

Consider

Introduction

Last week we started our study of the letter of James. We learned that James is the half-brother of Jesus. The oldest child of Joseph and Mary. They each had 4 brothers and some number of sisters.

James grew up in the same home as Jesus. He was the product of a devout Jewish family and was likely trained as a carpenter aka stone maker. At the age of 30 Jesus left home and soon declared Himself to be the long awaited Messiah and God.

As you can imagine, that was a big pill for James to try to swallow...so he didn't. During Jesus' ministry as he was going around with His disciples, performing miracles and telling people about the good news, James was a scoffer. He did not believe in Jesus as Messiah...in fact, he and his brothers and his mother at one point went to get Jesus because they thought Jesus was actually crazy.

Against the will of God, Mary and James and the other half-brothers tried to stop Jesus' ministry.

It is likely that James spent his whole life ashamed. First he was ashamed to be associated with his crazy brother and then he was ashamed for not recognizing Jesus as Messiah sooner. James likely felt as though he needed to make up for lost time. Once James becomes a believer....he is the kind of believer that we want to be...he was all in. So what changed his mind?

Well....the same thing that changes every one's mind about Jesus. We don't suddenly learn something that transforms us, although information can help open us up to listen. You see no one is saved by a decision....they are saved by an encounter with Christ that leads to a decision.

In other words, you become so transformed by an encounter with Christ that the "decision" is a natural action from your heart. We encounter Jesus and just like he told Paul....why are you against me? Come follow me.

The same thing happened to James....Jesus had just be crucified. He had been dead and wrapped in the tomb. Guards were placed there, some were mourning, others like James were likely sad but at the same time relieved that this mess was over.

Then James experienced something that he could not deny. It wasn't something that made any sense to his mind....not some logical deduction to change his mind about Jesus....No some religious revelation...James instead has a very real encounter with a very real resurrected Jesus and he would never again be the same.

His half-brother who had died on the cross....was now standing in front of him....very much alive...very much resurrected and very much God. James like many others could reject Jesus with their minds....but once their hearts engaged with resurrected Jesus...Jesus who is very much alive...they could do nothing but follow. It is technically a

decision, but the only way to deny an encounter with Christ is to convince yourself it never happened.

So James immediately became a follower of Jesus and was present in the upper room at Pentecost. He received the Holy Spirit and was all in.

He didn't waste much time getting started. I suspect growing up in the home with Jesus makes everyone a good leader. Quickly it seems James becomes the leader of the church in Jerusalem.

Think about the dynamics at play here. The disciples knew throughout their ministry that James was not a believer. He was actively working against Jesus and his ministry. He was very much like Paul. Paul hated Christians....had an encounter with resurrected Jesus and he too was completely transformed.

It must have been difficult for the 11 remaining disciples to trust Paul initially....and the same must have occurred with James. Paul and James both claimed to be completely transformed by their encounter with Jesus. But then again...so had Judas. Judas claimed to be a disciple...a follower of Jesus...one of the 12 and he wasn't even a believer.

We read that James became the leader of the First...ever Christian Church...and we gloss over that. James must have been incredibly remarkable..he gained their trust and excelled in one of the most important positions in the movement of Christ.

It brings up a reality for all of us...Anyone....any one...who has an encounter with the resurrected Jesus...can under go a complete life reset.....Prostitute, Liar, Schemer, Drug addict, sex offender, murderer, child abuser, arrogant jerk, rich snob, racist...you name it....everyone changes with a real encounter with Jesus Christ. They die to these things and become Spiritually reborn. The old them dying a death over time and the new Spiritual person emerges.

Labels from our sinful past are like sticky notes...they are designed to be temporary...and easily removed in Christ. That is James. So what do you think James wants to write to the Jewish people who have been scattered around the world?

Think about this for a moment....James is sitting down with pen and paper....the page is empty except for his introduction...now it is time to write what is most important. What do the Jewish people who have been dispersed around the world because of their faith in Jesus need to know?

Perhaps he would write about the importance of blending in....not causing waves...how to live in foreign communities and avoid getting persecuted for their faith. They were potentially in harms way because they were Jewish....much more so because they were believers in Christ.

They had fled from Jerusalem because it was no longer safe for them to be there. The Jews and the Romans were after them. So what was it like in Jerusalem?

