

*“Joy in the Midst of Suffering” (James 1:1b-2)*  
Mission Bible Fellowship (12-30-2018) Pastor Larry Nelson

## INTRODUCTION:

1. Please turn in your Bibles this morning to James Chapter 1.
2. As I explained to you last month, for the most part, James is not a book of theology.
  - a. Instead, James provides us with a clear verse-by-verse blueprint of what genuine Christian behavior is supposed to look like.
3. The entirety of my last sermon, was spent laying out one of the most important foundation stones of the entire Bible, **The Lordship of Christ**.

*James 1:1 “James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ ...”*

- A. As you will remember, I explained that, the Greek word which is translated here as “*bond servant*” in the NASB, and “*servant*” in the English Standard Version, is *doulos*, and *doulos* only has one meaning, which is **slave**.
  1. For those of you who are joining us today for the first time, I want to both welcome and encourage you to obtain the written transcript of my last message, or someone here can help you find it online.
  2. But for today, let’s just say that, if you are a **servant**, then you are an **employee**, and as an employee, if you don’t like your boss, then you can quit.
    - a. But slaves were owned.
    - b. James and many of the other New Testament writers refer to Christians as **slaves** of Christ, and as such, we have yielded all of our personal rights, and we exist for only one purpose, and that is to please and to do the will of our Master, The Lord Jesus Christ.
    - c. And as I said last time, there are many different aspects to our relationship with Christ.
      - (1) Yes, He is our Savior, our Provider, our Protector, our Advocate, and even our Friend.
      - (2) But **first** and **foremost** He is our **Lord** <*kurios*>, which means **Master**.
    - d. Anyone who had an older brother or sister, will remember times when they were given permission to do things, which according to our parents, we were too young to participate in.
      - (1) And from our childish “*wise-in-our-own-eyes*” hearts, do you remember what we all would often blurt out?, (say it with me), “**That’s not fair!**”
      - (2) Now although such foolish statements are both common and even understandable in children, because they are, children, they are not OK for the “*slaves of Christ*”, who should know better.

3. When we get the foundational understanding of our slave/Master relationship right, then everything else in the Christian life will eventually make sense.
  - a. But if we get this wrong, then our pride will get in the way every time that our Heavenly Master brings something hard into our lives, as it cuts against the grain of our sinful flesh.
  - b. As the slaves of Christ, we need to remember that if God actually gave us what we deserve, then we would all be in Hell, **today**.
  - c. So we need to view everything that God brings into our lives, short of Hell, as a blessing, which is intended to make us more like Christ.

**TRANS>** Please take out your sermon outlines – and let's begin with Point #1

### I. The Reality of Suffering (James 1:1b)

*James 1:1 James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.*

- A. It should be noted here that suffering and depravation were nothing new to the Jewish people.
  1. They had been enslaved in the land of Egypt for over 400 years.
  2. And by the time we come to the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, Israel had spent much of its history being conquered over-and-over again by nations, that God raised up to punish His people for their rebellion and idolatry, the latest one being the Roman Empire.
  3. For thousands of years, conquering nations, forcibly moved people to other places, to prevent nationalistic rebellions.
    - a. This scattering of the Jewish people among the nations was called the <Diaspora> in Greek, and there were many Christian Jews who were caught up in it.
  4. So James is writing to his Jewish brethren, who had professed faith in Christ.
  5. To put it simply, many, if not most of these Jewish Christians had lost everything in the <diaspora.>
    - a. They had to leave jobs, their businesses, their homes, their possessions, and often, many family members had been slaughtered by the brutality of Rome.
    - b. The Colosseum still stands today as a monument to blood-lust of Rome upon God's people, as Christians were brutally tortured and murdered there, all in the name of entertainment.
- B. Now before I move on from here to the rest of our text, it is very important to point out the difference between the false gods of the Greco / Roman world, and the true God of the Bible.
  1. To put it simply, the false gods of Greek and Roman mythology were **capricious!**

