

Main Idea: We can have joy when we face trials because we have three guarantees from God.

- I. Guarantee #1: God is producing perseverance in us (2-3).
 - A. We need to think rightly about trials (2).
 1. Trials are inevitable.
 2. Trials are diverse.
 3. Trials have a good potential.
 - B. We need to respond rightly to trials (3).
 1. We must choose to rejoice.
 2. We must refuse to shut down.
 3. We must seek to suffer like our Savior did.
 4. We must know that the gospel makes it possible.
- II. Guarantee #2: God is producing maturity in us (4).
 - A. The Christian life is a work.
 - B. The Christian life is a process.
 - C. The Christian life involves a goal.
 1. God wants us to reach spiritual adulthood.
 2. God wants us to be complete.
 3. God wants us to experience fullness.
- III. Guarantee #3: God is offering His wisdom to us (5-8).
 - A. The Lord wants us to ask (5).
 1. He is a giver.
 2. He is generous.
 3. He doesn't get irritated.
 4. He promises to provide us with what we need.
 - B. The Lord wants us to believe (6-8).
 1. Doubts are like waves.
 2. Doubts shut off our prayer requests.

Make It Personal: To benefit from this promise...

1. Make sure you know the promise-giver.
2. Meditate on the promise.
3. Take God at His Word as you live each day.

There's a sentence that I find myself thinking frequently when I'm in a season of suffering. In fact, I don't just think it. I often *say* it out loud, whether speaking to myself, or to my wife, or even to the Lord in prayer. The sentence?

I don't know what to do next.

It goes with the territory of persistent suffering. Again, as I've shared before, I'm no specialist on the subject of pain. A novice really. Some of you have your PhD in the field. But in recent years, and especially in recent months as I've battled intense migraines, I feel like I've been to school on the subject, and the Lord has been teaching about a subject that's common to man.

One of the things I've noticed about pain is that it causes you to ask a lot of questions. It starts with, "Why Lord?" It leads to, "What do you want me to learn from this, Lord?" And, "What are you trying to teach me?" And then, "How do you want to use this to help me minister to others?"

But there's another question, or set of questions is more like it, that keeps popping up, especially if the trial persists. "What should I do *next*, Lord? Should I change something? Should I do something to make this trial go away? Should I keep responding the way I've been responding, or is there a new path You want me to walk?"

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

Just because I honored Christ in my trial last week, or in the previous week, or in the week before that, doesn't prevent the same old question from rising again today. That's the way trials work. Trials are so *daily*, or better said, so *moment by moment*. And in each moment of the persistent trial the questions keeps popping up, "Now what, Lord? What do I do *next*?"

We've seen in the last two months of sermons that God has given us in His Word promises to live by in the crucible of suffering. We have the promise of a good outcome (Romans 8:28-29), and the promise of a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13), and the promise of provision (Matthew 6:33), and so on. But is there a promise that will help us with this dilemma, the *what do I do next* question that keeps filling our brain?

And because of God's kindness the answer once again is, *yes*. God has given us a tailor-made promise for this aspect of suffering. We find this promise in James 1:2-8, *the promise of wisdom*.

We're given the context for this promise in the introduction to the letter in verse 1, "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings."

The Holy Spirit guided James to pen this epistle. That's James, the half brother of Jesus and lead pastor of the church in Jerusalem (see Acts 15). He identifies his readers as "the twelve tribes scattered among the nations," indicating these are Jewish Christians.

The word *scattered* is significant. Apparently, these were believers that James once shepherded in Jerusalem who were forced to flee for their lives. Acts 8:1 says, "On that day [the day Stephen was martyred] a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were *scattered* throughout Judea and Samaria." Acts 11:19 elaborates, "Now those who had been *scattered* by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch."

They're refugees. They're a displaced people group. Those words don't mean much to most of us. They're just words. But to over 43 million people in the world today, those words are a tragic personal reality.¹

To help us appreciate what James' readers were facing, let me give you a definition and a story. First, here's a definition of *refugees*: "They are men, women and children fleeing war, persecution and political upheaval. They are uprooted with little warning, enduring great hardship during their flight."²

Now a story, written by a 17-year-old Afghan refugee:

I am from Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. The fighting has been going on in my country for many years.

Things got really bad when the Taliban came. Every day there was fighting, from morning to night. There was lots of bombing and shooting. Many people were killed.

My father, my mother, and my little sister were killed by a bomb three years ago, when I was 15. It is very difficult for me to talk about this.