Life in Jerusalem

Early on in the movement of the Way....Jesus' followers were initially treated as Jewish people who just believed in Jesus as their Messiah. They still saw themselves as Jews...they observed the

feasts...the law...and they were obedient to the priests and hoping to share with other Jews about the truth of Jesus as Messiah.

The Romans didn't care as long as there were no uprisings or problems. They would only step in if the Jewish leaders could not control their people. But the Romans had one rule....join any religion that you want....just don't add any. Those who tried to start or add a new religion would be persecuted.

So for the first ten years or so after the resurrection of Christ....not too much changed. But the first opposition to the new believers came from the Jewish people in Jerusalem. They did not like how aggressive the Christ followers were about who was responsible for the crucifixion of Christ.

The key message was that Jesus had come for the Jews as their messiah and they crucified Him. So the message would now be going out to the Gentiles. These believers taught Jesus as Messiah and as God....that they could not handle.

For the same reason Jesus was crucified...they became persecuted. They were disrupting Jewish synagogues, causing problems. The Jews had two choices...they could let this continue and eventually the Romans would step in and put them all down...for disrupting the peace...or they could identify this new movement as a new religion...not of them...and the Romans would spare them and persecute these new Messianic Jews.

So about 10-15 years after the crucifixion...this new church of Jesus is no longer welcome in Jerusalem. Not just in the synagogue...in the market...in the schools...in the neighborhoods...in daily life...they were shut out...

Then once they could no longer exist...at the same time..the Romans began to shut down this new religion. Jerusalem was no longer safe...so the disciples and thousands of believers fled from the persecution wave that started in Jerusalem.

Ok...so for a moment...think about James....left behind as the leader of the First Church of the World at the epicenter of persecution. He wrote this letter at a time that was at the peak of this persecution. Believers had been spread all over the known world...tough for them...but what an opportunity for the gentiles...the message of Christ was coming to them.

His congregation was in trouble...they couldn't trade in the market...they couldn't attend the synagogue...they were not totally welcome at the feasts...their kids shunned in schools...no one would help them. They were treated in many ways like lepers. In addition, at a terrible time it seemed a great famine came during the reign of Claudius and stressed out the entire region of Judea.

How bad were things? Paul had to go around to the churches in his missionary journeys and ask them for money to help support those in Jerusalem. In fact, his trip to Rome had to be postponed so that he could take money back to James and his church.

Paul at Antioch

Acts 11:29–30 (ESV) 29 So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. 30 And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

Paul at Corinth

1 Corinthians 16:1–4 (ESV) 1 Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. ... 3 And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. 4 If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

2 Corinthians 8:3–5 (ESV) 3 For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, 4 begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints

Paul to the Romans

Romans 15:25–28 (ESV) 25 At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. 27 For they were pleased to do it, ...28 When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you.

OK so back to James...sitting at his desk in Jerusalem...Blank paper in hand...pen at the ready....Writing to the dispersed. Clearly in desperate need of aid.

What do you expect him to say? " HELP! We are being persecuted! There is a famine! We can't work, we can't eat, we can't barter in the marketplace...The Jews have excommunicated us...the Romans are searching for us...we can't leave...we are all going to Die! Help!!!!"

That is what I expected James to write...So many Christians think that the major persecution of the believers occurred because they went to Gentile regions...NO it is the persecution that drove them there. The epicenter of Satan's attack on the church of Jesus was Judea and Jerusalem.

Why couldn't they leave? They were given direct commands from Jesus.

Acts 1:7–8 (ESV) 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Remember in Jewish writings lists are important and they are always listed in order of importance. You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem....first...

About twenty years later...in 60AD the Romans would dramatically oppose them...but up until then...almost all the resistance came from the Jewish church....to those in Jerusalem and then against Paul when He tried to bring this message into the synagogues of Asia Minor.

So with that background, let's look at what James, lead and directed by the Holy Spirit actually says. There is so much wisdom in this passage that it is mind blowing....life transforming...and if you will allow it..could actually change the course of your life for the rest of your life. Ready?

James 1:2 (ESV) 2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,

Ok stop...Most of us look at this verse and see two words that are counter intuitive....joy and trials...but I want you to ignore that for the moment....don't gloss over the very first word....In the ESV and KJV..."Count" NASB and NIV "Consider"

What an incredible word and what an incredible concept. It is so radical to the teaching of our world today....Paul told us as followers of Christ to be renewed in our thinking...