- a. Now there's a \$10 word, ☺☺☺ or about \$13.50 in Canadian
  - b. So when I say that these mythological false gods were **capricious**, I mean that they liked messing with people, by causing them trouble, just to see what they would do.
  - c. The heroes of mythology would no sooner get through one problem, only to have their false *gods* throw out another road-block, just because they were entertained by causing pain, suffering, and confusion.
  - d. And although the one and only true God of the Bible is never like this, foolish people often believe that He is.
2. But as one who has known the Lord and studied the Bible for almost 50 years, I want to give you another "Nelsonism" this morning, a statement of faith, which has just 5 simple words:
- a. And here it is: **OUR GOD NEVER WASTES SUFFERING!**
  - b. The perfect, absolutely sovereign, all-powerful, all-knowing, never-changing God of the Bible, determined in eternity past that He would demonstrate His love by coming to earth as a man to die in our place, for our sins, so that we could be forgiven and live in Heaven, forever.
  - c. Just as the sufferings of Christ on the cross had an eternal **purpose**, so too, faithful slaves of Christ, must declare, the biblical truth that our sufferings always have **purpose**.
  - d. Why?, because, **OUR GOD NEVER WASTES SUFFERING!**
    - (1) Say it with me – **OUR GOD NEVER WASTES SUFFERING!**
    - (2) If you forget everything else today, remember:, together:
    - (3) **OUR GOD NEVER WASTES SUFFERING!**

**TRANS>** So with that said, I want to move on to Point #2 in my sermon outline:

## II. The Instruction in Suffering (:2a)

*James 1:2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials*

- A. <He - ge - o - mi> is the Greek verb, which is translated here as "consider", and it is given in the imperative command form.
  1. And so, James is not just making a suggestion here.
  2. This is just the first of his laying down one command after another.
  3. And in this case, he is commanding us to have **joy** in our *trials*.
- B. I need to point out that in the English language *joy* and *happiness* are often used synonymously, meaning that we often interchange them.

1. But that is not the case in New Testament Greek.
2. Happiness is simply an emotion, which is driven solely by the circumstances of life.
  - a. For example:, You go to work, and your boss praises you and gives you a raise in salary.
    - (1) ¿How do you feel about that?, Obviously you feel happy.
  - b. Now that same boss, gets mad at you, or he praises someone else for the work that you did, and they get a promotion and a raise.
    - (1) ¿How do you feel about that?, To say the least, now you are not happy.
  - c. Wives, your husband comes home and praises you for the wonderful ways that you keep the home and raise the kids ...
    - (1) ¿How do you feel about that?, Hopefully happy!
  - d. But now that same husband comes home with a grouchy “DRA”, “Dirty Rotten Attitude”, and he totally ignores you, except to complain about the messy house.
    - (1) ¿Now how do you feel?, Probably not so happy.
3. Since our emotions, or feelings, are driven and measured by the sum-total of our current circumstances, God never commands us to feel anything, about anything, because feelings just are.
  - a. Feelings are just the sum-total of what’s going on in our life, at any given moment in time.
  - b. As Christians, we cannot control how we feel, but by the grace of God, we are commanded to control what we think, say, and do, no matter how we feel at any given moment.
  - c. That is why James uses a totally different word here.
  - d. He is not commanding us to feel happy., he is commanding us to respond to the trials of life with joy.

C. Please turn over to: *Ephesians 5*

Ephesians 5:15-18

15 *Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise,*

16 *making the most of your time, because the days are evil.*

17 *So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*

18 *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,*

*Ephesians 5:18 “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,”*

1. The word that Paul uses here for “filled” has nothing to do with volume, ie., something being ½ full or empty.
2. When the Holy Spirit comes to live in the soul of every Christian, he comes in fullness, not a portion today, and more later on.
3. In the Greek, this word “fill” is in the imperative command form, and it means “to control.”
4. Simply put, Paul is saying, “Just like alcohol controls every aspect of a drunkard who is under the influence, so too Christians must give every aspect of our lives over to the moment-by-moment control of the indwelling Holy Spirit.”

D. Now turn over to: *Galatians 5*

*Galatians 5:22-23*

22 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,*  
 23 *gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*

1. Notice carefully, how Paul begins this sentence, by referring to “the fruit of the Spirit.”
2. First of all it is not “the fruits of the Spirit”, it is “the fruit of the Spirit.”
3. Paul is talking about a singular, Holy Spirit-produced fruit, that is grown in every Christian who, as a slave of Christ, is deliberately seeking the moment-by-moment control of the Holy Spirit in his life.
4. And as we do, the evidence will be: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

E. So when we are commanded in *James 1:2*, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials”

1. This is **NOT** just an emotion that we whip up in our own strength.

*John 15:5* “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”

F. Joy is part of the 9-fold fruit, that is manifested moment-by-moment, in our lives when we are deliberately submitting ourselves to the control of the Holy Spirit.

