

Trials and Testing

Re-Routing: God's Back Roads to Joy—part 7

July 21, 2024

Severe trials seem to make joy impossible. But trials will hit us all, and when they do, you can hear God saying, “Re-Routing.” This route produces an unimagined source of deep joy.

DAY 1: Trials AND joy?????

Re-Route to Joy #7: Trials.

Joy definition #7: The joy of maturity.

1. As we've seen in our series, “Re-Routing,” the Christian life is filled with amazing paradoxes, some that at first blush “make no sense.” This is one of them.

James 1:2 (RSV) Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials ...

2. What immediately goes through your mind when you read that verse?

James 1:3 ...for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

⁴ *And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

⁵ *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him.*

3. Re-write in your own words what James is telling us.

4. The word “various” means “multi-colored.” Whether the trials are “smudges” in our lives or dark thunderclouds, all kinds of trials provide an opportunity for joy.

5. In trying to understand how joy let's look at the schema James highlights.

Trials→Testing→Steadfastness→Maturity (James 1:2-4)

5. What strikes you about the schema?

6. Why would any of that be an occasion for joy?

DAY 2: Steadfastness

*James 1:2 (RSV) **Count it all joy**, my brethren, when you meet various trials,*

³ *for you know that the testing of your faith produces **steadfastness**.*

⁴ *And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

⁵ *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him.*

1. “Count it all joy” – The word “count” can also be translated “reckon.” It was used primarily as a banking term. When you deposit your paycheck into your checking account the bank “reckons” the money to be authentic. You can now draw money on that deposit. You also can “reckon” that the accounting of your deposit is true.

2. What does James’ usage of “count” or “reckon” say to you about this topic of joy?

3. “Trials” test us. It is not the kind of testing of passing or failing a test. It is the kind of testing a gold miner does when he thinks he’s discovered gold. He takes the ore to an assayer who “tests” whether the gold is real or “fool’s gold.”

4. Trials are meant to deepen our faith. (At the beginning of a trial our faith may seem shaken, not deepened. Over time, God works to deepen faith).

5. “Steadfastness”

a. The Greek word for “steadfast” is “hypomonen.” Depending on the context this can also be translated “perseverance” or “endurance.” It means to be steadfast in the face of difficulties.

b. Why do you think steadfastness or endurance is so important in our Christian growth toward maturity?

6. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 3: Maturity

James 1:2 (RSV) Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials,

³ *for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.*

⁴ *And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be **perfect** and **complete**, lacking in nothing.*

⁵ *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him.*

1. Verse 4 tells us what steadfastness in the face of trials is building in the Christian. James uses two words.

a. “Perfect” – the Greek word is “teletoi.” It is sometimes translated “perfect,” “complete,” or “finished.” “Telestai” in Greek philosophy represented the ultimate meaning of life. (We will not become perfect in this life. The Christian will be made perfect at death. In the meantime, the process of perfecting continues, through trials).

b. “Complete” – the Greek word is “holokleroi.” It has a prefix (holo) which means “whole,” and “kleros” which means “part.” The idea is “fully developed.”

2. The result of this kind of Christian maturity that is built through steadfastness in the face of trials is that we will be “lacking in nothing.” The idea is that whatever trials we face, and whatever opportunities are in front of us, we will have the maturity to face them.

3. Taken together, in the maturing process two images emerge:

a. Something incomplete now works like it was designed to work.

b. Something in pieces is made whole. The image is of something be assembled from its parts. It now works like it’s supposed to work.

4. What strikes you about these two images of Christian maturity?

James 1:2-4 highlights this ...

“The pain of problems and the profit of persistence.”

DAY 4: Joy of maturity.

James 1:2 (RSV) **Count it all joy**, my brethren, when you meet various **trials** ...

1. Let's come full circle. Why would trials of every sort be reason for joy?
2. First, let's define the joy James is talking about. I think of it as "**the joy of maturity.**"
3. James is not talking about the initial feelings when trials come our way. We may feel aggravated, discouraged, defeated, and disconsolate or any of a number initial feelings when trials strike.
4. To "count" something joy is *initially* a mental discipline, and a command to follow. It doesn't mean that we will feel "happy" when trials strike.
5. Remember our schema:

Trials → Testing → Steadfastness → Maturity (James 1:2-4)
6. The idea of this kind of joy goes something like this:
 - a. I know that trials will test me. It won't immediately bring "good" feelings.
 - b. This trial is going to "test" my faith, not like a test in school. God is not "testing" me in order to give me a pass-fail grade.
 - c. Trials **test** our faith in two senses:
 - Trials **expose** the kind of faith we presently actually have, and
 - Trials sharpen, **shape**, and make faith stronger even though there will be times when my faith *feels weaker!*
 - d. The kind of "joy" that is birthed is a joy that comes when you see (or others see) progress in your Christian maturity, conduct, character or style of relating.
 - e. This kind of "joy" is powerful because it strikes a blow against our shame, guilt, sense of failure, and repeated failure to be what we long to be—mature like Christ!
7. What strikes you from points 6a, 6b, and 6c?
8. What strikes you from points 6d and 6e?

DAY 5: Personalizing your trials and joy

*James 1:2 (RSV) Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various **trials** ...*

James 1:3 ...for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him.

1. Remember James' schema:

Trials → Testing → Steadfastness → Maturity (James 1:2-4)

2. What trials are you currently facing?

3. Take the idea of “testing.”

a. God is exposing your faith as it actually presently is. What do you see of your faith? Are there good parts you see? Are there doubts you see? Jot down what you see.

b. God is “testing” your faith by “shaping, sharpening, honing, deepening, strengthening,” etc. How does this idea strike you, now?

4. The process character element is steadfastness, endurance, perseverance. In times of trials, this is sometimes a day-to-day experience. In rougher trials this may be a minute-to-minute experience. Does it help you to know that this experience is normative? That both immature Christians and mature Christians experience this? Jot down your thoughts.

5. Maturity is the end goal. Christian maturity is becoming like Christ. Is God putting His finger on some aspect of your life? Jot down your thoughts.

a. Your conduct?

b. Your character?

c. Your style of relating?

6. As we end our week, what is your biggest takeaway?