Romans 12:1-2 (ESV) 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

James is taking Paul's advice and putting it to action. He tells us to not think as the world thinks....

First of all James reminds us that we have a choice. We get to decide if the events in our lives are good or bad. The events themselves carry no predetermined interpretation.

Events in your life are bad or good for only one reason...we determined it.

Something happens to us and we choose to categorize it. James says...when trials come....stop and consider....transform your thinking. Don't let the world tell you that you are a victim of your circumstances.

The World's Perspective.

We are taught to roll with the punches. That bad things are coming and we must expect and adapt to them. People teach us that things are going to happen in our lives.....part of the human experience is that we actually experience stuff.

People can give us \$100 and people can take away or steal \$100 from us. People can be well or they can be sick. People can be in the wrong place and the wrong time or the right place at the right time. They teach us that as we go through life, random events happen and those events impact us either positively or negatively.

We are taught by a godless secular world that events themselves are inherently good or bad. Something happens in our lives...something bad lets say..and we instantly recognize that it is a trial. Something bad has happened to us...in fact, we are victims of this bad event. We may have caused it, but the event is bad and we are negatively impacted by it.

In fact, the world tells us...we can list good things and bad things...because good is obviously good and bad is obviously bad...if you can't decide, choose based on how it makes you feel.

Bad things? Death, Illness, Trauma, losing a job, being broke, hurricanes, earthquakes, fires, car wrecks, accidents, broken relationships, being victimized, robbed, attacked...market collapse, recession, depression, war,these are all...according to the world view...bad. Everyone knows they are bad...these are bad things that happen to people.

But there are good things too. Falling in Love, getting a promotion, cured of a disease, not having a disease, reunited with loved ones, receiving a gift, receiving help from someone, a rise in your stock portfolio, a new opportunity, an award of some kind...a dream job...a dream home...having children...all these are good things that happen to people.

Christians have widely adopted this world view.

When good things happen to us...we call it a blessing...an answered prayer...the touch of God's favor on us...validation of our obedience...God's approval of what we are doing or have chosen to do. God's stamp on our ministry or our spiritual activities.

When bad things happen to us...we are being attacked by Satan...punished by God for something...perhaps being pruned by God...or being redirected by God.

We have been brainwashed to respond to situations in a knee jerk way. Our minds see something...we interpret what we see and what we believe....we run it through our world view...we categorize it as good or bad...and we operate within that truth in all things related to that circumstance.

We even defend our actions based on the inherent truth of what a situation means in our lives.

Suppose that tomorrow I go to work and find out that I am being fired. That I am losing my job.

The world...my friends...my family....everyone knows this is a bad thing. A trial...and bad thing has happened to me...

They will try to comfort me...reassure me...help me...and when I am upset or rude to them...they will dismiss it...because...well...because I just lost my job. That is a bad thing and I am reacting as I should to this bad thing.

We even have gradations of problems....suppose instead of losing my job, I am diagnosed with cancer. Everyone would agree that is much worse...That I should be devastated, worried about the future, freaking out about death...doing anything and everything to cure it...and everyone would give me lee way because such a bad thing has happened to me.

Pretty normal stuff so far...right? Something happens and we react to whichever group it is in.

But is that what the Scriptures teach?

Are events are either good or bad...blessings or curses? Is a trial by definition bad?

God teaches us in the Scriptures that trials are opportunities. They are full of potential. A chance to stand out and honor God.

The Biblical Perspective

Even a cursory read through Scriptures seems to repeat the theme that we can't tell what is good or what is bad...that events don't come with such a label...we place the label on them.

The story of the Bible is that we are terrible at assessing what events are good and what events are bad.

Take Joseph...sold by his brothers in to slavery...good or bad? Falsely accused by Potiphar's wife...good or bad? A slave in Egypt now in charge of all the grain in a famine...good or bad?

Or Take Moses...a baby born in a time of baby killing...released by his mom to float down a river...good or bad? Adopted into Pharaoh's family...good or bad? Kills an Egyptian...good or bad....turns against Pharaoh...good or bad...Can't speak clearly...good or bad? Brings plagues among millions good or bad?