G. So now that we know where “joy” comes from, and that it is not an emotion, determined by our circumstances, we should all be asking, “Well then, ¿what is it?”, “According to the Bible, ¿what exactly is Christian Joy?”

1. The entirety of Scripture teaches that, joy is the understanding that God is totally sovereign over every aspect of His universe. <2x>
2. What I like to say is that, “Since God is large and in charge, we can and must trust Him.”
3. Every Christian parent should explain, and memorize *1 Peter 5:7* with their children.

*1 Peter 5:7* “casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”

4. An old woman once asked her pastor, “*¿Does this mean that we should bring even our little problems to God?*”
  - a. To which he wisely answered: “*Dear sister, ¿do you think that any of your problems are big to God?*”
  - b. He is the Sovereign Creator, Master, and Sustainer of His universe and, and therefore, James commands us, as obedient slaves of Christ, to **trust** Him in **everything**.
  - c. And it is this Holy Spirit-empowered **joy**, which enables us to trust Him, even in times of deep pain, sorrow, and loss.
  - d. Remember:, **OUR GOD NEVER WASTES SUFFERING!**

**TRANS>** So now let’s move on to Point #3 in my sermon outline:

### III. The Certainty of Suffering (James 1:2c)

- A. First of all, please notice what this text does **not** say: It does **not** say: “*Consider it all joy, my brethren, if you encounter various trials,*”

1. It says:

*James 1:2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,*

2. Now I don’t know what kind of trials and troubles that you are going through, but perhaps you can relate to this:
  - a. Two men were standing on a subway platform, waiting for the train.
  - b. And as it approached, there was another man just inside the door, who wasn’t feeling well.
  - c. So when the doors opened, this poor guy hurled his lunch all over one of the men standing there.
  - d. And as the doors closed, he looked at his buddy and said “**Why me?**”
  - e. ¿Isn’t that just like us?, When the trials of life hit us in the face, so often we think and, sometimes say, “**Why me?**”
  - f. To which God says, “**Why not you?**”

*Romans 9:20 “... who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it?”*

3. Please remember:, **OUR GOD NEVER WASTES SUFFERING!**
  - a. So **when** trials and sufferings come, we must remember, and remind others to remember, that God always has a plan and purpose for the trials that come upon us.

4. If you have been a Christian for very long you have certainly heard: *Romans 8:28*, So please turn over to:

*Romans 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*

- a. Perhaps someone has even quoted it, as they have tried to comfort you during your times of suffering.
- b. And truly, this is a great passage of scripture, but most people really don't know what it means.
- c. They say things like:, "*Everything will work out*", or "*someday you will laugh about this*", or "*you'll feel better soon*" or "*Its all good!*", (whatever that means).
- d. But none of these statements come even close to what this verse actually means!!
- e. First of all, please notice that this promise is only speaking to Christians, who understand their Master/slave relationship with God, to those who truly "*love God*", and who are not complaining by saying things like, "**Why me?**"
- f. Now I want everyone to look up at me, as I ask you:, "*Do you know what the next verse says?*"
- g. If you don't, then you have no clue what *Romans 8:28* means, because the "**good**" of verse 28 is actually defined in verse 29.
- h. So let's read the verse 28 again in its context:

*Romans 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*

*Romans 8:29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son ...*

- (1) There it is:, When we respond properly to suffering, Paul is promising here that it will make us more like Christ.
- (2) The N.T. theological word for this process of conforming us to the image of Christ, is called "*sanctification.*"

*1 Thessalonians 4:3 "For this is the will of God, your sanctification ..."*

- (3) While salvation is an **event**, sanctification is the **process** of the Christian becoming more like Christ, which begins the moment we are "*born again*" into God's forever family, and it continues until the day we die and go to Heaven.
- i. So when I say that **OUR GOD NEVER WASTES SUFFERING**, I mean that He sovereignly designs the trials of life to make us more and more like our Lord and Master, and less and less like our pre-salvation sinful selves.

