

The World According to Jim
"When the #\$%&@ Hits the Fan"
James 1:1-4

Introduction

- In 1972 author [Judith Viorst](#) wrote one of the most philosophically insightful books of our time. Maybe you've heard of it? [Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day](#). Alexander's day starts like this. "I went to sleep with gum in my mouth and now there's gum in my hair and when I got out of bed this morning I tripped on the skateboard and by mistake I dropped my sweater in the sink while the water was running and I could tell it was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day."
- That's just the start. Later Alexander's teacher doesn't like his drawing of an invisible castle, he loses his yo-yo, there's no dessert in his lunch, the dentist informs him he has a cavity, he must sit in the middle seat of the car, there's kissing on TV, he's served lima beans for dinner, and he has to wear his railroad-train pajamas. Alexander's solution for his terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day? Move to Australia. Nobody has bad days in Australia.
- Have you been there? The terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day? For some of you it hasn't been just a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. It's been a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad month, bad year, bad decade. Some of you have faced incredible trials recently. Wiinimakis. Hirschys. Cornetts. Krulatz. Andersons. Beiers. Ruskamps. Campbells. Those are just a few off the top of my head that I know about. What about all the trials and tests each of us face everyday that go unsaid?
- Here's the deal. When life is good, life is easy. But most of the time life isn't. When the you know what hits the fan it's not pretty. And we crumble. Our faith crumbles. And the weak little miserable god with a lower case "g" we've constructed in our minds crumbles. Can't stand the test just like us. Few of us handle trials and tests well. Even fewer of us have a view of God that's larger than the trial we're facing. Is your god big enough? When trials come, just like Alexander we run—away from the trial, away from God, away from his word—right to our Australia. And the trial wins. The test crushes us. And we check out.
- But in the "World According to Jim" things are different. Trials and tests are good things. The terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days are gifts. The Bible actually has the audacity to tell us that trials are occasions for joy. That's the message of James 1:1-4.

Proposition

- **Rejoice when the pressing, gripping, crushing trials of life come your way**
- The Puritan Thomas Manton once said, "A Christian is a bird that can sing in winter as well as in spring; he can live in the fire like Moses' bush—burn and not be consumed, even leap in the fire."¹ Is that you? Can you sing in the winter? Can you dance in the fire? Are you able to rejoice when the pressing, gripping, crushing trials of life come your way? Too

¹ Manton, p. 18-19.

frequently we use God, like a magic genie in a bottle, to change our circumstances when God is using our circumstances to change us.² If you've been run through the ringer these words from James are for you.

- *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

Transition

For the follower of Christ the first four verses of James 1 describe...

Organizational Sentence

- **Two positive outcomes of life's crushing trials when we respond with joy**
- Christians aren't masochists. Nobody enjoys hard times. That's not what this is about. The suffering is not the joy. The joy is in knowing that a sovereign good God exists and he makes use of those trials for the Christian's benefit and his own glory. God's sovereignty extends above and beyond the evil in this world. As **Doug Moo** put it, "God brings difficulties into believers' lives for a purpose, and that this purpose can be accomplished only if you respond in the right way to those problems."³ So how do you respond? How should you respond?

Transition

Here's where the wisdom of James comes in. Our response? One word. Joy.

- In **verse 2** James says that if you are a follower of Christ then you are to consider it pure joy whenever you face a trial. Remember the man who went down to Jericho and was jumped by a bunch of robbers then left for dead—until the Samaritan came along? That man, the one who went to Jericho *fell in* with a bunch of robbers. Same word here in James 1. *Whenever you face trials.* Whenever you fall into a bunch of trials count it all joy.⁴
- James is not just talking about persecution here. The word for trials is a much broader word than just persecution. *Trials of many kinds.* Many-colored, variegated, various kinds of trials. It's a word used of both outward trials and inward temptations.⁵ Basically any difficult situation, everyday troubles—inward or outward—that's what James has in view here. The inward temptation to look at pornography; that's a trial. The flat tire on the way to the job interview; that's a trial. A miscarriage; that's a trial. An illness—a trial. Having to stay up all night with a sick child—a trial. A difficult situation at work—a trial. The temptation to lose your temper—a trial. The loss of a job—a trial. Death of a spouse—trial. Financial struggles—trial. And often times the two, the outward trial and the inward temptation, are combined. Sometimes the external trial is so great, so difficult, that it becomes a point of temptation to sin.⁶ Just pause for a second and think of your week, your

² Dr. David Osborn, *Compass*, (April 2003); submitted to www.preachingtoday.com by Bill White, Paramount, California

³ Moo, p. 52-3.

