



Links Players

SIX DEGREES FROM SUFFERING: JAMES

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds. (James 1:2, NIV)

IN GOLF, one good shot really can erase a day’s worth of ugly. It’s the shot that “brings you back,” as they say, while the rest of those shots may send you to the practice range.

Not long ago, I ordered several dozen balls with the phrase **Enjoy it all** imprinted on each one. It has proven to be a fantastic reminder, but it’s far from flawless. I was playing one of those balls, for instance, when some cart brakes squealed in my backswing and my ball wound up in a thinly-sanded bunker with a steep face. No, I didn’t enjoy that. I finished my double bogey and whined all the way to the next tee (and maybe a bit after). In other words, even though I know Scripture’s master verse on handling suffering, I forgot it at one of those times when it counted most.

What is that master verse? It is likely James’ admonition: “Count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds” (ESV). Certainly golf offers us that—tee shots out of bounds, balls settling into unfilled divots, a series of missed short putts. But life plays one-upmanship with golf, and we never quite know what will hit us next. Only last week, a nephew of mine went from headaches and blurry vision on Tuesday to brain surgery on Friday. So, yeah.

If we endeavor to learn what James had learned and actually add every harsh event to our Pure Joy List, we would do well to keep reading his words and latch on to our motivation. If a golfer needs a good shot to bring him back, what can we look for to keep *us* in the fight?

James went on to write: “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.” The end result of our suffering is full maturity. If you look around and see many, many people choosing less than maturity in our time, you may now understand that it is because so few are willing to pay the price of staying in their trials. They want out, quickly, with no understanding of or care for what their escape may cost them in the long run.

Right-minded people don’t choose suffering. But when it comes, if we are willing to consider it with joy for the work it is doing in us, the result will be just what God had in mind for us all along. We will be made mature in his Son.

Opening questions What misses cause you the most frustration on the golf course? How do you remind yourself to keep a positive attitude when all is going wrong?

READING James 1:2-3 & 12; Hebrews 12:4-11

The rewards of suffering (James 1)

What rewards for suffering did James speak of in these verses? Are these motivation enough for you to face trials with a willing, even joyful, attitude?

Struggles and triumphs (Hebrews 12)

What specific struggle is mentioned in verse 4? How much difficulty does this struggle create in your own life? What methods have you employed to combat it?

What difference does it make when we start to see struggles or trials as God’s way of building discipline into our lives?

What reward do we find in verse 11? Are you willing to remain in the fight until this reward comes?
