

**Bethel Christian Fellowship
Fair Lawn, NJ**

**The Letter of James(2): The Proofs Of True Faith
“Trusting Through The Trials”
James 1:2-4**

August 9, 2026

When we were growing up and wanted to make some extra cash, my brothers and I worked for our Uncle Barry. At times it was catering at festivals, other times it was scooping Icee and selling hot dogs in downtown Newark. The days were long; we could start as early as 5am and not get back home until 1am. The reward wasn't bad. We made a hundred dollars or more, plus we worked with family. We also met a man whom we all came to know and love. He wasn't blood related, but he was covered by the blood of Christ. We called him “Brother Robert”.

Prior to coming to faith, he was shot in a drug deal gone bad. With a bullet lodged in his head, it was natural to think he'd be pronounced dead, but the LORD had other plans in mind. This moment caused him to put his faith in Christ and he never looked back. Brother Robert was not the most eloquent man. He was outspoken, redundant and said the same things over and over. But whatever he said would always point back to Christ.

There was a time when I tagged along with him and my father to pass out tracts to those whom he called “dead men walking”. As they passed out those tracts, most people just walked by without saying a word. But others would curse at them, spit in their direction and even call them names just for spreading the Gospel. I asked Brother Robert how he felt when people responded that way. He told me what he often told others; “BJ, I've got a bullet in my head, I should be dead, but the Lord saved me. The power of God is real, I don't care what people think about me. What can they do to me?”

At the time I thought he was out of his mind, but after coming to faith I realized this was how a believer is supposed to respond to adversity, with joy and confidence in the Lord. Although he is no longer with us, his testimony and perseverance in the midst of adversity reminds me of the verses before us today, James 1:2-4.

Last week we reviewed the introductory salutation (v. 1). Normally, after the initial greeting, most New Testament writers express appreciation for their readers in a form of thanksgiving. But not James; he was familiar with the trials and persecution of his brothers in Christ. As we also found out from the previous message, they were scattered “among the nations” because of the persecution that arose at the time Stephen was martyred for his commitment to the faith (Acts 11:19). Knowing this, James moves straight ahead into his message.

First, he offers a pastoral exhortation; *“count it pure joy, my brothers, when you face trials of many kinds”*(v.2). What follows is the explanation for the trials; *“because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance”*(v.3). He ends with the intended result of the trials; *“Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything”*(v.4). James knows that the difficulties that inevitably afflict believers serve a purpose. They deepen our commitment to Christ which causes us to grow up in the Christian faith. He wants his readers - including you and me - to know the same.

A. The Exhortation (V.2): *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers whenever you face trials of many kinds”*. James opens this verse commanding his readers to carefully consider how they should view adversity. This is crucial to point out; it’s easy to be joyful when things are going well but it’s uncanny to have joy when facing setbacks, afflictions and persecution. Hence the reason he is calling them and us to understand suffering from the vantage point of confidence in God’s Sovereignty. God is our loving Father, he’s slow to anger, abounding in grace and has a steadfast love for us. Everything that comes into our lives is from his heavenly hand, not to harm us but to help us. So when facing hardships we learn to trust him, and instead of stepping back, we step into our circumstances with a godly joy.

What comes next is his deep pastoral concern for his readers, he calls them brothers. The word translated “brothers” always refers to members of the same family. Here James uses it to address his readers as members of his spiritual family. It’s a word he uses fourteen times throughout the letter, showing his care and compassion for them. It also expresses his union with them. He was not above them but was united as one, being a brother in Christ.

He then urges them to see trials as a means for Christ-like development in their lives and not to be disheartened by the affliction they faced at that present time. They were being persecuted for their belief in Christ, there was also an apparent fear because of the stoning of Stephen, (Acts 8:1,11:19). James knew this and needed them to understand that making a stand for the gospel meant facing persecution. And the mindset of a mature christian should be that of Stephen. Even when facing death, his gaze was solely fixed on Christ; *“While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, Lord Jesus receive my spirit”* (Acts 7:59). The next time we face a trial, I pray that we can do the same, looking beyond our afflictions and upwards to the cross.

