

Count It All Joy

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[0 : 00] James chapter 1 verses 1 through 3 will be the text I'll preach from this morning.

! If you would stand with me as we honor the reading of God's Word together.! James, a servant of God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ. To the twelve tribes in the dispersion, greetings!

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

May God add a blessing to the reading of his Word. Would you please be seated? Well, I think that we can take this passage, those verses that I just read to you, and file it under the category of things that you wish the Bible didn't say.

If we played one of those word association games and the word was trial, I bet joy would not be one of the first words that instantly popped into your mind.

[1 : 20] Pain and suffering would be, but probably not joy. This is one of those texts that can make you think when you read it. Seriously?

Lord, you can't be serious here. You can't be serious about this. Yet, here it is. And not only is it here, but in the Greek, it's written in the imperative, which means that this is a command, not a suggestion, not a recommendation.

This is God's expectation that you consider or count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds. And so when we read that, we think or we ask, well, how can God expect us to do that?

That's a good question. God's word has a good answer. But before we get to that answer, we first need to know something of James, the human author who was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write this epistle and also the people who were the first to receive it.

There are four different men named James in the New Testament, but the most likely candidate is James, who was the half-brother of Jesus. After Jesus was miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit, Mary and her husband Joseph had several children of their own.

[2 : 50] And at first, James, like his other siblings, rejected Jesus as the Messiah. However, he later believed, and he became a key leader in the Jerusalem church, which was born on the day of Pentecost, soon after Jesus had ascended back into heaven.

And we see the character of James in the way that he introduces himself. He says, James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Servant in the Greek is *doulos*. That refers to a bond slave. That refers to someone without property rights of their own. And it's a term used in the New Testament with the highest dignity.

There is no master greater than the Lord Jesus Christ. And there is no person more worthy of our service in complete devotion than him.

After all, he is the one who added a human nature to his divine nature. He took on human flesh in order to what? To serve us by dying and atoning for our sins on the cross.

[4 : 05] A servant of Christ is someone who willingly lives under the authority of Christ as his devoted slave. May we all desire to be known as nothing more than a bond slave of Jesus Christ in this life.

So we notice first that James is a humble follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. You know, how many people, how many of us maybe, would, if we had that relationship to Jesus, use it for our advantage?

Hey, there's something interesting you need to know about me. I'm the half-brother of Jesus. But James doesn't mention that special connection to the Lord at all.

Because he's all about Jesus. He's not about himself. And he simply wants to be known and identified as a bond slave of the greatest master that there is, Jesus Christ.

Then in the rest of verse 1, James identifies his audience and he greets them. He says to the 12 tribes in the dispersion. He says, greetings. The 12 tribes is a title used in the New Testament for the Jews.

[5 : 22] And the dispersion refers to Jews living outside of the land of Israel. In the Old Testament, when the Assyrians and the Babylonians conquered Israel and Judah, and they deported many Jews out of their land, they took them captive, and they forced them to live outside of Israel.

And they were known as the dispersion. In a similar way, these New Testament Jewish Christians were scattered as a result of persecution that broke out in Jerusalem, if you recall, after Stephen's defense of the gospel, when he was stoned to death, which is recorded in Acts chapter 8.

Acts chapter 8, verses 1 through 3. And Saul approved of his execution, talking of Stephen. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentations over him. But Saul was ravaging the church and entering house after house. He dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

Then after that, later in Acts chapter 12, we read about the persecution that broke out again against those who stayed in Jerusalem after this first wave of persecution in Acts chapter 8.

[6 : 38] About that time, Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James, the brother of John, with the sword. This is a different James. And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also.

This was during the days of unleavened bread. And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people.

So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. And so we have the benefit of knowing the aftermath of what resulted from this outbreak of persecution.

Saul eventually was converted. And going by his Greek name, Paul, he became an apostle to the Gentiles and a strong pillar in the church.

