

Series: Tools of Faith
Title: Joy, the Measurement of Complete Faith
Text: James 1:2-7
Key Word: Dimensions
Proposition: Everyone can measure the completeness of one's faith by growing in these dimensions of joy.

Good Morning everyone. Wow, what a party last week. I am praising God for what He is doing in our lives. We're learning that when we put our faith into action we see lives changed and joy is rekindled.

This morning we're beginning a new series entitled, "Tools of Faith." In the weeks to come, we will explore a short letter penned by James, a half-brother of Jesus. He also led the church in Jerusalem.

His message is bare knuckled; his style is bare-boned. Talk is cheap, he argues. Service is invaluable. It is not that works saves us, but that works mark the follower of Jesus. In James' mind, it makes sense that we, who have been given much grace, should give much grace. In the weeks to come James will teach us the tools of such a vital faith.

I invite you to take out your sermon handout. This tool can be helpful to write down any thoughts or insights that you may want to remember later on.

Whenever we begin a project at home we usually get out the tools we will need to complete our task. Without our tools, it would be almost impossible to finish well. We want to finish well in our walk with God too. So, let's get out our first tool, a tape measure. We use the tape measure to determine the distance between two points. If we

were building a table, the tape measure would help us establish its dimensions. We would measure its depth, width, and height.

James knew that the Christians scattered all over the world would face challenges to their faith. They would need a faith with solid dimensions in order to remain secure in an insecure world. If they would remain faithful and fruitful, they would have to keep putting their faith into practice, even in difficult times.

God allows tough situations in our lives in order to refine us and to redefine the dimensions of our faith. As we approach tough circumstances with the dimensions of Godly joy we will see God both change us and the world around us. We will possess an unspeakable, contagious joy which will cause others to wonder what makes us so different. What dimensions of joy make Christians so different from anyone else? How can our lives be redefined by the dimensions of joy?

James points out that joy grows deeper through life's difficulties. (Vs 2) If you look at verse 2, James begins, "*Consider it all joy when you fall into diverse temptation, or when you face trials of many kinds.*" The Bible tells us that we are going to encounter testings or trials or difficulties. The word does not mean "temptation to sin." It comes from the Greek word which has to do with testing, something, trying.

James says that such testing builds patience. The Bible says, "*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter these testings or these pullings of God in your life.*"

When James says that you will fall into diverse trials, the picture of the phrase "you will fall" means that it is an unavoidable situation.

Some go through life feeling guilty because they believe they are to blame for the crisis they're enduring. So God must be getting back at them. They believe that they are to blame for their financial problems, or their family problems. Friends, sometimes we do make mistakes and suffer consequences for them. Many times though that is not the case.

The Bible teaches that we're going to fall into these trials regardless of how good we are. Imagine walking along the sidewalk and suddenly your foot hits a portion where it is raised. You trip, fall and hurt yourself. You didn't walk out of your house telling your spouse, "Honey, I'm going to go get the paper and fall and break my nose while I'm out. Okay?" Sometimes it doesn't matter how careful you are, you stumble over the raised concrete and it's over before you can do anything but hit the ground.

Trials are like that. It is not that there is anything preventative that we can do that will keep us from having a trial. We're going to encounter some trials. Many can accept this. We have a hard time doing what James says in verse 2: "*Consider it pure joy.*" When is the last time we considered it all joy when adversity came to our life? Most of us consider it all misery not joy. James is telling us, "When you fall into various trials and circumstances, count it all joy, my brothers." That's hard to do. That goes against every natural instinct.

It's not like we throw a party every time we go through a trial. How many of us have thrown a party after our job has been eliminated, our spouse has left us; or we've

been diagnosed with cancer, or our kid came home drunk? Not many would celebrate the difficulty.

I don't throw parties when I'm going through challenging circumstances. It's tough to consider it pure joy, because it hurts. But unless we go through some test, we will never know how deep are faith can go. Our problems are opportunities for us to go deep in our trust in God. We can see God's purpose is not to get us through life unbruised, unscathed, and without a problem. God's purpose is to get us through life learning how to trust him deeply just like the Son trusted His Father to get through the pain of the cross to the joy of Easter.

Next, we see that joy grows wider with persevering faith. (Vs 3, 4) James tells us why we count it joy. James says, "*because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.*" Perseverance, to some is holding on, clutching, hanging in there, and sweating it out until the unlovely end. Perseverance or *patience* is a beautiful word in Greek. It's not so much the ability to withstand, but the ability to overcome, the ability to endure to the point of victory. It is not hanging on and barely making it. It means that God wants to instill in us the attitude of an over comer. James says there is an endurance that is produced only by the experiences of trials. So count it a joy.