⁴ Motyer, p. 30.

⁵ Reinecker, p. 721.

⁶ Moo, p. 53-4.

month, your year. Jot down two or three trials or trial like temptations that you're facing. Write them down. Look at the paper.

- If your response to that particular trial, whatever it might be, is joy, and not just any joy—pure joy—all joy—great joy, God's *sheer gift to you*.⁷ If that's your response then you've just invited God to intervene and begin to work his purposes through that trial. God is not a bad cop in the sky out to get you. He's not seeking your downfall. God is not your problem. He wants you to see how great and glorious he is by carrying you through the trial. It starts with you responding joyously. Before we go any further some of you need to pray and apologize to God. You've been blaming Him for your trial instead of responding with joy. Free God up to do what he longs to do in your life. **Rejoice when the pressing, gripping, crushing trials of life come your way.**
- You do realize that trials by definition have an undetermined outcome. That's why they are held, right?⁸ How are you responding? What outcomes are your trials producing in your life right now? Are they sinking you? Are they driving away from God? Trials are spiritual opportunities. And when you respond to them with joy you will see the hand of God in your life. It's God's promise.

Transition

Let's look at the **first positive outcome** that trials can have. **Verse 3.** *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings. 2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.* The first outcome? **Endurance.**

Perseverance. If you respond to trials with joy God will produce perseverance within you.

Main Points

- Again, here's how things play out. We're faced with a trial. Look at your list. We have a choice as to how we respond. If we fail to see the test for what it is, a spiritual opportunity, it will bury us every time and we'll miss out on what God can do through the trial. But if we turn to God and respond with joy we communicate to God that he is free to begin working through our trial. And when God begins to intervene something happens. Look at **verse 3.** James says your *faith is tested*. But that testing is not a bad thing. It means to approve after testing.⁹ When I was a kid my favorite breakfast cereal was KIX. The ad slogan for KIX back then was "kid tested, mother approved." That's the idea here with trials. Tested and approved.
- In other words, as we respond with joy God transforms the trial from something that sinks us to something that refines us. Through the trial our faith actually becomes tested and approved. Made genuine. Peter says the same thing about trials in 1 Peter 1:7. *These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine.* Same word, *genuine*, that's in James 1:3.
- You know what that means right? There are a lot of non-genuine, imitation Christians around. Why? Because they've rejected the very means God uses of testing and approving the Christian faith. Have you rejected the very thing God wants to use to make your faith

⁷ Eugene Peterson, *The Message*, James 1:2

⁸ Baker and Ellsworth, p. 8.

⁹ Reinecker, p. 721.

genuine? Trials will do one of two things. They will cause you to fall away from God, Luke 8 and the parable of the soils, or they will make your faith genuine. I like how one commentator puts it, “The difficulties of life are intended by God to refine our faith: heating it in the crucible of suffering so that impurities might be refined and so that it might become pure and valuable before the Lord.”¹⁰

- Let James’ big brother wisdom sink in. God’s aim in your trials is not your destruction but testing, just as gold is put into the furnace to be purified.¹¹ Your faith is incredibly valuable. The trial is the means God uses to test the genuineness of our faith. I don’t know about you but that makes all the difference in the world as far as the trial is concerned. Doesn’t it? If I can get it through my thick skull that the trial is for my benefit I can endure a whole lot. I’m willing to put up with difficult circumstances, to wait through the trial holding onto the future outcome that God promises. And that’s exactly James’ point—*because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance*. Responded to properly trials lead to patient endurance. Steadfastness. Courage stretched out. Perseverance. When you respond to trials with joy God says he will develop a resiliency to your character. Paul gets at this idea in Romans 5:3 when he says, *rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance*.
- Someone should tell Alexander. Apparently even people from Australia are prone to terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days. I found this story in the news this past week. Apparently a man from Australia was having marriage difficulties. So what did he do in response to his trial? He put his entire life up for auction on eBay. Seriously. In [Ian Usher’s](#) own words, "I am selling everything lock, stock and barrel, from the contents of my wardrobe to my kettle, and from my cutlery to my car. My aim is to walk away at the end of the eBay auction with my wallet in one pocket and my passport in the other, go to the airport and just jump on the first available plane to anywhere." He goes on to say, “My tale is a bit of a sad one, but I am not trying to sell anyone a sob story. This is just my way of dealing with what has happened to me." In case you’re interested, bidding opens on June 22 and lasts for a week.¹²
- Don’t think that what this man is doing anything different than what we do when we face trials. We may not do it to this degree but we do the same thing. Get me out of this terrible, horrible, no good, very bad trial. We auction ourselves off to whatever will get us out of the difficult circumstances. We are so into quick fixes and self-help that most of us never allow God the free reign to make full use of our trials. We bail out. We bail ourselves out. And we’re all the poorer because of it.
- I realize some of you are facing incredible trials right now. I can’t even begin to understand how difficult things are for some of you. Look at me. You won’t be able to make it through on grit alone. That won’t be enough. You’ve got to respond to God with joy for the circumstance he’s placed in your life. That’s the only way God will be able to build enough perseverance into your character to see you through the trial. And when you do, your faith will take on an indescribable richness and beauty. *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance*. God will see you through. Do you trust him? Let him prove himself big enough for your circumstances. We’re going to talk about [verse 12](#) in a few weeks.