And when these Christians were forced out of Jerusalem as a result of persecution, they took the gospel with them. And it spread far, and it spread wide.

[7 : 40] More people were hearing about Jesus. They were hearing the gospel preached to them. But, put yourselves in the place of these first century believers whom James is writing to.

Imagine a mob entering into this building, into this space, and forcibly removing us from it.

Putting their hands on our women and our children. dragging them out. Stoning and killing and imprisoning our men and our leaders before our eyes.

You're being chased out of town and forced to leave behind your homes and your possessions and your jobs. It's hard to imagine for us, isn't it?

Yet, that's how many Christians live today. Those are the many of the trials that Christians around the world endure, even as I speak. So, understand James' audience knew trials.

[8 : 49] And God, through this servant of Christ, commands that they count it all joy. And he commands the same of you and I today as we face trials.

So, the main idea for this morning's sermon is this, rejoice in trials. trials. Rejoice in trials. So, now we move on to answer the question of how you can rejoice in trials.

Really, it comes down to a change in your perspective. To rejoice in your trials requires you to think about trials with the mind of Christ, which you have if you've been saved.

1 Corinthians 2, 16 says, for who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him, but we have the mind of Christ. So, those who are saved have the mind of Christ.

The Bible says that a person who is saved is indwelt by the Holy Spirit who enlightens them and who infuses their minds with the wisdom of God.

[10 : 01] Every believer then bears a responsibility to yield to the Holy Spirit's leading, as Ephesians 4, 30 says. And also to allow the Spirit to transform and renew their minds continually, as we read in Romans 12, 2.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good, acceptable, and perfect.

So, to rejoice in your trials, you must be in the right state of mind. You must see your trials from a heavenly point of view, and you must understand them with the mind of Christ.

And so, in James, chapter 1, verses 1 through 3, he provides us with two instructions which, if obeyed, will cause you to be able to rejoice in your trials.

The first instruction is this, welcome trials with a joyful attitude. Welcome trials with a joyful attitude. Look at verse 2 again with me.

[11:13] Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kind. As I already mentioned, count or consider in some of your translations, it's written in the imperative mood in the Greek, and that means that this is a command.

we are commanded to be joyful in trials. But, you know, that's not the human response to trouble, is it?

But the Bible says what it says, and we are to count trials with all joy or pure joy.

And here's something important for us to understand. we typically associate joy with a feeling more so than we do an attitude.

Attitudes come from your head. Feelings tend to come from your heart. And so James isn't saying, you know what, guys?

[12:20] Just put on a happy face. Just think positive thoughts. Fake it until you make it. None of us would think to apply this scripture in that way.

You don't go up to a church member who lost their job or a loved one and ask them, hey, why aren't you smiling? You should count it all joy, right? None of us would say to someone enduring a trial, you know, I'm so happy for you that your house burned to the ground.

that tornado came and wreaked havoc and destroyed all of your property. Aren't you excited that you get to go through this trial with joy? When Jesus met Lazarus' sisters in John 11 after Lazarus died, they were grieving.

But even though Jesus knew he would bring Lazarus back to life, he didn't lead with that news. He didn't say, you know what, guys? why are you doing this?

Why aren't you happy? This is not going to be a big deal. No, instead he comforted them and he shared their grief. He wept, even though I think part of the reason why he was grieved was because of the unbelief of the people in him as well.

[13:40] So James is talking about an attitude here. He's talking about a disposition towards trials. And he knows that this attitude should be present in believers no matter what the trial may be.

Because he calls them various trials. And various means various. Trials of all shapes, trials of all sizes, trials with a short time span, trials with a long time span, minor trials, major trials, big things, small things.

All are trials. Also, James makes sure to mention that it's not a question of if trials come. He says when trials come.

Because they will come. In the Greek, the word James uses for trials connotes something that breaks the pattern of peace, comfort, and happiness in someone's life.

