrival in faith and service that marks a stable maturity as to character and faith. This is a matter of living in wisdom, making good choices based on believing what God says is true, and believing that God’s rewards are better than the rewards of the world. It is not an idealized notion of sinless perfection in this life. In fact, James exhorts his readers to “confess your sins to one other” (James 5:16).

Although all believers will be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:28-29) not all believers will receive the greatest rewards available from this life. These rewards are so amazing that we can’t really conceive of their greatness while in this life (2 Corinthians 2:9). The means

of gaining these incredible rewards comes through faithfully enduring the difficulties of this life. Choosing this perspective about life is the means by which believers can *consider it all joy to encounter various trials*.

James is telling his readers that rejoicing is the only response that really makes sense when trials come into their lives. Given the Jewish heritage of James' audience, this probably sparks in them a remembrance of the Old Testament saints who likewise endured and matured to God's glory (Hebrews 11). This is because trials are a means to an end; trials provide a vehicle by which believers can mature their faith. And rejoicing makes sense because faith grows *endurance*, which in turn grows maturity in the individual believer. As we will see, this maturation leads in turn to the greatest reward available from this life (James 1:12).

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>2</sup> Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, <sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. <sup>4</sup> And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.**