Daniel...a young man taken into Babylonian captivity...good or bad? Trained to be a Babylonian leader...good or bad? Interpreting dreams good or bad?

King David... Killed a giant...good or bad? Fled from Saul good or bad? A ruthless warrior responsible for the death of many...good or bad? A man after God's heart or a man after another man's wife? Good or Bad?

Jesus Christ...born to poor people in a manger...Good or Bad? Persecuted as a child and fled to Egypt good or bad? Three years correcting the leaders of the church...good or bad? Healing miracles good or bad? Claimed to be God Good or Bad? Mocked those who claimed to follow God and led others to do the same Good or Bad? Killed fig trees Good or Bad? Destroyed a large group of pigs and ruined the business of many Good or Bad? Turned over tables in the temple Good or bad...Persecuted, mocked, tortured beaten and ridiculed Good or Bad? Died a criminal's death on a cross Good or Bad?

We could go on and on throughout almost every chapter of Scripture and we would eventually say....well it didn't seem good a the time..but it was the best thing that ever could have happened.

In fact, events in the Bible teach us that we have no ability to determine is something that happens is good or bad. Often the things that we pray for God to take away are some of the greatest blessings He has allowed into our lives.

When something happens to us...or lets say around us...we immediately assess it and lump it into a category with a perceived outcome...good or bad..We tend to drift to verses like this one.

John 16:32–33 (ESV) 33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Jesus said we would have tribulation..I guess this is just part of my share. But then we remember verses like.

Romans 8:27–28 (ESV) 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Through out the Bible it seems like people went through a lot of tribulation. Times were tough for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. One thing after another seemed to happen to them. David spent as much time fleeing from his family as he did singing psalms with them. In Jesus' day, People had to be blind before they could be healed. They had to be lame before Jesus told them to get up.

They had to reside in leper colonies until they are touched and cured by Jesus. Some had to die before being told to come forth. Mary Magdalen had to host seven demons before she could experience being set free...The Scriptures teach us that all kinds of things happen as part of the human experience and that we often can't see how the immediate event fits into God's over all plan for our lives and the world.

So have you ever heard the term "It's all Good?" Do you know where that came from?

Romans 8:27–28 (ESV) 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

For those who love God...it is all good. No matter what it is. Not some kind of mental gymnastics to deny the sin and horrible things that happen....but the reality of something much deeper....a quiet still faith that runs through us...an awareness that what happens in and around us is part of a much greater plan

God tells us that for those who love Him all things work for Good...He doesn't say all things are good...in fact, Scriptures are replete with tons of examples of sins in the lives of people and God never calls them good. He calls them evil.

But sins are not sinful because they are inherently so....in other words an event is neutral...it is an event....it only becomes a sin when God deems it as such...It is a sin in God's eyes and those are the only eyes that matter.

An event becomes a sin when God says it is a sin. There is one source of truth and it is God. He determines truth and He determines what actions are sinful and which are not.

In the same way, we can't label an event in our lives as good or bad because we don't have the perspective to do so. We just don't know what we don't know. So we must choose our response to the things that God allows to enter our lives. And James says...since you are choosing....choose Joy. As believers, you can just as easily choose joy as you can panic, fear or worry.

You and I who have the Holy Spirit have another option not available to others...we can choose to have God's perspective instead of the world's perspective.

And God tells us that for those who know Christ it is all good. You just can't see it yet.

Everything is allowed by God

We know that God is Sovereign and He directs all things according to His Will. He has a plan for this world, for our lives and for mankind and He is working out His plan. If something happened, the one thing that you can be certain of is that God allowed it. Nothing in this world spins out of the control of God.

Things may happen that we would say God should never have allowed...i.e. the Holocaust....but if it happened...you can be sure that God allowed it. That doesn't mean that He approves it or that it is inherently good...it just means that if it happened...God determined it was ok to happen. He could have stopped it but He chose not to do so.

Not only is God Sovereign but he is Omniscient. He knows everything. Everything past, present and future. Nothing ever catches Him by surprise. He never says, oh I didn't know that...or wow that was unexpected...IF something happened God not only knew about it, but He has foreknowledge about it.

God is also all powerful. We call it Omnipotent. He has the power to allow or stop anything. Things exist because He holds them in place. Nothing happens in spite of Him or around Him. Everything that happens could have been stopped by God but was not. He allows it because He has the full power to stop it.

