

Pain, Perseverance, & Pure Joy

Suffering, Tests, and Temptation Part 2

James 1:2-4 8-24-2014

Summary: James is not saying, “Pretend suffering is something it’s not.” Yes, “consider” is a cognitive term, but that is because changing emotion starts with changing thinking. Emotion is the result of interpretations of situations weighed against the norms of your beliefs and values. Consider trials joy by interpreting them as being good things from God, by believing that they are refining tests that produce perseverance, and value perseverance highly as that which will make you mature and complete.

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James 1:2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Introduction: Perseverance

Years ago I heard Chuck Swindol preach on James 1 and he talked about what he called watermelon seed Christians. He said if you spit out a watermelon seed on the table, and press down on it with your thumb, it will go shooting out from under the pressure. And he said a lot of Christians are like that. They do fine for a while, and they can hang in there up to a point, but as soon as the pressure reaches a certain level, they are gone. They quit or run away or give up. Their strength gives out, and their resolve and willingness to continue to face this problem just kind of disintegrates. They say, “I just can’t take this anymore” and they give up. Or they get angry. Or they “reward” themselves with some sin (“I deserve this because of how I’m being treated”). Or they start questioning God’s goodness or love or power.

Which one of those are you most prone to? When the pressure starts to bear down on you, and you cave in, what does that look like? And how often does it happen? How often do you find that you don’t get the benefits of reaching your goals because you give out before reaching them? Perseverance is a precious commodity, isn’t it? If you want more of it, you are in the right place at the right time because that is exactly what James is going to teach us today.

Consider Suffering Joy

That's the good news. The bad news is he starts by telling us to do something that sounds impossible.

2 Consider it pure joy,¹ my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds

Masochism?

What is that? Does that mean we are supposed to enjoy suffering - like masochists? No, we are not required to enjoy suffering. If we did, it wouldn't be suffering.

Hebrews 12:11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful.

What James says is not to enjoy trials, but to **consider** them **pure joy**. So what does that mean? Why does he say **consider it pure joy**, rather than *feel it pure joy*? Is this a purely mental thing and not an emotional thing? And if so, what good is that? What good is joy I can't feel? Is God just saying, "When you're miserable, pretend you're happy"? If it is strictly a matter of intellect, and not a matter of emotion, what is the purpose? If suffering is not joyful, why should I consider it joyful? Does God want us to deny reality and live in a fantasy world? Why should I consider my suffering something that it is not? What good does that do?

It is true that the word **consider** is a cognitive word. It refers to something you think and believe, as opposed to something you feel. You go through a process of reasoning, and then come to a particular conclusion that you regard as true – that is what this term means. But that is not to say your emotions are uninvolved. It is a thinking word, but the purpose of the thinking is to have an impact on your feeling.

Emotions are Results of Interpretations

This is a hard area for a lot of people to understand because our culture has a twisted idea of what emotions are. They have indoctrinated us with the idea that emotions are just feelings that happen to you. Some chemicals come together in a certain way, and you feel things. It is not right or wrong – they just happen to you. And so you are not responsible for what you feel. That's the popular belief in our culture. And it derives from an evolutionary, naturalistic perspective that ignores the reality of the soul.

But the Bible gives us a very different view. According to Scripture, the soul plays a huge role in emotions. We are not just mechanistic robots controlled by random chemical reactions. Emotions are connected with chemical reactions, but in most cases those chemical reactions are the *result* of what the soul does, not the cause. Emotion is the result of your heart's interpretation of things and events. If you see a dog with ears back and teeth bared running at you, your mind makes a quick assessment of the situation, you interpret what is happening as dangerous or threatening, and the result of that interpretation is an emotion: fear. You see a bouquet of flowers, it's your birthday, so you interpret the situation this way: "My husband did something thoughtful for me on my birthday," and the result of that interpretation is an emotion: love. You experience feelings of love or gratitude at that moment. But say before you have a chance to tell him thank you, he says, "Hey honey, can you please put those flowers in a nice vase for me? It's Secretary's Day, and I don't want to make sure I give her something nice." Now your interpretation of the situation is a little different. Now you interpret the situation to mean that your husband cares more about his secretary than he cares about you. And that interpretation generates a