That's what a trial is. And I don't know about you, but it seems like that kind of stuff is always happening. Two weeks ago, Danny first walked out into our garage and noticed some water coming out from underneath where our HVAC and water heater are.

[15:00] You know, and I'm an optimist. I'm an optimist. And I'm looking at it and I'm hoping for the best case scenario. I'm convincing myself that it's not a big deal, just some condensation maybe, right?

That stuff happens with these things, doesn't it? I think that it does. We'll just dry it up and, you know, pray about it and next day won't be a big deal. Well, next day, more water.

And I'm frustrated with myself because I don't know how to fix these things. I know how to find the source of the leak and once I find it, I don't know what to do with it. There it is.

I don't know, but there it is. And I'm frustrated because I'm thinking, you know, why did they teach us algebra and high school when I could have benefited so much more from having some kind of like a plumbing class or something like that?

I hardly ever use algebra in my life. And I'm dealing with this and I, you know, we're studying Habakkuk and I think, well, it could be worse.

[16:02] Habakkuk had much worse things to deal with. But here's the thing. As we saw last week, even if the trial was as bad as that. God's command stands.

There's no ifs. There's no ands or buts. Even if the worst thing that can happen happens, consider it all joy.

That's hard. That's a hard lesson. That's a hard truth to accept. So how can we have a joyful attitude during minor and major trials?

Well, you can when you realize that those trials come under the authority of a sovereign God who is accomplishing his purposes through them and that he loves you.

Romans 8, 28 through 32 explains that. And we know that for those who love God, all things, and you can put trial underneath all things, work together for good.

[17 : 04] For those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined, he also called.

And those whom he called, he also justified. And those whom he justified, he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also all things?

God works all things, including trials, for our temporal and eternal good. And it takes a mature believer to understand that.

It takes a believer who has probably had to endure some trials, some hard trials in life. They understand that it's through trials that we love this world less and we love God more.

It is through these trials that God molds and he shapes us into the image of Christ. And ultimately for us, Christ is our example of one who had a joyful attitude in the midst of the greatest trial that this world has ever known.

[18 : 29] After recounting the trials of various people in scripture who had faith that endured, the author of Hebrews admonishes us to have the same attitude and then points our focus to the example par excellence who is Jesus Christ in Hebrews 12 verses 1 through 2.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus looked beyond the trial of the cross to the joy that he knew would be his when the trial was over and it had accomplished the glorious work that it was divinely ordained to achieve.

Do you see your trials in that way? Are you consciously choosing to see trials with the mind and the attitude of Christ?

Is that how you consider and evaluate your trials no matter what they might be? Here's a convicting statement from Warren Weersby.

[19 : 51] Our values determine our evaluations. If we value comfort more than character then trials will upset us. If we value the material and physical more than the spiritual we will not be able to count it all joy.

If we live only for the present and forget the future the trials will make us bitter not better. God through James was encouraging these believers to embrace their trials.

Not so much for what they are but for what God sovereignly accomplishes through them. So the first instruction is to welcome trials with a joyful attitude and you can better do that when you follow the second instruction.

Welcome trials with an understanding mind. Welcome trials with an understanding mind. Look again at verse 3. For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

know in the Greek is ginosko and carries the idea of fully understanding something to not only be factually true but to have personally experienced it to be true.

[21 : 05] Jesus used the same word in the parable of the fig tree when he said from the fig tree learn its lesson as soon as its branches become tender and puts out its leaves you know that summer is near.

Paul uses a form of the word twice in Romans chapter 1 when he says that even pagan unbelievers have a certain observable knowledge of God that is revealed through his creation.

Christians who have endured trials have experienced that testing produced a steadfast faith within them. They have experienced how God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and his word have caused them to endure trials which tested their faith.

And the testing of their faith produces a deeper and stronger faith as a result of the trials that they endured in life.