My father used to have a tobacco shop. At one o'clock he came back from the shop to have a meal with my mother and my sister. I was at school but I could hear all the fighting. At 2 o'clock I came home and saw what had happened. My

¹ www.worldrefugeeday.us/

² <http://www.rescue.org/refugees>

whole street had been destroyed. There was nothing left. No father, no mother. My home was finished.

When I saw this I fell to the ground. I was in hospital for one month. I couldn't speak at all – I couldn't even make a sound. After one month I started to speak again, very very slowly. It is still very difficult for me to speak."

After my parents were killed I stayed in Afghanistan for two years, with my mother's sister. Then I went to Pakistan to live with my older brother and sister. I stayed there for one month. My brother and sister paid a man five thousand dollars to get me to England.

I came here in a lorry and a boat. For two months I didn't speak to or see anybody. I slept and ate in the lorry. It was very hard. I was sick every day. I only had enough food and water for one month.

After this time all my food and water was finished. Five or six times I had to get out to steal food. I had never stolen before. My mother and father taught me not to steal.

When the lorry got to England I hid outside, underneath the lorry. Then I stayed in this position for a long time. It was raining very heavily and the driver was going very fast. It was terrible and I was frightened. I was holding on very tight and my arms were very painful.

I thought 'Why have I come here? I don't like England'. The wheels were spraying water all over me and I was very wet and dirty. After about six hours I fell.

One or two days later I woke up in hospital. I don't know where I was. Then a woman brought me to the Social Services in Oxford and they gave me money and somewhere to stay. It has been good for me here. I go to school here. I am learning to speak English.³

So what do you say if you're a pastor and you're writing a letter to members of your congregation who were forced to flee for their lives and are now refugees? Here's the first thing that the Spirit of God led James to say, verse 2, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds." Literally, "All joy count it."

Is he kidding? You're a refugee, and you're to *count it all joy*? He's not kidding. He actually loves these people very much and is giving them instruction they desperately need, and so do we. James used an accounting term, *hegeomai*, which means "to regard as, to think." We're inclined to look at our trials and conclude, "This is all very bad." But James exhorts us to draw a different conclusion. "No, though these things may be painful, there's actually joy available in this."

The KJV uses the verb *count*. "Count it all joy." In your checkbook you have two columns, an asset column and a debit column. Which column should you put your trials in? Are they assets or debits? James says to put them in the asset column, the joy column.

How can that be? How can we conclude that our trials are a means to joy? We can conclude that, says James, because we have three guarantees from God.

Guarantee #1: God is producing perseverance in us (2-3).

Guarantee #2: God is producing maturity in us (4).

Guarantee #3: God is offering His wisdom to us (5-8).

³ <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/coolplanet/kidsweb/world/afghan/afghanrefugee2.htm>

These are three reasons we can count it all joy when we face trials.

I. Guarantee #1: God is producing perseverance in us (2-3).

James says in verses 2-3, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.”

Interesting word, “perseverance.” In the Greek it’s *hypomone* which literally means “the ability to remain under,” specifically, “the ability to remain under pressure, to endure difficult circumstances. It includes endurance, patience, and steadfastness.

Jesus used this word in Luke 8:15, “But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and *by persevering* produce a crop.” Paul used it in Romans 5:3, “Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces *perseverance*.”

According to Paul, the Thessalonian church modeled this *hypomone*, this *perseverance*. What produced it? Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 1:3, “We continually remember before our God and Father...*your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ*.”

There’s the first reason we can rejoice in our hardship. We have this guarantee. God is using our present trials to produce perseverance in us. Why, then, do we so often not experience this joy? Because to experience it, James says we must *think rightly about trials* (that’s verse 2) and then *respond rightly to trials* (that’s verse 3).

A. We need to think rightly about trials (2). “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.” *Consider it*, says James. He’s talking about our thinking. We need to make sure we’re thinking rightly about our trials.

When I think about this text, it takes me back to my college days. I was part of a team called Swordbearers at Cedarville College that traveled to churches on the weekends to minister in music and teach in Sunday School classes. As the team leader it was my privilege to preach in just about every church we ministered. I had three sermons that I rotated, and one of them was from this text. *Count it all joy when you face various trials*. My team members heard that sermon so many times they could preach it!

But then we began to notice something. It seemed like every time I preached that message, God sent something our way right afterwards. Know what it was? Trials. My team members experience health trials, relationship trials, financial trials. It was as if the Lord was reminding us that He didn’t give us His Word to entertain us, but equip us for living life His way.

In fact, some of my team members approached me and said, “Don’t preach that message anymore! Every time you do, trials come.” But of course, if we think that just staying away from James 1 will immunize us from experiencing trials, we’re mistaken. We learn three things about trials in verse 2.