¹ James is known for his abrupt transitions. Sometimes the only connection from one section to the next is a particular word. He will end a section with some word, and then it's like, "Oh, speaking of that...", and then he goes into a discussion that begins with that same word. Sometimes those are lost in the English translation, so I will point them out when they come up. One of them is here. The last word in verse 1 is **Greetings**. That is actually a form of the word joy. Then in verse 2 – "Speaking of joy, consider it pure joy..."

different emotion – maybe sadness, maybe anger, but not the same emotion you had when you were interpreting it the other way. Emotions are results of interpretations of circumstances.

In some cases you may not be aware of the connection between the emotion and the interpretations of circumstances. Something happens, you interpret it a certain way and have a series of thoughts about it, and then forget about it. Then another thing, and another – each time contributing to a certain emotion. And by the time you notice this emotion, you can't even remember the various events and interpretations and thought progressions that led to it, so it seems like the emotion is coming out of the blue. But emotions do not just come out of the blue. They are related to interpretations of events and the resulting thought progressions.

...Interpretations Weighed Against Your Beliefs and Values

But that is not the only factor. The other half of the equation is your beliefs and values. After you interpret the situation, you then weigh that interpretation against your beliefs and values. If you give one of the kids around here a piece of candy, he might have emotions of exuberant happiness. Then you give a piece to your prayer group leader, and he says, "Thanks," but he doesn't seem nearly as happy as that kid was. Why? Both the kid and the prayer group leader might interpret your gesture the same way.

"This nice person is giving me a piece of candy."

But when the child weighs that interpretation against his values, he finds that his heart values candy very, very highly. It is literally more valuable to that child than an ounce of gold. But in the soul of the prayer group leader, candy might not be valued quite that much. They have different emotional reactions because they value the situation differently.

The same goes for beliefs – different beliefs result in different emotions. There is a political campaign, two people interpret the data exactly the same way – that the Democrat is going to win, but that interpretation might result in opposite emotions in the two people if those people have different beliefs. One guy believes this will result in more social justice and better conditions and more beneficial laws, so he is full of hope. The other guy believes it will result in injustice, higher taxes, more waste, higher crime rates, and a weaker military, so he is full of fear. So the same interpretation of the data results in opposite emotions because of opposite beliefs.

Right and Wrong Feelings

So when you understand the nature of emotions, you realize there is such a thing as right or wrong emotions. If your emotions are based on a wrong interpretation of the situation, or if they arise from wrong values or wrong beliefs, then they are sinful emotions.² This is one of the biggest differences between worldly counseling and biblical counseling. In worldly counseling, the main goal is to feel *better*. In Scripture, the main goal is to feel *rightly*.

Interpret Your Trials Correctly

So back to our text. What is James doing here when he says **Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials**? He is not saying, "Pretend something is true that isn't true." What James is doing here is showing us how to adjust our beliefs about suffering, and adjust how much we value the results of suffering, and adjust our interpretation of suffering, so that it really will result in actual joy that we can feel. He uses a thinking word instead of a feeling word because to change feelings, you have to first change your ways of thinking.

² If you find child abuse amusing – that is a sinful emotion because it comes from valuing an evil thing. If you are happy when someone blasphemes God because you believe God doesn't exist, that is a sinful emotion because it is based on a wrong belief about God.

