

## Passing the test of your Faith

Our faith in God has incredible potential to make our lives complete. Faith can take us from the place of deficiency, to the place of being quintessential and accomplished! James puts it this way, *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing”* (James 1:2-4). Another translation reads, *“Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.”*

Faith in God can make you perfect and complete, however, your faith will be contested (challenged). Your faith will go through the fire of trial! The up side is this... Whatever you are in need of, your faith in God has the potential to take you from where you are right now, a place of lack and insufficiency, to this place the Bible calls, *“...being perfect and complete.”* That is, lacking nothing! Nevertheless, the downside is that your faith must first be proven (put to the test).

This being the case, the path to perfection and completeness is one of serious trials and stern opposition. Your faith cannot get you anywhere until it has been authenticated. The devil knows exactly what's at stake, and he will do all he can to keep you from trusting God and His word. Therefore, as your faith encounters the turbulence of tests and trials, do what James says, and **count it all joy**. This is the first step to becoming perfect and complete in Christ Jesus.

Note, the two Greek words translated “perfect” and “complete” are very interesting. **Perfect** signifies “having reached a successful conclusion” and **complete** signifies “having made something whole.” Observe, the testing or proving of your faith produces growth, and you must grow sufficiently in order to reach a successful conclusion (and wholeness). That said, what exactly is your *successful conclusion and wholeness*? It's a special place where you need nothing! It's reaching a destination where there is no lack! That ever test your faith is going through right now, let me tell you, it's going to be worth it!

God desires for you to reach this destination, to be perfect and complete - **lacking in nothing**. Why? Because He rejoices in the prosperity of His children! However, the road to this awesome destination is fraught with tests and trials. Yes, your faith will be opposed, contested and put through the fire of various trials. This is not optional, as your faith has nowhere to go without it! Yet, even in the midst of such tests and trials you are told that there is something you can do to make the journey easier (endurable) - you are told to **“count it all joy!”** Joy is a way of showing that your faith is genuine. Notice, the scripture doesn't say, *“if”* but, *“when”* you fall into various trials.

James tells us to **count it all joy** in the midst of trials and struggles. This statement forces us to examine how we should react to those things that take away our joy. For at sometime we've all been hurt, disappointed and overwhelmed by the many different trails that come our way. And many of these challenges may have caused our joy to dissipate. Yet, they can easily become the opposite – they can become a source of even greater joy. James says we should consider it *“pure joy”* (NIV) whenever we face trials of various kinds. This seems like a hard thing to do. Yet, it is possible!

The joy that James is talking about here is pure joy – the word ‘pure’ means all, whole or thorough. It’s not just a surface joy, but a joy that is all-encompassing. It’s a joy that’s real and sincere, a joy that surpasses all understanding! But where do we find such **pure joy**?

- (a) We find pure joy in God’s presence. **Acts 2:28** says, “*You will make me full of joy in Your presence.*”
- (b) We can find pure joy in the Holy Spirit. **Acts 13:52** says, “*And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.*”
- (c) We find pure joy in the will of God. **Romans 15:32** says, “*That I may come to you with joy by the will of God.*”
- (d) We find pure joy in prayer. **Philippians 1:4** says, “*Always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy.*”
- (e) We find pure joy in unity. **Philippians 2:2** says, “*Fulfil my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.*”
- (f) We find pure joy in believing. **1 John 1:8** says, “*Whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.*”
- (g) We find pure joy in the truth. **3 John 1:4** says, “*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.*”

Whenever you are going through ‘stuff’, and you need to find some joy, look for it in the right places. It’s easier to consider it all joy when you know where to look! And remember “*the joy of the Lord is your strength,*” therefore, any joy that originates in Him (or His word) will strengthen you when tests and trials come your way. In **John 15:10** Jesus declares, “*If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.*”

To persecuted Jewish believers scattered among pagan nations James gave this surprising advice: “*Consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds.*” In other words, trials should not be seen as a curse, a punishment or even a calamity but something that must prompt rejoicing. “*Count it all joy,*” not just a little bit of joy mixed in with a whole bunch of sadness and grief. No, James said, “count it all joy” (that is, full joy)! So remember that circumstances don’t have to destroy your joy.

What’s more, to experience God’s abundant, overflowing joy involves a choice. It’s a habit of mind which finds it’s source in the Spirit of God. Joy is a positive approach you choose to express. It’s a matter of ‘attitude’ that stems from your confidence in God. The belief that He is at work, that He is in full control, that He is in the midst of whatever has happened, is happening or will happen. You must be on your guard and don’t get robbed of joy because of any of life’s happenings. Whether it be circumstances, people, the future, the past; the answer is to abide in God and to be obedient to His word and receive **pure joy** from Him.

Going back to our opening scripture (**James 1:2-4**), it’s apparent that the “*testing of our faith*” produces something. It produces patience! The original Text says, “***Knowing that the proving of your faith works out endurance.***” The Greek word for ‘patience’ literally means, “an abiding under”, and it is passive. Therefore, “endurance” is probably a better description of this word (in the context of **James 1:2-4**). As you build endurance you build character, and strong character is what you need to become perfect and complete. So commit this to memory:

- (a) When you are going through trials, consider it pure joy.
- (b) When your faith is being tested, know that your endurance is growing.
- (c) When endurance is fully developed, producing strong character, then you will reach your destination and lack nothing.