1. *Trials are inevitable.* James doesn’t say *if*, but *when*.

2. *Trials are diverse.* Trials of “many kinds,” he says. They’re not all the same. The Greek is *poikilois*, and it means “many colored” and “of various kinds.” Peter uses the word in 1 Peter 1:6, “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in *all kinds of trials*.” Trials come in all shapes and sizes, and our wise God sends them our way with a tailor-made purpose in mind.

3. *Trials have a good potential.* Take another look at the verb James uses. “Consider it pure joy when you *face* trials.” Another vivid term, “face” (Greek *periptō*). It means “run into” or “fall into the hands of” or “experience.” In Acts 27:41 it’s used to say a ship “struck a sandbar.” That’s how it feels when a trial enters your life, like your ship just smashed into some hidden sandbar.

But know this. While the sandbar was hidden to you, it wasn’t to God. He’s up to something in the sandbars of our lives. There’s a good potential in them, even though they may be quite painful, namely, our joy. Count it all *joy*.

That requires thinking rightly. But not just thinking rightly, for secondly...

B. We need to respond rightly to trials (3). Notice verse 3, “because you know that the testing⁴ of your faith develops perseverance.” Think of spiritual muscle. That’s what God is after. He wants to increase our ability to remain under pressure. And so, like a wise coach, He orchestrates a workout regimen to develop (Greek *katergazomai*, “accomplish, result in, prepare, bring about”) our ability to persevere.

And how should we respond during this divinely crafted workout? James points to four resolves.

1. *We must choose to rejoice.* “Consider it pure joy.” That’s not what we feel like doing. It’s a choice we must make. We feel like complaining and becoming despondent, but we must choose to see the hand of God in our lives and then exhibit His Spirit-produced joy.

2. *We must refuse to shut down.* Shutting down is the opposite of persevering, but again, that’s what we would naturally do. We stop opening our Bible. We stop coming to God’s House. We stop joyfully serving the people God has placed in our life. We become consumed by what we *cannot* do because of our painful situation and miss what God *wants* us to do.

3. *We must seek to suffer like our Savior did.* And how did He suffer? Hebrews 5:7-8 tells us, “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered.” 1 Peter 2:21 says, “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”

And how do we do this? How do we choose to rejoice, and refuse to shut down, and seek to suffer like our Savior? Here’s how...

4. *We must know that the gospel makes it possible.* James doesn’t give the gospel in this letter. He doesn’t need to give it. These readers have already embraced it. That’s why James can refer to them as he does in 2:1, “My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.”

It’s what Jesus did for us that makes possible our rightful response to trials. We are sinners, which means our bent is to be consumed with ourselves, and what we deserve for this self-worship is our Creator’s wrath. But out of His love for us He sent His Son to take that wrath in our place. Jesus, facing the punishment we deserved, did not shut down, but persevered for us, and “for the joy set before Him endured the cross (Heb 12:2).” God then raised His Son from the dead, and now offers forgiveness and eternal life to any who will repent and believe in Him.

⁴ The word means “to try to learn the genuineness of something by examination and testing, often through actual use.” *Louw-Nida Greek-English Lexicon*

It's what Jesus did for us that now makes counting it all joy possible. And so Hebrews 12:3 says, "Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

We can have joy when we face trials because we have three guarantees from God. We've seen the first. God is producing perseverance in us. Here's the second...

II. Guarantee #2: God is producing maturity in us (4).

That's verse 4, "Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." We learn three things about the Christian life from this important verse.

A. The Christian life is a work. God is working in us to do His good pleasure (Phil 2:13). We are His workmanship (Eph 2:10). Here the NIV says that perseverance must finish its *work*. We're not a finished product yet. The Potter has us on the table and He's molding and shaping us.

B. The Christian life is a process. "So that you may be." The Lord is working to take us from where we *are* to where He wants us to *be*. No one gets holy in a hurry. As the old-timer once put it, "I'm not yet where I oughta be, and I'm not yet where I'm going to be, but thank the Lord, I'm not where I was!"

And just where is the Lord taking us in this process? James makes it clear that...

C. The Christian life involves a goal. What's the goal? "That you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." James says God has three related aims...

1. God wants us to reach spiritual adulthood. "That you may be *mature*." The word actually appears twice in verse 4 which literally reads, "Let the endurance have a *perfect* work, that you may be *perfect* and entire, in nothing lacking."⁵ The Greek *telion* means "full grown, complete, perfect." Hebrews 5:14 says, "Solid food is for *adults*." That's our word, and that's God's intent for us, that we reach spiritual adulthood.

