

The Grass is Greener: Trials

James 1:1-4

Are you very happy? that question was asked to American and 31% said they're very happy. That same question was asked to Americans this June and fewer than half said they're very happy. Only 14% of Americans said they're "very happy."ⁱ

Americans are less optimistic about their future than they were in 2018 and lonelier.

We all want to be very happy, don't we? How can we get there? It's by finding greener grass.

Our resolution to happiness is almost getting rid of difficulties in our lives. We look at our trials and we want them gone. We consider what would make our lives better and we say, "if only I had..."

Where do you look over the fence and see greener grass? Marriage? Job? Health? Kids back at school *full time*? The President you're hoping for get elected?

Joy is fleeting. COVID-19 has felt like a joy-robber this year. We feel like trials threaten our happiness.

What would it take for you to be joy-filled and to have gratitude?

We answer: if I got that job. If that person fell in love with me. If my kids were okay. When 2020 is over.

Paul in Philippians 4: ¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

What is that secret???

Today we begin a series entitled *The Grass is Greener* and we will walk through James 1 and hear how James interacts with our struggle for contentment.

James has a word for us. He says, "Count it all joy, my brothers,^[b] when you meet trials of various kinds."

How can he say that? He counts *trials themselves* as a joy.

Let's dive in.

1 James, a servant^[a] of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Who is writing this? James, the half-brother of Jesus and leader of the church at Jerusalem. He could have dropped that authority, but instead, he inserts Jesus as the authority.

How does he refer to himself. A servant. He knows whose he is.

A testament to Jesus that his brother would follow him! His brother is Lord and Messiah.

To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion:

Greetings.

Recalling Israel's dispersion. James takes this and speaks now of the church's dispersion. He is likely writing those who used to be in his church, but were dispersed by persecution. He has a connection with his listeners.

Testing of Your Faith

2 Count it all joy, my brothers,^[b] when you meet trials of various kinds,

What in the world! What kind of advice is this? We don't know exactly what kind of trials his audience was experiencing, but we know that at least in their history they had experienced persecution.

It's interesting: trials is the same word as temptations. Didn't we just pray last week, "lead us not into temptation?"

Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5:11-12

¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Trials: 1) persecution; 2) hardships; 3) temptations (!)

³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

James says that the result of our trials is that, when we walk through them with Christ, we grow in steadfastness. This feels like a let down. The whole purpose of my trials is steadfastness?

James has the audacity to say that the character trait of steadfastness is more important than the trials we are in.

Do we actually believe that? Do we believe our character is more important than our circumstances. We believe it about others, don't we? We even know it about ourselves in retrospect. But do we believe it about ourselves today?

Think about how your character has been formed. How did you become tenacious? How did you become gritty? By facing obstacles.

Grit by Angela Duckworth. The most important trait for success is grit. "Enthusiasm is common. Endurance is rare."

"To be gritty is to keep putting one foot in front of the other. To be gritty is to hold fast to an interesting and purposeful goal. To be gritty is to invest, day after week after year, in challenging practice. To be gritty is to fall down seven times, and rise eight."

It's not surprising that both Paul and the author of Hebrews talk about the Christian life as a race. In Hebrews 12:1, it says, "let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." Not, let us run with speed, but endurance!

Eliud Kipchoge: fastest maraonther. Under two hours! 115 pounds.

100 meter record holder (also 200 meter). 9.58 seconds. Usain Bolt: 207 pounds.

Pacing as a long-distance swimmer. Jumping from 50 yards to 500. The worst: pacers: time keeps getting shaved off. How to swim hard for a long time. Lungs have to develop. Muscles have to develop.

Researchers know that we learn "ten times more in a crisis than during normal times." Geoff Colvin.

We grow as we do hard things.

⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

What is the full effect of steadfastness? That we lack nothing. When we are discontent, we think that we lack something. "If only I had..." James tells us that when we are shaped through trials we come to understand that we lack *nothing!*

1 Peter 1:6-7

⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

2020 is a test. Just like every day is a test. Do we have the ability to put our eyes up to Christ and to look at what he is doing in our hearts?

Gold: impurities rise to the surface and can be strained off. 24 karat gold is pure gold. It's also the most malleable. The more you refine gold, the more malleable it becomes.

Love Tucson: let's let steadfastness have its full effect on us.

Thanksgiving: retailers jump straight from Halloween to Christmas because Thanksgiving cuts the legs out from the fuel of the economy: discontentment.

Tortoises on turf.

Romans 5:2b-5 ² ...we^[c] rejoice^[d] in hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

ⁱ <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/americans-are-unhappiest-they-ve-been-50-years-poll-finds-n1231153>