God is also present everywhere. He is Omnipresent. Nothing slips by Him because He was somewhere else. He is present fully present in every moment. He is completely aware and without distraction.

God is also love. Not something He does but something that He is. If God allows something it is because He loves us and He wants the very best for us. Everything that God allows occurs because it is what is best for those He loves and He loves everyone. Every event in your life occurs because of all the choices God has, He has given you the very best one. He can do no less.

In fact, whatever you face in your life you can rest assured that God ran through every possibility and deemed that what has occurred in your life is necessary and best for you...to make you more like Christ.

So God is Sovereign, All knowing, All Powerful, All loving, Always present...and always using the events in life for the good of those who believe.

Note that the promise to work all things together for good is given only to those who believe. Those who do not believe have little good on their horizon. God knowing their destination cannot promise that things in their lives will work together for good. In fact, He guarantees the opposite.

Romans 8:27–28 (ESV) 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

If you are a believer...God has made a promise..that nothing will happen in your life that He will not work out for good. He does not promise to explain it to you or that you will ever see it. The good that comes from the events in your life could come long after you are gone. Our decisions impact Generations. We, however, can rest assured that if we are going through tough times there is a higher purpose that God promises. We don't suffer in vain. Following Christ means that at times we may be called to suffer like Christ.

1 Peter 4:12–13 (ESV) 12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

Look at the response of the new believers after a particularly difficult trial. Peter and the apostles had been arrested.

Acts 5:39–40 (ESV) 40 and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

But look at their response...just jailed and beaten unjustly...did they cry out as victims?

Acts 5:41–42 (ESV) 41 Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. 42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

Christ followers will suffer....and James says...Consider it Joy....because you were counted as worthy...God is shining through you. The world thinks we are crazy because we choose how to respond. We don't allow the trials in our lives victimize us.

In Christ, the Holy Spirit changes our perspective. He shows us what God is doing. We can live above our circumstances spiritually. Not in denial but rather fully understanding and even embracing what is ahead for us.

I had the privilege of caring for one of God's best. She was and remains my favorite patient. She visited our office frequently. Often bringing by cookies or brownies. She knew every nurse in my office...all my partners and kept abreast to our families and children. She had her own children and was the matriarch of her family.

She was in her late 70's and had a lot of grandchildren that she called "God's little ones" She always told us that she was talking to God about us. I was not following God too closely at the time...ok not at all... and we always joked for her to put in a good word for us.

I can remember the day that her biopsy report came across my desk. I literally started crying. She had diffuse metastatic inoperable cancer. It was aggressive and it was well

advanced. I lost sleep all night knowing that at her appointment the next day I needed to tell her. Two of her daughters came with her that day.

As soon as she saw the look my face she asked me if I was ok. She said I looked sick. When I shared that she was very sick, she looked at me and smiled. She said "that must have been hard for you...you are so kind. But Doctor Frank...I know what you do not yet know....My God is in Heaven and He does as He pleases. "

Her daughters simultaneously said..."That's right and we will praise Him in the storm"

I thought that they were all delusional. I began to ask them if they heard what I said....Do they understand what advanced metastatic cancer is? It seemed to me like they were all in denial. I have had this discussion with too many in my life, but this one it seemed really weird. She smiled at me and said, "So how is your family. Is Alex walking yet? Once he starts you can't keep up with him"

I remember being blown away by her denial. This event in her life was bad. It was a bad thing. Cancer is bad. It is on the top of the bad side of the list. There is nothing good about this. What is wrong with her? I remember thinking, I may need to repeat her brain scan. She is in denial and must be in shock.

They left my office that day more upbeat than when they arrived. It was crazy.

I had just been an eyewitness to the grand slam of faith and totally missed it. She chose to allow God to define things as good or bad in her life and she knew it was all good.

God allowed Cancer into her life...He knew in advance, He could have stopped it, He loves her, He had the power to cure it, but just three months later, I was at her funeral...still shaking my head trying to understand why they were celebrating God in such a horribly bad moment.

Do you remember when I said that you may never know the good that comes from the events that God allows in our lives? She died before seeing the impact that she had on me. I moved on dumbfounded by her denial until one day years later.

One day...I was reading my bible and I came across this verse....

Psalm 115:3 (ESV) 3 Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

She was quoting Scripture and I never knew it....