When your faith is being tested, the most natural question to ask is, *“That does it take to achieve success when the trials come?”* I believe there should be two cooperating forces at work for you to achieve success. **James 1:4-5** reveals what these two forces are: *“But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”* Another translation reads, *“So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking.”*

The first force is endurance (patience). Quite simply, don't quit before you reach your destination - before your answer comes. Allow endurance to fully develop so that you can be perfect and complete, lacking nothing! **Hebrews 10:36** says it this way, *“For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.”* You may have done the will of God, done exactly what God wants you to do, but if you don't exercise endurance, you won't receive the promise (the answer you've been waiting for). That's how important endurance is!

A prisoner of war identified four factors that will boost a person's resolve to endure painful trials:

- (1) Hope (that the war would end).
- (2) Faith (in the ability to tough it out).
- (3) Vision (of being able to escape).
- (4) Determination (a mindset not to give in).

We can apply all these four factors to our Christian walk today.

- (1) **Hope** - a confident expectation something good is about to happen (**Acts 26:1-7**).
- (2) **Faith** - the unequivocal belief that you can place absolute and complete trust in God's faithfulness.
- (3) **Vision** - a prophetic understanding of your future as derived from infallible God's word.
- (4) **Determination** - the ability to endure under hardship by looking at the author and finisher of your faith (Jesus Christ). Who for the joy that was set before Him, “endured” the cross!

The second operating force at work (to pass the test of your faith) is wisdom. In **James 1:5**, in the midst of a discussion on trials, James appears to change the subject mid-stream. He has just explained how trials produce character and endurance, and then he says, *“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God ... and it will be given to him.”* Rather than switching topics, James is making a consistent argument regarding trials. In order for us to be able to *“count it all joy”* in the face of trials, we must view the matter from God's perspective. This is what wisdom does! Beyond simply understanding God's reasoning, we must also actively apply His wisdom. When we do this, we become more able to correctly evaluate people and circumstances, and are therefore, better equipped to make sound decisions.

One of the primary functions of wisdom is to help us rightfully discern the source of our trials. Rightfully discovering the source is very helpful in understanding God's divine purpose in each situation. Often our trials come from making wrong decisions ourselves, and these occasions are tough because we cannot blame the problem on anyone else. However, whatever the situation, and whoever else is involved, we have someone we can go to. Someone who is ready to provide what we do not have - wisdom from above!

The search for wisdom is over! If we want wisdom, let us ask God for it and He will give it to us. We don't need to bathe in any distilled water, hike to some high mountain to meet a "wise man" or smoke any special herb. All we need to do is ask for what we want and then listen as He gives us the answer. But how do we ask for wisdom? There are probably many ways to ask or place a demand on God for wisdom.

The first and most obvious is making a direct petition to God. We can go directly to Him and stand on **James 1:5** requesting for His wisdom in a particular situation. However, for us to hear and effectively carry out His instructions we need to calm down (de-stress) and receive His peace in that situation. For example, in a very tense situation, most of us tend to get flustered initially. Consequently, we have to purposefully calm down so that we can ask the Lord for His divine wisdom in that situation. It is only at this time (when we are at peace) that we can hear exactly what He wants us to know. Then, after we have heard, we are able to apply God's wisdom!

So remember, if you lack wisdom, if you can't see the wood for the trees, you can ask God and He will give you wisdom "liberally and without reproach." God is delighted every time you ask Him for wisdom! And He won't belittle you or find fault with you for asking. There are no limits to the areas of life where wisdom can be found. However menial your task, you can ask God to guide you and find the wisdom to help you do it well. This means that those who are often looked down on by so-called 'wise' people, carry every bit as much potential for wisdom when they come to God for guidance and growth. Proverbs confirms that wisdom is supreme!

**Proverbs 4:7** (AMP) says, *"The beginning of Wisdom is this: get Wisdom - skilful and godly Wisdom! For skilful and godly Wisdom is the principal thing. And with all you have gotten, get understanding (discernment, comprehension, and interpretation)."*

Albert Einstein said this, *"Wisdom is not a product of schooling but of the lifelong attempt to acquire it."*

To recap... Faith in God can make you perfect and complete, however, your faith will be contested (challenged). Your faith will go through the fire of trial! Your faith must be proven to be authentic - the real deal! Yes, your faith when proven is powerful! Whatever you are in need of, your faith in God has the potential to take you from where you are right now, a place of lack and insufficiency, to this wonderful place the Bible calls, *"...being perfect and complete."*

Therefore, whenever you find your **faith on trial** (being tested), ask God for wisdom, and patiently endure. Without these two forces at play your faith will never be able to see you through. But with them, you will be made *perfect* and *complete* - lacking nothing! Living a victorious life! With them, and Him, all things are possible!