

What Makes Us Happy?

“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings. 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.” James 1:1-3 (TNIV)

There are two contrasting definitions of joy:

Modern joy = self-interested, happiness, gratification, full appetite, satiated.

Biblical joy = the result of a deep sense of being in the presence and will of God. (See *Eccl. 7:14*)

Pure joy only comes when our faith has been tested and we have persevered. It is evidenced by the presence or lack thereof of perseverance, wisdom, faith, focus, and humility.

“Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. Those who doubt should not think they will receive anything from the Lord; they are double-minded and unstable in all they do. Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business. Blessed are those who persevere under trial, because when they have stood the test, they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. James 1:4-12 (TNIV)

Although related, Scripture is clear that trials and temptations are very different:

Trials are to be endured and are from God.

Temptations are to be avoided and are from the enemy.

“When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each of you is tempted when you are dragged away by your own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters.” James 1:13-15 (TNIV)

If God doesn’t send temptation, what does he send?

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of all he created.” James 1:17-18 (TNIV)

This is why the prophets referred to people as a city and God as the walls of protection around that city. The walls are called Salvation and the gates are called Praise... God delivers his people - we don't deliver ourselves. (See *Isaiah 60:18-22*)

From what in your life do you need to be delivered? (Where do you need perseverance, wisdom, faith, focus or humility?)

Small Group & Personal Reflection Questions:

1. How have you seen the Biblical idea of joy and the modern idea of joy (see front for explanation) play out in your own life? Would you say you have or regularly experience the “pure joy” that James talks about? What helps you or hinders you in experiencing it?
2. What do you think about the distinction that was made Biblically between trials and temptations? What experience have you had with them as separate things? How have you approached them differently?
3. When we ended the sermon, what was your answer to “from what do you need to be delivered?” Explain it in more detail to your group or journal it on your own.
4. With that area/issue in mind - which one of the 5 application ideas that were introduced in James, do you need most right now (on front of outline underlined)? What can you do to receive them as a gift from God?