One day a boy was watching the older kids in the neighborhood riding bicycles. He wanted to ride a bike too. Everybody else rode bikes, and he had to walk. So his dad bought him a used bike.

The boy got up on that bike the first time and he took about one good spin on the pedals and crashed and fell. But he got back up and tried it again. And he fell again. And he got up again and he fell again. This went on for several days. He can't remember exactly how many times he crashed his bike, or how many skinned up knees and band-aids he went through. But somewhere along the way, that practice brought the boy to the place where he could ride the bicycle.

He didn't get up on the bicycle the first time and ride the thing. But he got to where he could ride it, while not concentrating. He didn't have to say, "Okay, hands, steady. This way and that way. Pedals forward. Pedals back and it will stop." It became instinct. You didn't ride a bike the first time you tried. But you wanted to ride a bike bad enough that you kept trying even though you kept falling. And the day came when you could ride.

Growing wider in joyous faith is like learning how to ride a bike. The first time we pray, it feels like our prayer falls to the ground, but we get back on our knees and keep on asking. It is the trying of our faith that works patience. Perseverance eventually wins the day.

With God's help we can do what He wants us to do. We can give generously and sacrificially. We can give the reason for the joy that is within us. We can forgive those who have hurt us. We can love. We can do all things through Christ, who strengthens us. The trying of our faith will work patience. James says, "*Perseverance must finish its*

work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." God is more interested in our maturity and completeness than in our comfort.

Finally, James points out that joy grows higher with searching prayer. (Vs 5-7) In verse 5 James wrote, *"If any of you lack wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault; and it will be given him."*

This promise is realized in the midst of trials and tribulations. Trials raise all kinds of questions, Why? What if? How? When your mind races with questions James urges us to ask God. God will help you understand. God will lead you to the next step.

Most of us have knowledge. We know what is happening. We see the circumstances. It's not a lack of information that creates the confusion; it's a lack of wisdom that challenges our coping with life's difficulties.

James says when you lack wisdom; ask God. Ask God what to do; to be able see His hand at work; to feel His presence through the valley. He is not going to upbraid, belittle, criticize or condemn you for asking. He is going to give you the wisdom. He wants you to know His mind and heart. Wisdom asks God to tell you not only what is happening and why it's happening, but also to tell you what to do to become more like Jesus.

Many pray, "God show me what you're going to do next, and I'll tell you if I like it and whether I'll go on." He wants you to come to the place where you trust Him regardless of what he says. He asks nothing more than your complete, undeterred obedience. God says, "I want you to commit that you'll do what I tell you before I tell

to do it." Can you trust God that much? The Bible says if you lack wisdom, if you don't understand what is going on, ask God. He'll tell you.

So ask Him in faith. James says, *"But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt."*

One day a boy was out playing in the back yard and got a splinter in his foot. He came in and held up his foot to his father. He was crying, and he said, "I got a splinter in my foot!" His father said, "Son, sit on the couch. Let's look at it." So the dad looked at it. Then, as the boy held up his foot and the dad reached over to pull the splinter out. The boy said what every kid says "Don't touch it!" His dad said, "What do you want me to do? Take a picture of it and mount it on the wall? I've got to touch it, Son. There is no choice." "It will hurt," he moaned. Dad said, "It might, but it won't hurt as long. It will sure feel a lot better when the splinter is out."

But somehow that wasn't adequate. Mom came into the room, held the boy down while dad attempted to pull that splinter out. The boy kicked, screamed, and jerked in all different directions. With tweezers in hand the dad tried to grab the splinter and pull it out. Finally the dad said, "Son, I am not going to cut your foot off. I'm not here to hurt you. I'm here to help you, and if you don't let me help you, it's going to get worse not better. Trust me; I'm your father. I love you. I care about you. I do this only to help you. Be still. Relax."

Many times our heavenly Father is attempting to pull the splinter from our lives. We say, "God, I'm hurt. God help me." God reaches in to help us, and the first thing we

do is say, "God, don't touch me! Don't do that God!" God is saying, "But I've got to reach in there and deal with the hurt. It may hurt a little, but I've got to do it." We say, "No, God. Please, nothing like that!" So here we are fighting with God. How many times in our lives do we find ourselves in a situation where God is trying to work in our lives so that we can become more like Christ?

We resist, reject, what He is attempting to do. We say, "God, I don't want you to do this. Let me out of here!"? God says, "Trust me, be patient. Persevere; you are on your way to being who I created you to be." What about you? will you trust him; will you trust His heart, when you can't see His hand? Perhaps you have, but you find your faith wavering. Keep trusting when you can't trust any more. One day what once was so difficult, so beyond the dimensions of your faith, will become a deeper, wider, and higher faith producing joy unspeakable.