



FAITH, FREEDOM, & FITNESS

DAILY BREAD

Thursday, January 01

James 1:2

*Consider it pure joy,
my brothers and sisters,
whenever you face trials of many kinds ...*



Anyone that is not new to the sport of powerlifting has likely experienced a training plateau in which your lifts “level out” or even go down from overtraining. Like an injury, it is a frustrating time that we must work through. The key is to focus on recovery and not the plateau, or injury, itself.



In today's verse, James does not open his letter with a gradual introduction, but immediately launches into the foundation of his letter. He begins with a profoundly challenging command in verse two:

*Consider it pure joy,
my brothers and sisters,
whenever you face trials of many kinds ...*

In essence, he says that we should find joy in bad things happening to us. Of course, that's exactly the opposite from a normal human response to hardship, similar to a lifter facing a training plateau or injury. Many of James' readers were likely facing poverty and persecution, but he purposefully uses the words ***“trials of many kinds.”***

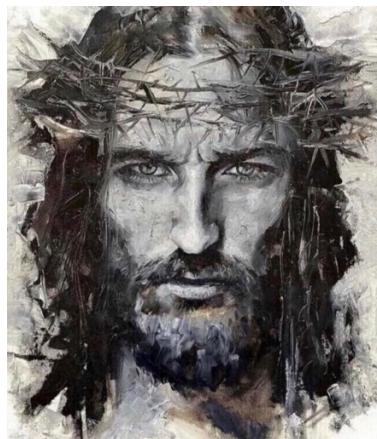
Everyone experiences trials. James means for believers to respond to troubles, regardless of size, by counting the experience as ***“joy.”*** What does he mean, and why would he write such a demanding thing to suffering people?

The word “**count**” is used in some translations instead of “**consider**.” The word relates to organizing or collecting things. James is implying that we should enter our hardships as deposits into the checkbook of our life, not withdrawals. He’s not talking about our immediate emotional response to an injury, illness, or loss of a loved one. He’s talking about how we categorize that moment when assessing our life as a whole.

We may not be able to control our circumstances, but we can control how we think about them. We can choose to wallow in self-pity or to say to ourselves, “This is a bad thing, but I will get through it. I will learn from it and grow stronger. And I will call the growth and strength worth rejoicing over, even when it hurts, both emotionally and physically.”

That brings us to the next question: Why would God want us to respond to bad things this way? The next two verses, which we will begin discussing tomorrow, will answer that question.

In Christ, Spero



*For God so loved the world,
that he gave his only begotten Son,
that whosoever believeth in him
should not perish,
but have everlasting life.*

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FAITH, FREEDOM, & FITNESS

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Friday, January 02

James 1:3

... because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.



Most powerlifting routines contain a conditioning phase, a foundation phase, and a strength phase. Each phase is designed to prepare the lifter, both mentally and physically, for the next phase.

In today's verse from James 1:3, he continues taking us through a spiritual training cycle, including a testing phase (verse 2), a perseverance phase (verse 3), and, as we will discuss tomorrow, a maturation phase (verse 4):

... because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.



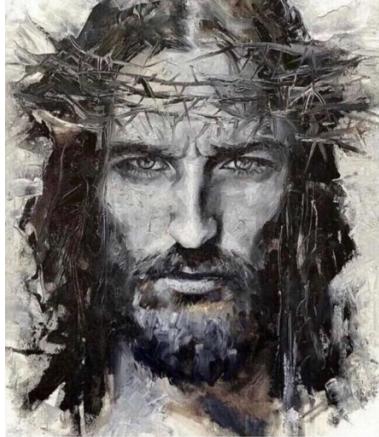
Yesterday, we discussed in verse two that as believers we must call it joy when trials come our way. Or, to put it more bluntly, we should see the good side of bad things happening to us.

In verse three, James gives the beginning of his answer to why God would ask us to do that. In short, it's about faith. It's about trusting God. God wants us to respond to trials, to the hard things in our lives, in a way that demonstrates our trust in Him.

James is saying that when a trial or hardship comes our way, we should label that moment as joyful *because* it will test our faith. By definition, a trial creates a moment where we don't know how things will work out. It is in these moments that we make life's most critical choices. God wants us to turn to Him for more help, to trust more deeply that He is with us and for us, to believe that He will carry us through.

When we choose to trust Him, He provides. Our endurance – the ability to keep trusting Him while trials continue unresolved – grows. And since our faith is the most important thing to our God, that is worth rejoicing!

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FAITH, FREEDOM, & FITNESS

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Saturday, January 03

James 1:4

*Let perseverance finish its work
so that you may be mature and complete,
not lacking anything.*



Like the culmination of a powerlifting cycle ends with the strength phase, our spiritual training cycle here on earth ends with the maturation phase.

In today's verse from James 1:4, James writes that we shouldn't make the point of our lives an all-out effort to avoid trials. Instead, we should make the most of them by letting "**perseverance**" – trusting God through another trial – create the result that it always does. Namely, more maturity, and more trust in God:

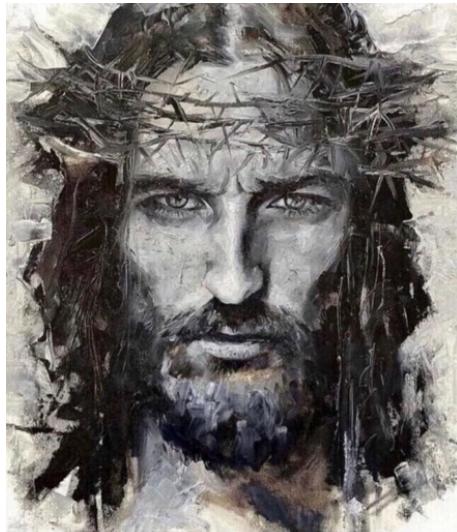
*Let perseverance finish its work
so that you may be mature and complete,
not lacking anything.*



In fact, James goes so far as to say that the one who can trust God without stopping, no matter how terrible the trial, will have arrived at perfection, complete maturity.

None of us is there, yet, but every believer in Jesus Christ is on the way. We just need more trials to keep us growing in that direction.

In Christ, Spero



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