

“Remain”

James 1:1-4

8/14/22 Epicenter/BAC

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All Scripture quoted from NIV unless otherwise noted

Jesus was a master of the attention-grabbing statement (Lk 14:26, Matt 5:44, Matt 18:8-9, John 14:6). James, the author of the epistle that bears his name, was the half-brother of Jesus. He shows here that he too can deliver a powerful opening line when he introduces himself as, **“A servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”** This is a very significant statement. Tradition holds that James did not believe Jesus was the Son of God until after Jesus had resurrected from the dead. Maybe we can understand that. After all, what would it take for you to regard your sibling (or cousin, if you don't have a sibling) as God in the flesh? By introducing himself this way, James emphasizes that our relationship with Jesus is more important than any other relationship we could possibly have.

The book of James is one of reasonable living and of practical faith, along with the outworking of that faith. As such, it stands as a valuable component of God's Word and stands to teach us a great deal about our faith. Though clearly written to Christians in his day, it is just as applicable for us today.

James quickly hits us with another powerful, and maybe unexpected line when he says, **“Count it all joy...when you meet trials of various kinds.”** While this may seem like a ridiculous request, the fact is, it is not a request at all; rather, it is the first of two imperative statements in James 1:1-4. James does not say that trials will be joy or will feel like joy; rather, we are instructed to regard trials as a gift from God. Perhaps that is hard to imagine, but think about how modern surgery or dental practices are a gift – not the kind you may look forward to, but certainly ones that you are glad to have access to, right?

Trials are an inevitable part of the Christian experience; we will all encounter trials. In James 1:2, the word 'meet' (or 'face' or 'encounter') comes from the Greek περιπίπτω, which means “To fall into, as being completely surrounded or submerged.” This term is only used two other times in all of Scripture. The first is in Luke 10, in which Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan and says that a man **“fell among thieves.”** The other appearance of this word is in Acts 27, in which the apostle Paul was on a ship that was **“caught in some crosscurrents”** (though this often does not come out clearly in many English translations.) Clearly, in each case, trials are not the result of something you intentionally chose – those are consequences of your actions. Trials, on the other hand, are troubles or difficulties that come in order to test, purify, and refine your Christian faith and character.

We know that trials and testing of our faith produces patience ('steadfastness') because, as we see in Hebrews 12, which mentions "A great cloud of witnesses," the facts of history tell us to press on when we face trials because God's up to something. Hebrews 12:2 refers to "Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter [τέλειος] of our faith." These trials also can help you grow in your confidence. When faith passes a test, it shows its worth and value. The more valuable something is, the more testing it requires. Compare the level of scrutiny that would be used when examining a 24-karat necklace as opposed to the level of scrutiny when examining a 2×4 board. Faith must be tested because it is so valuable; so fundamental to Christianity. Charles Spurgeon once wrote that "*Faith is as vital to salvation as the heart is to the body.*" Trials force you to strip away everything else that you lean on and they show you what it is that you truly rely on.

Don't shortchange the process. James 1:3 says, "The testing of your faith produces steadfastness" ('perseverance' or 'endurance'). This word for 'Steadfastness' comes from the Greek ὑπομονή, which means literally, "Remain under," as one might remain under a master teacher or a specific set of circumstances. It reveals a picture of one who is under a heavy load, who chooses to remain there instead of seeking an escape from it.

There may be many reasons why you would not want to "remain under" a trial. Sometimes a trial is painful, as is surgery, dental procedures, or physical therapy. But it is important to remain under the care of the doctor, dentist, or physical therapist. You trust that individual, and so you must choose to trust his/her methods. Another reason you might not want to remain under a trial is because you don't understand it. But you (and I) have a very limited perspective and you simply lack the ability to see the complete picture of what God is doing through your current situation. Or maybe you simply don't care about that. Maybe if you are honest about it, you would admit that you are simply more interested in ease and comfort than you are in tests, trials, and what they may accomplish in your life. A fourth reason you may not want to 'remain under' a trial is that you feel like you just don't have the time for it, as if you would be happier about your current trial if only it had come at a more convenient time. It takes a certain level of vanity to assume your timing is superior to God's timing – that's a separate issue that you may want to deal with sooner rather than later. Choose to trust God when trials come; choose to 'remain.'

Don't take the first 'out' that comes along. Problems often take root over time, and will only be remedied over the course of time. James 1:4 tells us to, "Let steadfastness have its full [τέλειος] effect." This word is the same word used of Jesus, the perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2). It indicates something that is finished, complete, brought to its end, lacking nothing. Commentator David Guzik says, "*This is not a passive waiting, as in a doctor's waiting room; it is the active endurance that is required when one is running a marathon.*" Only then will the testing of your faith reach its full effect.

Indeed, the partial effect of steadfastness is a lesson partly learned. How many times would you prefer to take a test before you pass it? How many times will it take for you to learn the lesson that's in it for you? Choose to remain in God's refining fire until the impurities are fully burnt off. Don't jump ship when the storms of life arise. Much of what God is trying to accomplish in your life comes through your remaining under a trial. God uses trials to make you more and more like Christ. That is the outcome you want, and if it comes through fire, then so be it. God is making you more Christ-like, and you want that. But sometimes the only way you are going to get that is when you choose to remain and allow the test to fully work until you are fully refined, made perfect and complete in Jesus Christ. Would you like to be able to consider it all joy when you face trials of various kinds? That can only happen when you choose... to remain.

Takeaways from this message.

James is a book of reasonable LIVING and of practical FAITH.

Trials are a GIFT from God.

- **Trials are the things that you FALL INTO, as being completely surrounded or submerged.**
- **Trials are not the same as CONSEQUENCES.**

Passing a test gives you FAITH.

- **The more VALUABLE something is, the more testing is needed.**

Don't SHORTCHANGE the process.

- **Don't take the first "OUT".**
- **The PARTIAL effect of steadfastness is a lesson PARTLY learned.**

DIG IN!

Here are some farm-fresh questions that will help you to personalize and apply this morning's message.

1. *What was most surprising, unexpected, or helpful from today's passage/message? Why?*
2. **What do you know about the author of today's passage (Mark 6:3, 1 Cor. 15:7, Acts 12:17, Gal. 2:12)?**

3. **What is significant about the wording of James 1:2, wherein it says, “Consider it pure joy”?**
4. **Did you notice the extra apostrophe on today’s outline? Aren’t you glad it’s there?**
5. **What trial/test are you facing right now? Why is it hard for you to ‘remain under’ that set of circumstances? What do you believe God is teaching you through it?**
6. **What might be the impact on a Christian believer’s faith and character if he/she were never subjected to trials? How does this affect your thinking on the trials you face?**
7. **Check out the following verses and consider what they have to say about today’s topic: 5:10, Acts 5:41, 1 Pet. 1:6-7, Rom. 5:3-4, 2 Cor. 4:16-18.**
8. ***What have you learned through your personal time of Bible reading this week?***