¹⁰ Moo, p. 54.

¹¹ Manton, p. 24.

¹² <http://www.news.com.au/couriermail/story/0,23739,23391573-5013016,00.html>

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive what God has promised to those who love him.

Transition

It's interesting. Perseverance is good. It's necessary. It's positive. But it's only an intermediary outcome of what God is trying to do in us through our trials. Look at [verse 4](#) for the [second positive outcome](#) of trials. *Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.* When we respond to God with joy he is able to use our trials to bring spiritual [maturity](#) and [wholeness](#).

- The idea in [verse 4](#) is that responding to God with joy during a trial puts perseverance to work. Perseverance has a job to do. I like how the New English Bible translates [verse 4](#). "Let endurance perfect its work in you that you may become perfect."¹³ *Let steadfastness have its full effect.*¹⁴
- When we're faced with a trial, look at your list again, we have a choice as to how we respond. If we fail to see the test for what it is, a spiritual opportunity, it will impoverish us spiritually. But if we turn to God and respond with joy God is free to begin working. He'll produce perseverance in our character. And then, once perseverance has been put to work it produces spiritual maturity. The outcome of the terrible, horrible, no good, very bad trial is completeness in all its parts, wholeness.¹⁵ Through your trial you'll end up *not lacking anything*. That's a pretty strong statement isn't it? For the Christian, the benefits of trials are incredible. In the world according to Jim, it's a good thing when the you know what hits the fan.
- Again, Christians aren't masochists. The suffering itself is not the joy. The trial is not the joy. But when you respond with joy in spite of the circumstance God promises maturity, completeness, and wholeness. That makes the trial worthwhile. That makes your trials worthwhile. Look at your list. God will redeem your trials. Run to him.
- It's been said, "You are only young once but you can stay immature indefinitely."¹⁶ "But Doctor," we might say, "why does the medicine have to be so nasty? Why does the treatment have to be so severe?" And the doctor replies, "Don't you want to be better?" Don't you want to be whole?¹⁷ If the tares are pulled out prematurely the wheat is damaged. [Rejoice when the pressing, gripping, crushing trials of life come your way](#) and you will see the mighty hand of God.

Conclusion

- Some time ago researchers at UC Berkeley did an experiment involving amoebas. They wanted to see what would happen if they put an amoeba into a perfectly stress-free environment: ideal temperature, optimal concentration of moisture, constant food supply. The amoeba was required to make no adjustment whatsoever to its environment. Whatever it is that gives amoebas ulcers and high blood pressure was removed. You'd think that'd be a

¹³ Moo, p. 56.

¹⁴ ESV

¹⁵ Reinecker, p. 721.

¹⁶ Baker and Ellsworth, p. 22.

¹⁷ Motyer, p. 34.

recipe for one happy little amoeba. Apparently, too much comfort is dangerous. The amoeba died.¹⁸

- *Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. So don't try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way.* “There is no condition in the world that is not an opportunity for the exercise of grace.”¹⁹
- On the other end of it, the old saying goes whatever doesn't kill you only makes you stronger. That's not the message of James 1:1-4 either. Question God, yes. Ask why. Weep over your trials if necessary. But in all things rejoice. *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*²⁰
- I want to invite you to stay if your schedule permits and for the next few minutes open your bibles to Psalm 69 and then Psalm 95 follow along and in quietness listen and reflect and pray and worship.

¹⁸ Source: Chris Peterson, "Optimism and By-pass Surgery," in *Learned Helplessness: A Theory for the Age of Personal Control* [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993]. Quoted by John Ortberg in *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat* (Zondervan Publishing House, 2001), p. 47.

¹⁹ Manton, p. 26.

²⁰ Philippians 4:4