

Day 1

Joy

Silence (2 minutes) Take some time to be quiet, to calm down, and to listen. What has God been teaching you? What are the next steps He wants you to take? How is your spirit doing?

Scripture *"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."* James 1:2-4

Discussion These passages feel extreme- even counter-intuitive. We are to regard trials as pure joy. It doesn't say to feel the joy, but to *consider* them as pure joy. When we face trials it can be difficult to reconcile our circumstances with our belief that God loves us. All too often we let our situations drown out the joy God offers us through faith in him and we collapse into ourselves. We may find ourselves to serve God and use our gifts to build up the Church, saying "I just don't have the focus or energy." At these times we might even question God's goodness, faithfulness, or even whether He exists at all! These trials are exactly what James is writing about here, though. In fact, without these trials it seems we would not be able to develop perseverance! This is ultimately why we are to consider these trials pure joy: they are the vessel through which we mature in our faith. The circumstance may not be from God, it may even be caused by horrific evil, but God in His wisdom, love and power will use it for good in the life of His child: *"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose."* (Rom. 8:28) We may not know every reason God has for allowing trials in our lives, but we can know this for sure: every trial can be used to strengthen our faith. We can trust a specific historical event, that Jesus lived, died for our sin, and came back to life. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."* (Jn. 3:16) *"Now this is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent."* (Jn. 17:3) So, when we face various trials, our faith may be tested. But, because of the reality of Jesus' death and resurrection, and remembering past events in our lives in which God has already demonstrated His love for us, and that He works for our maturing, we choose to trust God and regard our trial as pure joy. In the midst of lacking energy, or even feeling deeply angry, confused, and broken, we simultaneously trust our God and regard the trial as pure joy.

Application A properly made sword requires the scorching heat of a forge to achieve durability and an edge that lasts. In the same way, our faith in God will be subject to the fires of this life to produce perseverance and maturity. Think of one way you can apply what God has taught you through trials to whatever you are facing today. Rejoice in your trials!

Prayer Lord God, I submit myself to You. You are loving, wise, good, and powerful. Thank You that You love me and want me to mature. I praise You that in Your wisdom You use trials to work in me. Your ways are not my ways. I would not set life up like this. There is much I don't understand, but I praise You that You are trustworthy. You are good. You know that I am easily distracted by trials and how I have at times been overwhelmed by them. Father, I consider my trials pure joy. Please help me to grow in doing this. Thank You, Father. Thank You that I am Your child. Thank You that I belong to You. I love You. Amen.

Silence (2 minutes) Talk to God about what you are learning. What are your fears? Where are your hangups? Pray for direction.

Scripture memory for the week: *"For the joy set before Him He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."* Hebrews 12:2b-3