The Problem of Misinterpreting Trials

It would be hard for me to overstate how many of our problems come – not from our suffering, but from wrong interpretation of suffering, wrong beliefs about suffering, and undervaluing the benefits that come from suffering. I could probably go on for an hour about how inability to properly interpret suffering is at the root of most of your relationship problems, spiritual problems, marriage problems, problems in your prayer life, emotional problems, fear, guilt, depression, anxiety, worry, anger, selfishness, and on and on and on. James is going to tell us the right way to interpret suffering – as a test of faith. He is going to correct our beliefs about suffering by showing us that it is designed for our good. Then he is going to correct our values, because none of that is going to help us unless we value the benefits from suffering very highly. If you think of those benefits the way that prayer group leader looked at candy – it would be nice to have, maybe, but no big deal really – if that is how you feel about those benefits, then when God says, “Hey, consider suffering pure joy because it gives you these benefits!” it won’t work.

So James has his work cut out for him, doesn’t he? He has to make us change our interpretation of trials, our beliefs about trials, and our values. Let’s see how he does it.

Changing Your Interpretation (Trials = Tests)

He begins with interpretation. The starting point in getting joy is to realize what category suffering should fall into in our thinking. You think, “However I feel, however things seem – the reality is that this suffering is a good thing – whether it feels that way or not.” Reality needs to trump feeling. It is like if you take your computer apart to fix the fan, and there is some annoying component that’s in your way. So you say, “I’m just going to bust that thing off and throw it away,” but a computer expert says, “No – you don’t want to do that. That part seems annoying, but’s actually a good thing. It’s the processor. Without that, the computer is useless.” Now that part is just as annoying as ever, but you are thinking about it as a valuable, good thing now instead of something you want to get rid of. If you are ignorant about computers, but someone you trust as a computer expert says, “Trust me – that’s a good thing,” if you trust him, you’ll start thinking of it as a good thing. If the medicine tastes terrible but the doctor says, “Trust me, it’s a good thing. Without it you’ll die,” then you will pay good money for that horrible tasting medicine because you think of it as a good thing. So the beginning point, when it comes to suffering, is to listen to God when He says, “This suffering that I bring into your life; trust me – it’s a good thing.”

Teach Your Children

One of the biggest favors you can do for your children is to teach them this. We all naturally think suffering is our enemy. And when a child thinks that, and he is faced with various kinds of suffering that he can’t do anything to escape, his life can become unbearable. So many behavioral problems in children come from the child not knowing how to handle suffering. They just think it’s intolerable, yet they cannot escape it, so they react in all kinds of sinful or harmful ways.

And they keep doing that even into adulthood. We tell lies in order to avoid suffering. We get angry when people cause us suffering. We get consumed with worry because we fear future suffering. We get depressed because we see no way out of our suffering. We make foolish life decisions just because we want to minimize suffering. We indulge in sins in order to distract ourselves from suffering or because we think we deserve a break from suffering. We fail to do things we know we should do because they are hard, and involve some suffering. All of those come from wrong interpretations – like seeing the flowers and assuming they are for your husband’s secretary when in reality they are a gift to you. And all those problems can all be avoided if we just believe God when He says, “Trust Me – this is a good thing.”

Which Suffering?

“What kinds of suffering does this include? Does this apply to suffering caused by sinful people around me? Does it apply to suffering caused by my own stupidity? Does it apply to suffering sent by God as chastisement for sin? Is it only for major suffering, or does it also apply to little things? Does this apply to stubbing my toe? Does it apply to losing a loved one? Is it just physical suffering, or also emotional suffering?”

2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds

That word translated **of many kinds**, or **various kinds** is a word that points to the wideness of the variety. The idea is that it is not just the categories you would normally think of when you think of suffering. Think more broadly. Think wider variety. The point is, this applies to any kind of suffering. Big, small, your fault, someone else’s fault, physical, emotional – any and every kind of suffering. It all counts. Consider it all pure joy. God is saying, “Trust Me – this is a good thing. It might be an evil thing that people are doing to you, it might be an evil thing that you did to yourself, but none of that changes the fact that what I’m doing is a good thing.”