- j. Therefore, **when** suffering and trials come, as slaves of Christ, our God-honoring response to our heavenly Master must **never** be “**Why me?**”, but “**Lord, what would you have me to learn through this trial?**”, and, “*How can I glorify you in the midst of this suffering?*”
5. ☺☺☺ Now it’s time for me to go from preaching to meddling. ☺☺☺
- a. It is common in western culture, and even among Christians to ask, “*How are you doing?*”
- b. And if things are not going too well, it is also common for us to say something like, “*Oh, I’m having a bad day!*”
- c. But if *Romans 8:28 & 29* are still in the Book, and they are, and they are still true, and they are, then Holy Spirit- controlled Christians **never have a “bad day!”**
- d. Here is another *Nelsonism*., this text is promising us that “*Our God is up to something, and it is GOOD!*”, <REPEAT>
- e. So according to our James text, ¿Is it normal for Christians to suffer?, **Yes**, ¿And can that suffering be extremely painful and hard?, **absolutely!**
- f. But we need to remember, and remind each other to remember, that “*Our God is up to something, and it is GOOD!*”
- g. ¿Why?, because “**OUR GOD NEVER WASTES SUFFERING!**”
- h. And therefore, as Christians, when we are controlled by the Holy Spirit, we **NEVER** have bad days., Some days are really **hard**, but they are **NEVER bad**.
- i. And therefore, James commands us to have **joy** in this good, and **YES** sometimes **VERY hard**, journey, because God is seeking to conform us to the image of our Master!

## CONCLUSION:

1. ☺☺☺ Somebody once said, “*If you poke Pastor Larry, this guy bleeds biblical counseling*”, and they are right ☺☺☺.
2. And in case you haven’t figured it out by now, This morning I did a lot of group counseling from the pulpit.
3. So as I lay out these great foundation stones of theology, I love to put the cookies down on the lower shelves where everyone can get to them, even children.
4. Dear ones, the foundational truths that I have been able to share with you during these last two sermons, are not intended to just fill our heads with more Bible knowledge., They are intended to change our lives, for the glory of God and the good of others.
5. So we’ve come to the time, which I like to call the “**So What? Factor**”

6. Now that we have studied God's Word together, "**So What?**", meaning, "What are you going to do with what you have learned today?"

*James 1:22, 25 "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. (25) ... not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does."*

7. Let's all commit ourselves to becoming "doers" of the Word, and not just "hearers."
- a. And as you do, I love to hear how you are being changed, for the glory of God, by what you are learning.
8. And as I mentioned last time, I am happy to make the written transcripts of my sermons available to anyone who requests them at my email address: [<askpastornelson@gmail.com>](mailto:askpastornelson@gmail.com).
9. So now, let's just take a moment to pray together.

*Hebrews 12:2 speaks of, "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

*"Our loving Master, we thank You that Your commands come with Your enabling, and that we can depend on the Holy Spirit-empowered strength to understand and live out what we have learned today.*

*Thank you that we can have true joy in the journey, even in the midst of deep sufferings.*

*And thank You that we are never again going to have a "bad day", because we know that **OUR GOD NEVER WASTES SUFFERING!***

*Thank You for the work You are doing to make us more-and-more like You , and less and less like our old sinful selves.*

*May what we have learned today forever change the way we think and live for Your glory and honor, for it is in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that we pray, Amen."*

**CLOSING HYMN:** He Giveth More Grace, by Annie Johnson Flint

1. Annie Johnson was born on Christmas Eve 1866, and her mother would later die giving birth to her baby sister, when she when Annie was just years old.
2. When her father died, she and her sister were adopted by the Flint family, who raised them in the local Baptist Church, where Annie received Christ at the age of 8.
3. She loved children and set herself to becoming a teacher, but only two years after completing High School, she was stricken with arthritis, which would soon land her in a wheel chair, and then finally to be totally bedridden and helpless.
4. When her adoptive parents died, she and her sister were again orphans.
5. And she supported herself by writing Christian poetry.

6. As Annie Johnson Flint matured in her faith, through her suffering, she carried on an international letter-writing ministry of encouragement to others, who had read her poetry books and greeting cards.
7. It is amazing that she could even hold a pen in her deformed fingers, that had become so twisted by the ravages of arthritis.
8. And it was from almost 50 years of unimaginable bedridden suffering, that she penned a poem, which would become one of the church's most beloved hymns: "*He Giveth More Grace.*"

### He Giveth More Grace

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,  
 He sendeth more strength when the labors increase,  
 To added affliction He addeth His mercy,  
 To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.

His love has no limit, His grace has no measure,  
 His power no boundary known unto men,  
 For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,  
 He giveth and giveth and giveth again.

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,  
 When our strength has failed ere the day is half-done,  
 When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,  
 Our Father's full giving is only begun.

His love has no limit, His grace has no measure,  
 His power no boundary known unto men,  
 For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,  
 He giveth and giveth and giveth again.