We aren't qualified to decide if the events in our lives are good or bad. We aren't qualified to make that judgement. So God just tells us...its all good...trust me.

For God's Children, every event in our lives is a blessing...it just may look like a curse.

Christians should have a different perspective than others. This place is not our home. This life is not all that we have. We are here for a short time until we can go home. We are not of this world we are on mission in this world. Our lives are not to be lived here for our comfort, we are to sacrifice for the Gospel. This life is not the show it is the waiting room. Death,

getting called home, could be something to look forward to. Paul certainly had that perspective.

Philippians 1:20–24 (ESV) 20 as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. 24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

Note that Paul says...it is his hope that God will be honored either in his death or his life. It doesn't matter to him. If God desires that He dies..fine...If God desires he should keep living..Fine. He want to die but God decides. He doesn't know what to choose so He let's God handle it.

Translated another way...My God is in the Heavens He does as He pleases."

So we still left James at his desk...The first verse....the most important verse...starts with one word.....CONSIDER

Think about....weigh the importance of...run it through your mind...contemplate the situation...compare it to other situations in your life...Decide how you are going to interpret it....The events of your life, are not inherently good or bad. The world has lied to you. We were commanded to not be conformed to this world...but to be transformed. It starts right here.

One day the doctor sits across from you...the report on the screen...the images that document the problem...She tells you the "bad news" But that news is not bad until you decide it is. You see you don't let others define the impact of events in your life. That determination is between you and God.

And God says it is all good...you just can't see it yet. So many times the worst moments of my life in retrospect were the best. So many times, people I know tell me that being diagnosed with cancer was the best thing that ever happened to them.

So James tells us...first and foremost....no matter what happens in your life...no matter what trials come...the first thing that you and I are to do...is to consider.

To consider the things of God has another name....it is called Prayer. If you want God's perspective on the things that occur in your life...your consideration must include Him. We are going to see as we go forward that our prayers to stop what is happening in our lives may not be what is most important. Too often our prayers or take this away, cure this, fix this....are not in alignment with God's will.

Remember if you are experiencing it...He has already allowed it....maybe the reason is to take it away..but most likely it has occurred because it is the best thing God can do to get you where He needs you to be.

So James says...you will experience various trials...you will be drawn to your knees trying to understand them...You will pray to God to take them away...but eventually you have

to choose their weight and your response... The goal is to get on the same page as God as much as is possible.

Our prayers become...God I know that you love me. That you want the very best for me. That you have every option available to you and you allow only the best for those you love. I look at this situation and it just looks bad. I honestly don't see any good in it. But I chose to walk by faith and not by sight. I know that you are doing things that I do not understand and you do not owe me an explanation.

I will share with you what I want...and then obediently surrender to your will. I know that you will never leave me. That you draw me closer to you when things seem dark. You promise that this event in my life will work for God and will advance the Gospel.....I am going to keep praying until I can agree with you.

We pray because prayer changes us. God is not a genie or an ATM machine. He is not always ask and receive. We pray until we can surrender to God's plans. Until we can align our will with His. We pray for miracles and healing but in the end we surrender to whatever God deems is best. We can find joy and peace in anything because of the Holy Spirit.

James 1:2 (ESV) 2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,

Notice that James specifically says...my brothers. He is talking to believers only. The response to trials that James is talking about requires the Holy Spirit. This work is done in us by Him. Only followers of Jesus can possibly find joy in trials of all kinds. Without God it is impossible...If you are not transformed by the renewing of your minds you will never experience joy in trials.

Ok so how do we do that? How do we count it all joy? How do we get there? Trials happen in our lives and they threaten us...they expose the weaknesses in our faith...honestly they terrify us. We find ourselves freaking out...almost unable to think....wanting to pray but not seeming to find the words.

Well a few things God has promised us...First we don't have to have words.

Romans 8:26 (ESV) 26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

Don't know what to pray?...just pray. How long? Until you can consider it joy. Excuse me? Until you can consider it joy? That may never happen. Thinking like the world again...right? Don't think you can find peace in the midst of these trials? Well you can't, but the fruit of the Spirit in you includes joy and peace. He will take you there as you surrender your fears, your anxieties, your worries and your desires to be in control.