Trials

Then James gives us more insight on how to interpret suffering by the way he describes it. He refers to our suffering two different ways. The first time it is called **trials**. The second time it is called **testing**. The first word, trial, is the Greek word *peirasmos*. That is a word that can either mean suffering or temptation, depending on the context. Here it is referring to suffering – anything that causes grief or sorrow or pain.³

This Is a Test

So James is talking about events that cause suffering, and then in the next line he refers to those events as **the testing of your faith**. That tells us something about how to correctly interpret the trials in your life. They are tests. Sometimes people will say, “I wonder if this is some sort of test from God?” You don’t have to wonder. It is not that some trials are tests and others aren’t. All trials are tests. You get a mosquito bite; that’s a test. You get terminal cancer; that’s a test. Your boss yells at you at work; that’s a test. You get in an accident and become a quadriplegic; that’s a test. Kids disobey - test. Cancer - test. Sermon goes so long you are starting to get bed sores - test.

Tests of what? **Your faith**. Verse 3 – **the testing of your faith**. Every event of hardship in your life, big or small, is designed to test your faith.⁴ And it is the sort of test that also refines – like putting gold in fire. It reveals whether the gold is real and how pure it is, and in the process of revealing that, it burns the impurities away and makes it better. Suffering does that to your heart - tests it and improves it. You can tell if faith is real by whether suffering makes you run toward God or away from Him. Some people, when they suffer, get angry at God. Others go through the exact same suffering and it makes them seek God all the more earnestly. How can the exact same suffering have those opposite effects? It is because the suffering is a test that reveals and exposes the fact that the first person’s faith wasn’t pure (or maybe wasn’t even real), and the second person’s was.

³ Peter uses that same word to teach us some very similar principles about suffering. **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 are things that cause grief or sorrow in your heart. **1 Peter 4:12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ.** Trials are like going through fire. And the synonym James uses in verse 13 is **sufferings**. So **trial** simply means any event that causes suffering – any and every kind or variety of suffering.

⁴ Again, Peter says the same thing – trials are for testing your faith. **1 Peter 1:6 ...now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith ... may be proved genuine**

So, learn to interpret all your suffering as a test. Now, how do you pass the test? We have changed our interpretation of trials; we interpret them as tests of our faith. But now how do we manage to pass the test? The answer is in verse 3.

Changing Your Beliefs (Testing → Perseverance)

The NIV translates the beginning of verse 3 **because you know...** Literally it is just, **knowing...** Consider it pure joy when you face any and every kind of trial. How? By **knowing** something – by keeping something in mind. This is where changing your beliefs comes into play. To pass the test, you have to know some things to be true.

Based on Knowledge

James is not calling us to some silly, mindless optimism that is not grounded in anything. This is not the power of positive thinking.

“I got hit by a car – at least it wasn’t a bus!”

That is not the sort of thing James is talking about here. He is saying, “Interpret suffering as a good, beneficial, valuable thing, because of something you know to be true – namely, that you’re going to get perseverance out of the deal.”

3 knowing that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

Changing Your Values (Perseverance Is Priceless)

Now, can you see how everything James is telling us to do here stands or falls based on how much we value perseverance? If you are working out and your trainer says, “Consider it pure joy when you feel that burn, because you know that means you’re going to be in shape soon.” That motivates some people but not other people. Why? Because some people value being in shape extremely highly, and others don’t care that much about it. If he said, “Consider it pure joy when you feel that burn because once you complete the workout I’ll give you a million dollars,” then more people would find it possible to consider it pure joy. So when James tells us to consider all our suffering pure joy because we know we get perseverance out of the deal, that gets us nowhere unless we highly value perseverance.

That’s a problem, because most of us don’t highly value perseverance. We just see that word, and it is just a word. It is not a treasure that we say, “Oh, I *want* that so much...” But James is going to help us with that. He is going to show us what an incalculable treasure perseverance really is.