B. The Explanation (v.3): *“because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.”* As believers our main goal is to follow Christ, in doing so we are made to be more like him. But the result of this comes with a cost, and that cost is hatred from the world, which can come at us in many ways. A loss of friends, family strife, quarrels at work, you name it. But it's to be expected because becoming like Christ cannot be accomplished *without* suffering. Our Saviour says; *“If the world hates you, keep in mind it hated me first”* (John 15:18). With this truth in mind, James says that we should consider it “pure joy” to endure Christ-like persecution. “Pure” renders a Greek word that is sometimes translated “all”. So we count it “all joy” or “only joy”! or “nothing but joy”!

In verse 2 he pointed out the certainty of trials; *“whenever” you face trials of many kinds*. I’m sure everyone is familiar with the common phrase “No ifs, ands, or buts about it.” Nothing can be more true here, James knows that If you are a Christian, there are no if’s ands or buts that you will face hardships. His assuredness comes once again from his master Jesus who says; “If they persecuted me they will persecute you also”...(John 15:20). Also we know that these are trials from without and not from within because he says that these trials are designed for the *“testing”* of our faith in Christ. “We can’t avoid trials; but we can make the decision to respond to them with confidence in God’s providence and a determination to glorify God in the midst of those trials”

Douglas Moo.

It’s not easy to rejoice when a test or trial comes our way. But “testing” by trials is a necessary part of growing up in our Christian faith. “These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”(1 Peter 1:7). It’s a chance for us to apply what we know intellectually and live it out practically. The goal is to have a God centered mindset regardless if we pass or fail a test.

If we fail; “Glory to God that you gave us the heart and mind to see that we could have been more Christ-like in this situation”. If we pass; “It was only by God’s grace and divine enablement that we were able to make it through our circumstance”. Our faith is strengthened and we are able to persevere because our hope is in Christ and not our circumstance.

C. The Intended Result (v. 4.): *“Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”* Perseverance has a full time job. It works within us, causing us to endure trials and tests which are intended to develop mature christian character. The result is a believer not lacking in any spiritual virtues, being made mature and complete. The word mature can also mean “perfect” as rendered in the KJV but one of the reasons we know that “perfect” is not being used in this context is because throughout scripture believers are never called to be perfect in this life.

What believers are called to be, is spiritual fruit bearers. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,” Gal 5:22. *“Perseverance must finish its work,”* this indicates an ongoing process. Just like a tree that must be pruned to bear fruit, a christian must endure suffering and difficulties to develop spiritual maturity. Only in the face of trials and tests of many kinds can a Christian cultivate these spiritual attributes. God’s Pruning is necessary; Jesus says, *“He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful”*, John 15:2.

The conclusion: Our growth in the Christian faith and the way we respond to trials and testings can serve as a means not only to encourage other believers but it can also point non believers to Christ. Acts 16:16-40 clearly demonstrates this as summarized below.

After Paul cast a spirit out of a slave girl, the owners realized they could no longer make money off of her. So they took both Paul and Silas, stripped them, severely beat them and threw them in jail with a personal guard to look after them. Instead of complaining, they began to pray and sing hymns to God, suddenly there was a violent earthquake and the foundations of the prison were shaken. The jailer woke up and saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword ready to kill himself thinking everyone escaped. But Paul shouted reassuring him that everyone was accounted for. After witnessing such a scene the jailer asked them “what must I do to be saved?” They replied “Believe in Jesus and you will be saved”... The scripture says “*he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family*”...(V.36)

We may not get thrown in jail or beaten but the principle remains the same. How we respond to tests and trials mark our level of Christian maturity. When viewed through the lens of God’s providence, everything that happens in our lives comes from “His Fatherly Hand” (Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 10). If we forget this, situations that arise to shake us up can seem destructive and not caring. That’s why it is of utmost importance for us not to focus on the cuts, but to fix our gaze on the one who does the pruning. Only then can we learn to “*Count It All Joy!!*”