

## Joy and Endurance 07.24.11

### REVIEW FROM LAST WEEK...

*Sure, I'm joyful in the blessings... but in the testings?*

The key word is CONSIDER.

*"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds."  
James 1:2 NIV*

*I must CHOOSE joy; it is not:*

- AUTOMATIC, it's an attitude!
- EASY, it's often a challenge!
- A FEELING, it's a decision!
- DEPENDENT ON CIRCUMSTANCES, it comes from God!  
*"The joy of the Lord is your strength." Nehemiah 8:10b ESV*

### All kinds of trials - All Joy!

DIFFICULTIES, HARDSHIPS / TEMPTATIONS /  
CHALLENGES, DISCIPLINES / FROM GOD, SELF-IMPOSED,  
OTHERS / LONELINESS / FAILURES, SETBACKS /  
TRIBULATIONS, ACCUSATIONS / ILLNESS, DEATH

*"... whenever you face trials of many kinds." v2b (NIV)*

### 5 Reasons Why the Testing of My Faith is Joyful

1. So that I may KNOW MY FAITH IS AUTHENTIC.  
*"The seeds that fell on rocky ground stand for those who receive the message gladly as soon as they hear it. But it does not sink deep into them, and they don't last long. So when trouble or persecution comes because of the message, they give up at once." Matthew 13:20-21 GNT*
5. So that I may BE BLESSED.  
*"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God promised to those who love him."  
James 1:12 NIV*

That's where we left it last week. **Our objective today is to connect the dots. How do we get from point 1 to point 5? How do we go from trial to faith to blessedness to joyfulness? James tells us in verses 3 and 4. Let's read them together.**

2. So that I may PERSEVERE.  
*"Because you know the testing of your faith develops perseverance."  
James 1:3 NIV*

One of the key reasons I can be joyful despite the trial I am going through is because I know that - as a Christ-follower - this testing develops perseverance. **Helps to look at other versions...**  
= endurance (NRSV) = steadfastness (ESV) = patience (KJV)

The two go hand in hand. OOH is testing. OTOH is endurance, the ability to persevere. I love the ESV "steadfastness" because this is the most oft-used descriptor in the OT of God's love for us - steadfast. And it is what he wants for us...to be steadfast in our love.

**Illustration - Running Marathon.** Has anyone ever run a marathon? Know how you train? You run... longer and longer each week. (This isn't rocket science!) Every weekend you include a "long run" in your training. You start with wherever you are... maybe 4 or 5 miles. Then the following week you add a mile. And you keep adding distance every week until you're up to 26 miles! Takes about a year of training. When you're actually running the marathon in the race - at about 23 to 24 miles, you "hit the wall." You feel like you just can't go on... but you do anyway. This is the gut check... the joy!

Eugene Peterson quotes James 1:3 that our trials also a gut check:

"You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors." James 1:3 MSG

James wasn't the only one of the early Christians to make this connection between the trials of life and perseverance. All the early Christ-followers recognized that their faith grew because of problems and trials, and thus, was reason for rejoicing! Paul:

"We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation." Romans 5:3-4 NLT

To be clear, we do not rejoice because of the trial, rather we rejoice because we know that the trial develops endurance. We rejoice for the endurance, which is the result of the trial - not because of trial. We rejoice because we know there are benefits to endurance in this God-race: strength of character and confident hope of salvation.

God is not so concerned with our comfort as He is with our character. He is not so concerned (as we are) with our happiness. Rather He is concerned with our holiness. He doesn't wish us to wander through this life wondering and filled with doubt. He wants us confident.

**(Come back next weekend!)** Strong character and confident hope come from endurance. Endurance comes from trials. **Peter:**

"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials." 1 Peter 1:6 NIV

What is the "this" that Peter is talking about? Our salvation. IOW, knowing our salvation is secure (confident hope) gives us joy in spite of the trials and the griefs we suffer. **This is part of maturity process...**

3. So that I may **BE MATURE**.

"Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature..."

James 1:4a NIV

We have to talk about this word, "maturity." Often used as "perfect."

"... that you may be perfect." ESV

Jesus: "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect."

Matthew 5:48 ESV

The word in the original language τέλειος has the idea of being finished, complete, the end result. A baby when it is τέλειος will be an adult, the natural outcome of growth and maturity. Jesus tells us that this is the natural outcome of our our Christian growth that we will become τέλειος in our thinking and in our living. This is what we mean when we talk about becoming "like God." Not perfect in the sense that we never ever make a mistake. But perfect in the sense of growing to become fully aware of God is our lives and desiring to

please Him, to live in the way He has created us to live. This maturity, this kind of perfection, this τέλειος comes from testing!