Definition of Perseverance

Before we look at what he says, let’s make sure we know what perseverance is. I think we could define it this way: Perseverance is the ability to outlast your trial. For the Christian, all suffering is temporary. Our trials come, stay for a while, then go away. And the goal is to still be standing firm when the trial finally goes away. Perseverance is not just an individual act of fortitude or strength. It is something that is deep in your character that manifests itself in all kinds of situations in life, so no matter what the trial or test – something familiar, something new, something you saw coming, something unexpected, big, small – whatever it is, and however long it lasts, your steadfastness and resolve outlasts it.

Life without Perseverance

That is perseverance, and it is a priceless treasure, because life without perseverance is a nightmare. Everything ends in failure. People who lack perseverance will hang in there for a while, but at some point

they buckle, and revert to some sinful response. Some people have no perseverance at all – it only takes one half of one second for them to revert to some sinful response. Others can hang in for a while, others a little longer – but what really matters is if you can stand firm all the way until that trial is over without caving in.

Escape

And we all have different ways of caving in. For some people, it is escape. If a conversation gets too hard, they just walk out of the room. If a problem at church gets too hard, they just leave the church. If work gets too hard, they quit their job. School gets hard, they drop out. A relationship gets hard, they just cut it off. Marriage gets hard, get a separation. They can deal with problems up to a point, but once they reach that tipping point, they just run away. And if they can't run physically, they run emotionally. They just retreat into a cocoon of self-pity.

Anger

For others, caving in means reverting to anger. Instead of continuing in patience, they just give in to the impulse to become angry. They can't make it all the way through the trial without getting mad.

Doubt

For others, caving in means doubting God – questioning His wisdom, or questioning His goodness and love. We back away from God instead of running toward Him. We start to back off of prayer and Bible reading. We say, "It's not working – why should I do it?" I give myself reasons for not going to church that I wouldn't have given myself before. I back off from serving in the church. And before long there is a level of coldness in my relationship with God that would have shocked me in the early days. Standing firm to the end means you get all the way through the dark valley to the other side without cooling off in your pursuit of God.

Distraction

Another form of caving in is resorting to some earthly distraction for your comfort.

"I'm suffering so much, I deserve this pleasure."

And you try to reward yourself with pleasures to make up for what you are suffering.

Quitting

Another way people give in is by just quitting. As soon as things get hard, you quit. Life is hard for people who lack perseverance, because you can't finish anything. You have got half-finished projects all over your house. You make resolutions, but you can't ever follow through. You decide to go on a diet, but it only lasts a couple weeks. You decide to get in shape, but after four or five trips to the gym, it goes by the wayside. All the books in your library have a bookmark somewhere around chapter 2. You have read Genesis ten times more than any other book in the Bible because of all the times you resolved to read the whole Bible cover to cover and you gave up not long after you started. A good portion of your life is spent just staring at hard jobs. "Wow, look at all that laundry. That's a lot. I should be doing it. I'm going to do it right now. Wow, look at all that laundry." – and you just can't seem to get moving.

And so your life becomes one, giant truckload of guilt that you carry around all the time. You see your backpack – "Homework – all that homework. I really need to get busy on that. The big semester project is due in a week; I should really get started on it."

"I should study for that test."

"I should write that paper."

"I should do those labs".

"I ... wonder what's on TV?"

When we lack perseverance, and we quit rather than following through, the whole reason we do that is to make life easier. But instead it makes life harder. It makes life miserable. You always have this

mountain of work you are supposed to be doing and it just keeps getting bigger and bigger and instead of feeling refreshed and rested you feel more and more overwhelmed – even though you aren't doing anything.

Not only that, but you have constant relationship problems. You don't ever have any deep friendships, because you bail as soon as things get hard. Your marriage is always in the toilet because you can't make it through any conflict without falling into sin.

Satanic Control

Life is hard for people who lack perseverance – especially for Christians who lack perseverance because your worst enemy gets to control your life. The devil, who hates you and wants to destroy you and use your life to dishonor God, will be able to stop you in your tracks any time he wants just by attaching some hardship to what you are doing. So your worst enemy now has the ability to steer you wherever he wants you to go.