When we face trials of many kinds...we pray until we can surrender completely to what God is doing in this situation. We are not willing ourselves to do so...we are surrendering ourselves to allow the Holy Spirit to do what we cannot.

Tell ALS Story

Philippians 4:5–7 (ESV) 5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Note several things here. First every promise is based on the fact of the presence of the Lord. It is only because of that reality that we can avoid anxiety. Think about it for a moment. If you truly knew the Lord was in the midst of...in charge of...and with you during your trials...you would be at peace.

Our anxiety comes from our struggle to understand that truth. To truly surrender to what God is doing in our lives. Anxiety is our warning that our faith is under assault. It is the warning light that God places on our dashboard to remind us that we are not in control. People say it is our fight or flight response....but often it is our FAITH response.

When people tell me that they are battling with anxiety, fear and worry, I tell them one thing...They have not prayed enough. I say it with love but that is the truth. God promises...you can pray until the endpoint where worry and anxiety goes away.

God tells us to pray our requests...to do so with thanksgiving....and then the promise....the Peace of God...that is beyond our understanding will guard our hearts and minds. We can find true peace with and through God in every circumstances.

Jesus showed us how to handle these circumstances...in the Garden.....sweating blood....on His knees...praying for God to take away the trial that faced Him.

The trial that He was about to face was the worst trial experienced by a man. Everyone would agree that going to the cross is the worst trial you can have. But Jesus doesn't let the world define His experiences. He was human...He was anxious...and He showed us His humanity. In His flesh he was anxious to the point of sweating blood

Did you ever wonder why Jesus had to pray three times in the Garden of Gethsemane? Three times he prayed....He was sweating blood...He was anxious....He knew what crucifixion was and He knew what the moment had for Him. His disciples kept falling asleep. Jesus prays three times for the cup to be passed from Him. He begs the Father to find another way...

He makes His request...is there any other way to save the people we love? Can this cup pass from Me? But as He keeps praying you begin to see His perspective shift. But not my will Father...Yours. Your will be done.

And after the third prayer he wakes up his disciples and says The Time has Come.

Jesus started out praying because of His anxiety...literally sweating blood.... Then He prays until His anxiety is gone and He is completely surrendered to what God is doing in the moment. He finds

peace. He finds joy not in what is happening to Him, but what happening to Him is doing for others. He has the honor of suffering for and being an example for others.

He knelt down in anxiety and stood up in resolve. Fully at peace with what God wanted to do in His life. He was going to the cross...because it brings glory to God and salvation to everyone. His life was available to be used for others.

So James is leading the First Church and ready to pen a critical letter to the believers who are dispersed. You know that includes us...right? We are believers dispersed around the world...facing various trials....James words are for us...today.

One day in our future or perhaps right now you will go through a trial....

And James' first words to all of us are...consider...take time to process every event in your life with God. Consider what happens...Consider what it means....Consider why God has allowed it...Consider how much God loves you....Consider how faithful He has been in your past....Consider it all.....Stay on your knees with God until you find His joy.

You and I will likely one day have our own Garden of Gethsemane prayer....we too will ask for the cup to be passed....We too will pray until we find peace with what God is doing...We will start out falling to our knees unable to speak....but gradually as we stay there...a power rises up within us...as we process with God we begin to feel His presence....we begin to experience His power....we see our circumstances from His perspective...In the midst of despair we find something new....resolve. It rises up to the challenge that faces us. It is a presence that overpowers our fears and worries.

The longer we stay surrendered in prayer...the more God lifts us up above our trials. We no longer see what is happening to us....we are totally focused on what God is doing through us. We not longer see our trials as ours, we see them as opportunities to show God to others. As we stay longer....we begin to understand what the disciples meant when they said they were praising God for being worthy of suffering for His purposes.

Because you persevered....you experience what it means to live in sync with God. You will rise from your knees and walk in a power you never knew you had....the Power of the Holy Spirit. You will agree with God that this trial is the best thing that could ever have happened to you...You will find that you are grateful that He has given you this opportunity to demonstrate your faith...to yourself...to others....and most of all...to God.

And then it happens...you find yourself...at peace...almost eager to see what God will do next...What was your greatest fear has become your greatest opportunity. The fight for your life becomes the ride of your life. Your greatest fear has now become your greatest joy.

Consider it Joy my brothers when.....not if...you face trials of many kinds. Let's Pray