

James 1:1-4
Trial by Fire

I. The foundation for joy in trial

II. The expectation that positions us for joy in trial

The question is not if we will go through trials, but when we go through trials

III. Understanding God's call to joy in the midst of trial

a. It is a call to think rightly, not to a feeling

We are called to count it joy, not to be or to feel joyful

b. It is a call to joy, not to happiness or rejoicing

Happiness depends on circumstances, joy transcends them

IV. The basis of joy; God's purpose in the trial

a. Understanding the relative value of possible gifts in God's eyes

b. Appreciating how God completes us through trials

Closing thought; Three traits about God's character you must believe and trust

Questions for reflection, application, and discussion

1. Many Christians have understood James 1:2-4 to be a command to have the feeling of happiness in the midst of trial, with the implication that if they do not feel happy that it reveals a lack of faith and/or maturity.
 - a. Have you ever understood James' words and the Bible's teaching on trials in this way, or do you know others who have believed this?
 - b. Have you ever felt a pressure from other believers to be happy, or to at least appear happy when you are in the midst of personal crisis? If so, where do you think that pressure comes from?
 - c. How has this sense of obligation to find or manufacture the feeling of joy in the midst of crisis impacted you (or others that you know), your faith in God, and your relationship with other believer's times of deep trial.
2. Pastor Mike pointed out that James does not call us to be or feel happy in the midst of trials, but to "count it all joy" when we face various trials.
 - a. He pointed out that the call to "count it all joy" is a call to have the right kind of thinking, not a call to have the right kind of feeling. What is the difference? How can we "count" or consider our trials a cause for joy when we don't feel joyful?
 - b. Is having feelings of fear or despair in these times of trial inconsistent with counting or thinking about the joy behind the trials? Explain your answer.
 - c. Pastor Mike also described the difference between joy and happiness. Can we have joy when we are not happy? Explain your answer.
3. It has been said that in general, no people in history have had less suffering than contemporary Americans, but at the same time no people in history have been surprised by and struggled with their suffering more than contemporary Americans.
 - a. Do you believe that this is an accurate statement? If so, why do you think this is the case?
 - b. If we apply this question to the church, how much suffering do you think we experience in comparison to believers from other times and in other parts of the world? How do we deal with our suffering in comparison to how believers in times and places of martyrdom, persecution, war, rampant disease, and economic depravity dealt with their trials?
 - c. What about the faith and beliefs of these Christians in other times and places have allowed them to deal with the worst of sufferings with a peace and joy that we at times struggle to find when we face trials?
4. 1 Peter 1:6-7 teaches that the greatest gift that God can give us is a mature faith. However, both Peter and James (and other passages) teach that God develops this faith in us through trials. For this reason, trials can be seen as God's gift to us.
 - a. One of the most common beliefs among Christians (sometimes taught, often held in practice) is that good times are God's blessings for right living and problems and trials

are God's correction for wrong behavior (for an example of this, see the book of Job). Why do you think this is so commonly believed?

- b. James teaches that trials are often not God's confrontation of the sinful, but His growing of the faithful. In the case of Job, it was his faithfulness and God's desire to grow him further that were behind his trial, not his sinfulness. How might this perspective impact you in the midst of your trials?
5. How does this teaching from James 1 help you understand and deal with the challenges we are currently facing as a result of the current international crisis? How can you apply this teaching to your life this week?