Damnation

When you lack perseverance you can't reach your goals, you can't get things done, you can't outlast your trials – they always win and you always end up quitting, running away, becoming discouraged, or getting angry. But none of that is the worst part. The worst part has to do with your eternal destiny.

Matthew 10:22 he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

It does not end well for people who lack perseverance. They won't make it through the Tribulation, and Judgment Day won't go well for them. There is a lot of debate about the topic of eternal security, because on the one hand, Scripture is clear that God works to preserve our faith and hold on to us. But on the other hand you have passages like this, that make it clear that in order to be saved in the end you have to persevere to the end. Wherever you come out on that debate, make sure you don't create a theology that tells you that you don't have to persevere to the end to be saved. Don't believe the lie that you will go to heaven whether or not you persevere to the end.

Luke 8:15 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.

Hebrews 10:36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

Romans 2:7 To those who by perseverance in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.

No eternal life for those who fail to persevere to the end. And don't fall for the teaching that says you will automatically persevere no matter what, so it is not something you have to concern yourself with. It requires serious effort.

Hebrews 6:11 We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. 12 We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and perseverance inherit what has been promised.

Inheriting what God has promised requires persevering to the end. Can you see how much hangs on perseverance? If you lack perseverance your life will end in disaster.

Maturity

But on the other hand, if you have perseverance, look what James promises:

4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Maturity. Becoming what God designed you to be. Getting out of your caterpillar form and becoming an actual butterfly. Becoming an oak tree instead of just an acorn. Being a functioning, healthy adult instead of a helpless infant. Maturity is when you become what you are supposed to be.

So think, for a minute, about what *spiritual* maturity is. We know what social maturity is – when you respond in social situations like an adult instead of like a child. So what is spiritual maturity? Spiritual maturity is when the spiritual things about you are functioning the way God designed them to function. Like your emotions. How does it affect your emotions when you hear about someone in our church who repented of a sin, compared to how you feel when the Broncos win or you get a raise at work?

How about your assumptions? Love always assumes the best possible motive. The flesh assumes what it wants to assume. How far along that line of maturity have you progressed so far?

How about attitudes? What are your attitudes about authority, or suffering, or the church, or the lost? How closely do your attitudes mirror God's attitudes?

How about your desires? Do you desire the most valuable things the most, or are you still desiring unimportant, temporal, earthly things more than spiritual, eternal things? How does your desire for a new car or better house or an easier life compare to your desire for eternal reward on Judgment Day?

What about your values? Could someone tell by watching you live your life that eternal things are much more valuable to you than temporal things?

Emotions, assumptions, attitudes, desires, values – those are all things that determine your responses to things that happen in life. John MacArthur always says, “Spiritual maturity is when your involuntary reactions are godly.” That is a great statement. When you have spiritually mature attitudes, mature assessments of things, mature emotions, mature values and desires, you will find that your quick, instant, kneejerk, involuntary reactions to things reflect the heart of God. That is spiritual maturity. Do you want that? It comes one way – through perseverance.

Perseverance and Other Virtues

And here is why: The reason you need perseverance in order to reach spiritual maturity is because all other virtues depend on perseverance. Scripture speaks of perseverance in doing good (Ro.2:7), perseverance in hope (Ro.8:25), in ministry (2 Cor.12:12), in doing God's will (Heb.10:36), in running the race (Heb.12:1), in hard work (Rev.2:2), in faith (Rev.14:12), and on and on. We need perseverance for every single Christian virtue. Why? Because if you don't continue in that virtue when things get hard, what good is it? What good is it if you learn to be a loving person, but your love grinds to a halt when things get hard? What good is humility if you don't persevere in humility when it is most needed? What good is kindness or generosity or servanthood or peacemaking, or hungering and thirsting after righteousness, or prayer, or hiding God's Word in your heart, or wisdom or joy or truth telling or gentleness or self-control or any other virtue if you don't persevere in it? If you have those things for a time, but then they disappear when things get hard, what good are they? Perseverance is a unique virtue because if you are missing that virtue, it destroys all the other virtues that you do have and renders them useless.

