

Count It All Joy: Faith That Holds Under Weight

James 1:1-6

Key Thoughts

1. **We are not our own.** James could have signed as the Lord's brother; he signed as His bondservant, a word that meant total ownership. We are all slaves of one master or another, and in Christ we were bought out of slavery to sin to glorify God in our body and in our spirit.
2. **Joy is tied to God, not to circumstances.** Circumstances change; God does not. The scattered believers had watched the apostles leave the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name, so joy in suffering was not a theory to them.
3. **Testing approves and refines.** We fall into trials we never saw coming, but they are not pointless. Like silver and gold in the fire, testing proves our faith genuine and burns off what is false, because faith is trust that holds under weight.
4. **Endurance is a lifelong workout with a goal.** Trials keep coming, each at a higher level, because in this life God is not finished growing us. Endurance does its perfect work until we are perfect and complete: mature and whole in the eyes of God, who alone defines what perfect means.
5. **When we lack wisdom, we ask God in faith.** Wisdom is skill for living, and God gives it liberally and without reproach, but He wants us to ask. To doubt is to treat God as something less than the best option, and if God is not directing you, something else is, and it is not you.

Discussion Questions

1. Read John 7:5 and James 1:1. James grew up in the same house as Jesus and still did not believe, yet after meeting the risen Christ he signed his letter as a bondservant rather than as the Lord's brother. What does that choice tell you about how the resurrection changed him?
2. Read Romans 6:17-18 and 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. If we are all slaves of one master or another, why do we resist the idea of being owned, and how would "you are not your own" change the way you live this week?
3. Read James 1:2, Nehemiah 8:10, and Malachi 3:6. What are you most tempted to tie your joy to, and what changes when your joy is tied to a God who does not change?
4. Read James 1:3 and Malachi 3:3. Testing was a metalworker's word for proving silver and gold genuine in the fire. If faith is trust that holds under weight, where is the weight in your life right now, and what might God be refining?
5. Read James 1:4. Trials seem to keep coming, each one at a higher level. How does seeing endurance as an ongoing spiritual workout, with the goal of being mature and whole in God's eyes, change the way you face the next one?
6. Read James 1:5-6. Where do you lack the skill to navigate a situation right now? Have you actually asked God for wisdom about it, or have you been reaching for other options first?

Applications

1. **Name the weight.** Write down the trial you are carrying right now. Each day this week, thank God that it is not pointless, and ask Him what He is working out in you.
2. **Ask first.** Name the one situation where you lack the skill to know what to do. Ask God for wisdom about it every day this week, before you reach for any other option.
3. **Remember who owns you.** Start each morning by reading 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, and ask how you will glorify God in your body and in your spirit that day.

Closing Prayer

Father, we are not our own. We were bought at a price, set free from sin to become slaves of righteousness, and we belong to You. Like James, let us be known first as Your bondservants. Teach us to count it all joy when we fall into various trials, because our joy is in You, and You do not change. When the weight comes, let our faith hold. Sit as a refiner over our lives and burn away what is false. Let patience have its perfect work in us, until we are perfect and complete, lacking nothing in Your eyes. Where we lack wisdom, teach us to ask You first, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and to ask in faith, trusting that You are always the best option. Keep us from being driven and tossed by every wind. Make us doers of the word, and not hearers only. In Jesus' name, amen.