Paul: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Romans 12:2 ESV

Just like we said last week that this joy of God is NOT automatic, NOT easy, NOT a feeling, and NOT dependent on circumstances, our transformation into a godly man or woman is the same way. It is by the trials of life that we discover (or CHOOSE) not to be conformed to this world, but rather to the τέλειος of God - to be complete, perfect, mature in our thinking and in our actions - it's in the trials that we discern the will of God “what is good and acceptable and perfect (τέλειος). In fact, in two other places Paul tells us that this maturity is the whole point of his ministry:

“Him we proclaim ... that we may present everyone mature in Christ.”  
Colossians 1:28 ESV

“May your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless...”  
1 Thessalonians 5:23 ESV

If you are like me, it's about at this point that you begin to wonder WHY it is this way. After all, why not be able to mature, become perfect in a more positive way, through the easier things in life? Part of the reason may be our human make up. The way we are made. How we work and function. Stop and think about what you are like when everything is going your way. How often do the blessings of life send you to your knees in prayer before God. How often do you feel “fully dependent” upon God's Spirit when life is working out well? Isn't it in the trials of life that we are more likely to go to God?

When do you pray for a job the hardest? When you have a job or when you don't? When do you pray for health the most? When you're healthy or when you're sick? When do you feel the need for God's companionship the most? When you're enjoying friends and family or when you feel utterly alone and lonely?

When we recognize this about ourselves, we then can truthfully talk about “joy” and the “trials of life” in the same sentence, because we know that it was the trials that drove us to God, that in turn drive us towards maturity and perfection... **and drive us to one more thing...**

4. So that I may **BE FULLY EQUIPPED**.

“Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be... complete, not lacking anything.” James 1:4b NIV

James writes that when perseverance finishes its work in us we will be mature AND complete. The two go hand in hand. But they don't mean the same thing. If I want to be finished, mature, perfect I must also be complete - and notice that James tacks on “not lacking anything.” In other words, I will have everything I need to be mature, finished the way God has in mind.

**complete = ὁλόκληρος [holó/klēros] literally means “all the parts”**

We can each agree that we are not now finished in all areas of our lives. We each have strengths and weaknesses. We each have temptations - some don't phase us, some seem to haunt us. Why do the areas we struggle in seem to come back to us over and over?

Why do some temptations just seem to never go away? Because God wants us to be perfected, matured and to become this way we must become complete - we must have all the parts. There is good news here. Once you have, through trials and temptations, come through the challenge, it usually will not be as much trouble in the future. Because you now have THAT part of your completion. Christians who have been at this for awhile know this truth. They have been "equipped" through the trials that used to haunt them. Now they can handle it better.

**Illustration:** I love playing with my grandchildren. Over this past very hot week I had fun turning on the sprinkler and letting my grandchildren run through the sprinkler. (Cohen let me know his underwear was wet!) Thursday night I played hide and seek with my grandsons. My youngest grandson, Lincoln, was running through the upstairs with nothing on but his diapers. He doesn't talk much to me yet, but he know how to play! It's delightful. I love spending time with them; I love playing with them.

But it would be tragic if they never grew up... if they never matured. Lincoln running with nothing but diapers is cute now, but not so much at the age of 54 (my age.) Every parent, every grandparent wants their children to become "mature and complete, not lacking anything." Your heavenly father is exactly the same way.

Now... stop and consider the "trials of life" that will face my young grandchildren. They have to learn some very basic things - things that are really exceedingly difficult for any adult who must relearn them. Learning to walk, learning to talk. These are only learned through many trials, many mistakes, many failings. And they each must face difficulties that, at the time, appear tragic to them - like getting a "shot" at the doctor's office. That hurts! They will cry! But we give them their shots anyway because in the end, we want them not lacking anything that might keep them healthy. Your heavenly father is the same way - He only wants the best for his children. And though you protect your children as best you can, they will encounter evil in their lives. When they do, you will be there for them, comforting them, but also guiding them, helping them - perhaps - to learn from their encounter.

**Conclusion** - Our physical illustration of babies becoming adults only goes so far. Ultimately they will physically mature and grow up. When it comes to our Christian maturity, sadly, this is not always the case. All of us need the trials of life to help us mature in our Christian faith.

**(a)** Some of us are "born again" - we pray the sinner's prayer and confess of our need for Christ, but when the trials of life come, we don't see them as opportunities to grow in our faith and, thus, we remain spiritual babies all our lives. God wants so much more from you! God wants so much more FOR you! Some of you today need to shed your spiritual diapers.

**(b)** Some of us need to be reminded. You're not a spiritual babe in a diaper, but you have been going through a particular trial so long that you have forgotten the joy and blessing that comes to us from the other side. Today, God wants you to be reminded that He loves you, cares for you, and will ultimately provide you His salvation you so greatly desire.

**Prayer and Benediction.** What does this Christian maturity process look like? For that, you'll have to come back next Sunday evening!