So when James says perseverance will make you **mature and complete not lacking anything**, he is saying a lot. Perseverance will bring you to maturity, and it will make you complete in God's sight. Perseverance is much, much, much more valuable than a million dollars. It is priceless.

That is not to say it is the final goal – it's actually not. The final goal is to become **mature and complete, not lacking anything**. That is the goal, but you can never reach that goal without perseverance. If you want to be the greatest brain surgeon you have to have the perseverance to make it through medical school. If you want to be the greatest football player ever you have to have the perseverance to make it through the practices. Every time God sends a trial into your life, that is practice. That is a workout. Keep persevering through each of the various workouts, and eventually you will reach your goal. Each trial is a test. You use the perseverance you already have to make it through and pass the test, and the result is you get more perseverance. Just like building a muscle. You use the little muscles you already have to make it through exercises that result in stronger muscles, which enable you to do more exercises, which give you even stronger muscles.

So without perseverance, you cannot reach spiritual maturity. Some people have suffered and suffered and suffered all their life and they still are not spiritually mature, because they never persevere through the individual trials. Are you getting a feel for the value of perseverance? If you could just get perseverance, you could finish what you started, follow through on your commitments and resolutions, stand firm through the storms of life, maintain relationships through hard times, outlast your trials, flourish in all the other virtues in your life, become mature and complete not lacking anything, make it through the Great Tribulation, and, on Judgment Day, you will hear those words from the Judge's mouth:

Revelation 2:3 [I know your deeds...] You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

And that is why, whenever a trial or hardship comes into your life, it is an occasion for rejoicing.

Conclusion

I am amazed at how many preachers and commentators don't seem to like this passage. I think I heard or read four or five that said they would prefer this verse wasn't in the Bible. Many others felt they had to apologize for it. They go on about how horrible it is when you suffer and some meddling, insensitive, religious Pharisee comes up and says, "Consider it pure joy!" One commentator had a long section on how important it is that we don't ever use this passage for grief counseling. When people are sad and broken because of some trial, what they need is compassion, not a lecture from James 1. And if you do have to bring up James 1 to a suffering person, whatever you do, don't start with that. It is just so insensitive.

All of that breaks my heart. Are we forgetting that it was the Holy Spirit who inspired James to write this? And he didn't write it to a bunch of people sitting on the beach sipping drinks at a resort somewhere. These are Jewish Christians scattered around the Gentile world – rejected by both Gentiles and Jews. Many of them were in deep poverty, having wages withheld from them, being dragged into court unjustly. These people were suffering real hardships, and James not only says this to them, but he begins with it.

I love this passage. I don't know how I would make it through life without this passage. Don't be ashamed of this truth. I hope if you see me getting snowed under by trials that you will remind me of the truths from this passage as soon as possible. Can this passage be used in an insensitive way or misapplied? Sure, but that does not mean we should hide these marvelous principles from those who need them at the moment they need them most. Just use it in a sensitive way and apply it correctly and explain how it is done. Then it will be a soothing, healing balm to the troubled soul. The problem is not with people quoting James 1:2 – **Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds**. The problem is when they stop there and fail to quote verses 3 through 12. They tell people to rejoice, but don't explain how. Change your interpretation of suffering, change your beliefs about what is happening, and change how much you value perseverance and the outcomes of perseverance. Then your considering trials joy will turn to actually feeling real joy in the midst of suffering.

Benediction: Galatians 6:9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

1. Which current trial in your life are you finding it the hardest to consider pure joy?
2. Do you think it is because of wrong interpretation, wrong values, or wrong beliefs?
3. When you buckle under pressure of a trial, which kind of buckling are you most prone to? (giving up, getting angry, self-pity, rewarding yourself with some sin or distraction, questioning God's goodness or love or power, etc.)