Colossians 1:28 says this should be our goal in ministry, "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may *present everyone perfect in Christ*." It's certainly God's goal with us. We are God's children, but He doesn't want us to remain as immature little kids.

Kids can do funny things, but they're funny because they're kids. If a 21-year-old is doing what a 2-year-old does, they're told, "Stop being immature." It's not a good thing when children don't grow up. The Lord wants His kids to grow up.⁶

That's one of the reasons He designed a special place where this growing up is to occur. It's called *the church*. Ephesians 4:11 indicates He gave pastor-teachers to the church "to equip the saints for the work of the ministry." But what's the purpose of all this equipping and ministry? Verses 12-13 tell us, "So that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and **become mature**, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

If you're not a functioning member of a local church, you're stunting your spiritual growth, and the growth of others too. You need your brothers and sisters in Christ, and they need you too, so that together you can help each other mature.

But it's not just spiritual adulthood that God's after. Here's a second aim.

⁵ Young's Literal Translation

⁶ In Matthew 5:48 Jesus said, "Be *perfect* as your Heavenly Father is *perfect*."

2. *God wants us to be complete.* “That you may be mature *and complete.*” This word, the Greek *holokleros*, means “entire, whole, a totality.” In other words, it’s not just that the Lord wants us to grow up, but that we grow up healthy and complete and whole.

And that again brings us back to the importance of the local church. You can’t experience this wholeness on your own. The Lord has given us “everything we need for life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3),” and one of His essential gifts to us is *the church*.

I hope you love and cherish your church. I hope you show you value it by spending time with your brothers and sisters, and not just spend time, but invest time with them with God’s goal in mind, to help each other become mature and complete.

James identifies a third aim...

3. *God wants us to experience fullness.* “Not lacking anything,” literally, “to be in need of nothing.” In James 2:15, James says, “Suppose a brother or sister is *without* clothes and daily food.” James says it’s unacceptable to see that situation and do nothing about meeting those needs. That’s our word. To be *without*, to *lack* something.

When it comes to our spiritual development, God doesn’t want that for His children, and that’s why He allows trials into our lives. He’s not punishing us. He wants to give something to us, the fullness of spiritual maturity.

You say, “Well, these first two guarantees are quite encouraging. It’s great to know that God is producing perseverance in us, and that God is producing maturity in us. That helps me rejoice in the tough things I’m facing. But I must be honest. When I’m in the middle of a tough situation, especially one that lingers, I don’t just need the knowledge of what’s coming at the end of the race. I need to know what to do in the next step of the race. Like today, this very minute. What should I do next?”

I’ve seen four neurologists. Should I try a fifth? I’ve tried this medicine and this one and this one, and they didn’t help. Should I try yet another? Life is full of questions, especially during tough times. *What do You want me to do next, Lord?*

What are you facing right now? If you’re seeking to cooperate with God’s agenda, you have those questions too. *What should I do next with my wayward child, Lord? Or with my difficult job situation? Or with this stubborn habit? Or with my financial crunch? You know I want to please You, Father, to respond in a Christlike manner. But how do I do that this week? What do you want me to do next?*

If you’re asking those questions, you’re going to appreciate this third guarantee. The reason we can rejoice in sufferings is not only guarantee number one, that God is producing **perseverance** in us, and number two, that God is producing **maturity** in us, but also number three...

III. Guarantee #3: God is offering His wisdom to us (5-8).

Notice verse 5, “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” What a blank-check offer!

If any of you *lacks*. Here the verb is a present passive indicative, “to be in need of.” And it’s in the singular, which makes it very personal. If *any one of you* lacks.

If any of you lacks *wisdom*. The Greek word is *sophia*, a word that means “insight, specialized knowledge, prudence, discretion, the capacity to understand.” *Louw-Nida* says, “the capacity to understand and as a result to act wisely.”

You see, that's exactly what I need when I'm in the crucible of suffering. I need some understanding so that as a result I'll be able to act wisely. So if that's our predicament, what should we do?

A. The Lord wants us to ask (5). A very simple word. *Ask*. James uses the Greek word *aiteo* which means essentially what our English word means, "to ask for, to request," and in some contexts, it even means "demand."

I'm reminded of James said in chapter four. "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. *You do not have, because you do not ask God (4:1-2).*"

The Lord wants us to ask, and in this case, to ask for wisdom. "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God." And what's true about God that should motivate us to ask? Four things.

1. *He is a giver.* "He should ask God *who gives.*" God is a giver. "For God so loved the world that He *gave His only begotten Son* (John 3:16)." "Who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us, how will He not also, along with Him, *freely give us all things* (Rom 8:32)."

