



## What Story Are You Telling? Part 4: How to Count Joy

January 24, 2021

### Notes

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 and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:1-4, NIV)

### Counting Joy

I use to read this verse as a command. I now see it as a promise.

James has a specific goal. He wants the reader to understand that the various trials we experience will produce stability. And, he wants us to see the hardships we face will become very insignificant in light of what God will do in our lives.

But, is James saying that we should ignore our problems, or to act as if our trials don't exist or really hurt? After all, how else do we consider our trials as joy? This verse has a deeper meaning that is very comforting. I think this verse is actually another promise from God of what he will do in your life when things are hard.

The Greek word for consider is *hegeomai*. It is an accounting word that means to count. James is not telling anyone to ignore their challenges or difficulties or obstacles. He is saying the exact opposite. He is telling you to write it down and to keep track of those challenges like an accountant would keep track of expenses. In one column write down all of the challenges. Write down those various trials.

But, then in another column write down all of the ways that God has blessed you. Write down all that ways that God is helping you. Write down the ways that God is bringing good out of your various trials. Write down the way God is doing good for you. Write down the ways that God has been faithful to you. Some people call it a grateful list. And then, add up both of those columns. Add up all the various trials. Add up the various blessings. See how richly God has blessed you, even in the midst of the trials. That is how you can count it all joy. Not because you are ignoring the problem. Some events that happen in your life are pure evil. You cannot say that is joy. But, what God will do with your trial, what He will ultimately produce, that is another story.

Even if it takes a while, keep counting! God wants you to look for the ways that He blesses you and the ways that He brings joy out of sorrow. Don't be the person who only remembers the trial. Remember that God is keeping track of your various trials. He knows them better than you do. Why? Because He is always faithful to His promises. If He says the net sum will be more joy than sorrow – He is keeping track of your life to make sure He is keeping his promise!

“While other worldviews lead us to sit in the midst of life's joys, foreseeing the coming sorrows, Christianity empowers its people to sit in the midst of this world's sorrows, tasting the coming joy.” Tim Keller, *Walking with God in Pain and Suffering*

# Testing of Faith

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.  
Proverbs 13:12

What if that the desire does never happen? How will testing produce anything good?  
Because God comes in and persuades us.

38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38-39 NKJV

God's ability to convince you is endless. When troubles come, He allows you to doubt. He allows it to hurt. Hurt it leads you to lament. Lament leads you to pour out your heart to God. Lament has a purpose -- to rebuild your life by helping you trust more in God.

One of the best illustrations of this James exhortation in action is in the book of Luke.

13 That same day two of Jesus' followers were walking to the village of Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 As they walked along they were talking about everything that had happened. 15 As they talked and discussed these things, Jesus himself suddenly came and began walking with them. 16 But God kept them from recognizing him. 17 He asked them, "What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?"

They stopped short, sadness written across their faces. 18 Then one of them, Cleopas, replied, "You must be the only person in Jerusalem who hasn't heard about all the things that have happened there the last few days."

19 "What things?" Jesus asked.

"The things that happened to Jesus, the man from Nazareth," they said. "He was a prophet who did powerful miracles, and he was a mighty teacher in the eyes of God and all the people. 20 But our leading priests and other religious leaders handed him over to be condemned to death, and they crucified him. 21 We had hoped he was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel. This all happened three days ago.

22 "Then some women from our group of his followers were at his tomb early this morning, and they came back with an amazing report. 23 They said his body was missing, and they had seen angels who told them Jesus is alive! 24 Some of our men ran out to see, and sure enough, his body was gone, just as the women had said."

25 Then Jesus said to them, "You foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. 26 Wasn't it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?" 27 Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

28 By this time they were nearing Emmaus and the end of their journey. Jesus acted as if he were going on, 29 but they begged him, "Stay the night with us, since it is getting late." So he went home with them. 30 As they sat down to eat, he took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them. 31 Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And at that moment he disappeared!

32 They said to each other, "Didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?" 33 And within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven disciples and the others who had gathered with them, 34 who said, "The Lord has really risen! He appeared to Peter." Luke 24:13-34 NLT