Why ask? First, because He is a giver.

2. *He is generous.* "Who gives *generously,*" says James. The word (Greek *haplos*) means "without reserve, liberally, simply, sincerely, openly." It's the opposite of stingy, or tight-fisted, or begrudgingly. God the Father loves to give good gifts to His children, and wisdom is one such gift.

"I don't know what to do, Father! Would You give me wisdom?"

"I'd love to, My child, for I always want what's best for you." And so He gives us what we ask because He is so generous.

3. *He doesn't get irritated.* He gives "without finding fault," a word that means "to insult, reproach, reprimand."

He's the opposite of the border official I met traveling from Romania into Ukraine. As we crossed the border, we had to fill out of the proper paperwork. Our Ukrainian brother, Vasy, said, "Don't make any mistakes on the form, or they won't except it." I could just imagine the soldier taking my form and passport and saying, "You didn't write your name the right way. Request for entry denied."

I'm thankful the God of heaven is *not* like that. He's not looking for us to mess up so He can deny our requests. In fact, He knows we've already messed up, but through His Son He welcomes us *without finding fault.*

4. *He promises to provide us with what we need.* In this case, it's wisdom. "If any of you lacks *wisdom,* he should ask God, and *it* (wisdom) will be given to him."

Don't miss the *it* there. We're invited to ask for wisdom, and that's what our Father gives us. He doesn't say He'll give us a ticket out of this trial. Why would He do that? He's intent on using this trial for our good, so why would He remove that which He knows will produce eternal reward for us? It's wisdom He gives us, for that's what we most need so we can remain in the trial and honor Him through it.

And think about what wisdom is. God doesn't give us a message in the sky, "Do this! Do that!" Nor some gut impression of what we should do. No, His gift is *wisdom.* We know from other Bible texts that He wants us to use our minds and search His Word

for precepts and principles, and to seek godly counsel from others. That's vital for making God-honoring decisions. But information isn't enough. We need to know what to do with that information, how to implement it in our lives and in this particular situation, so as to please Him. That's wisdom, and that's His gift to us.

What an amazing promise, the promise of *wisdom!* But to benefit from this special promise, we must ask. The Lord wants us to *ask*. Yet that's not all. Secondly...

B. The Lord wants us to believe (6-8). James says in verses 6-8, "But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does."

So there's something that will short-circuit this conditional promise. *Doubts*. "When he asks, he must believe and not *doubt*."

1. *Doubts are like waves.* Up and down, back and forth, shifting and unstable. "Do you believe Me, or don't you believe Me?" says the Lord. "I'll give you exactly what you need, wisdom, and I won't make you jump through hoops to get it, but you *must believe Me*."

2. *Doubts shut off our prayer requests.* That's what verse 7 says. *That man*, the doubting man, should not think he will receive *anything* from the Lord.

Let me remind you of how your Christian life began, my brother in Christ. You heard what God said in His Word about your sin and about the Savior, and you *believed* God's Word. In fact, it wasn't until you stopped doubting God and by His grace put your full weight upon His promise, that you experienced the power of that promise. He said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." And by the power of the Holy Spirit, you believed, and you were saved.

My non-Christian friend, you could experience the power of God's promise today, but you must stop doubting. You say, "But what do I do with my doubts?" Do what the man in Mark 9:24 did. He said to Jesus, "I believe. Help thou mine unbelief!" And He will.

We've seen three guarantees this morning, and they are what enable us to count it all joy when we face trials. Guarantee #1: God is producing perseverance in us (2-3). Guarantee #2: God is producing maturity in us (4). Guarantee #3: God is offering His wisdom to us (5-8). Now let's make this personal.

Make It Personal: To benefit from this promise...I urge you to do three things

1. *Make sure you know the promise-giver.* God extends the promise of wisdom to His children, to those who know Christ. Do you know the promise-giver?

2. *Meditate on the promise.* You will want to memorize verse 5, for that's the heart of this promise. But don't just memorize it. Meditate on it. Chew on it. Personalize it. "Lord, You say that if I lack wisdom, I should ask You for it. And You say You will give it to me. Thank You for this promise! You know what I'm facing right now, and I greatly need it." But don't just thank Him for the promise...

3. *Take God at His Word as you live each day.* Take this promise to school with you, young people, and into the living room, moms and dads, and to work, and to church, and everywhere else you go. And when you find yourself saying, "Lord, I don't know what to do next," ask Him, and He will give you precisely what you need. You have His Word on that, *the promise of wisdom*.