And this is really the ultimate purpose of James' book. He writes with the goal to prepare these people to grow in maturity, to grow in Christlikeness, to prepare them for the day when they will stand before God.

[22 : 18] And this is God's goal for you, that you're ready for that day. And so we cooperate with the Holy Spirit as he rewires our minds to see and to think differently.

Sin wires the mind to set goals that are contrary to the ones that God has for us. If your greatest pursuit in life is to be successful in the eyes of the world to have the perfect job, the perfect family, the perfect house, then when trials hit your work, your family, or your goals for success, you'll be devastated because you've wrapped your identity so much in those things.

need to know God. But if your greatest goal is to know God and to be conformed ever more into his likeness, then you know joy in trials because you will understand that no matter how tough the trial may be, they are being used by God to move you towards that great goal.

God has ordained and designed trials for your growth in godliness. The person who has the mind of Christ understands the purpose of trials and experiences joy in them because they know God will use it for an ultimate good.

See an example of this in many cases in scripture, but I think of Joseph. In Genesis chapter 37, you know, Joseph, you read at the beginning of Joseph's life, Joseph was pretty obnoxious.

[24 : 07] Let's just be honest. He's his father's favorite son and his brothers know it. And Joseph is kind of a tattletale. Then he parades around before his brothers in his coat of many colors and he tells them of this dream that he's had where they're all going to bow down and serve him.

And so we meet Joseph and he's kind of like this, look at me, look at me in my beautiful coat. I'm daddy's favorite boy. You're all going to be my servants one day. And if you had a sibling like that, it'd probably be pretty obnoxious, wouldn't it?

Though hopefully he wouldn't do what Joseph's brothers did to Joseph, which was that they sold him into slavery and then told their father that he was killed by wild animals.

But he eventually, Joseph goes from a falsely accused criminal in prison to the right-hand man of Pharaoh, the most powerful man in the nation.

And when his brothers come to him for assistance during a time of famine, they don't recognize that the man that they are begging for is their brother whom they treated so horribly.

[25 : 18] Then after testing his brothers to see if they had changed, Joseph reveals himself to them. And instead of seeking revenge on them, he forgives them.

And he makes a statement to them that reveals a perspective that God had given to him over the years through his many, many hard and difficult trials.

In Genesis 50-20, he says, As for you, addressing his brothers, all the things, all the trials that they did, all the selling him and what started all of the difficult things that Joseph went through.

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are today.

See, Joseph's statement reveals a mature understanding of God's sovereignty over the affairs of men. It was an understanding he acquired through trusting in God during his various trials when all he had was his faith to rely upon.

[26 : 23] In trials, we experience growth and godliness like we could never experience in any other way. This is not encouraging to you if your goal is to have a nice, easy, carefree life.

Your best life now. If that's your goal, then trials will never be a joy to you. And you'll always disobey God when it comes to this command. But when you set your sights above the things of this world, and you fix your eyes on Jesus, and the knowledge of him, and make it your goal to be mature in him, then trials will be a joy to you because they will teach you to know him and to love him and to trust him more.

So here are several things to keep in mind to help you welcome trials with an understanding mind. The Bible mentions at least eight reasons for the Lord's allowing trials to come into the lives of his people.

First, to test the strength of your faith. trials are the Lord's way for you to take a spiritual inventory of the strength of your faith in him.

A person who becomes resentful, bitter, and self-pitying when troubles come is exposed for having a weak faith. On the other hand, a person who turns more and more to the Lord as their troubles, as their trials intensify, and seeks God's help, and seeks God's presence to carry that burden, that

person demonstrates a strong faith.

[28 : 17] They are a person who has learned to rejoice in trials, as Peter speaks about in 1 Peter 1, 6-7. Again, talking to people who have been persecuted. in this you rejoiced, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Second, trials are given to humble us. If we are tempted to trust more in ourselves, if we are tempted to take credit for the blessings that we have received in life, trials are used by God to strip us of that pride and to trust more in him and his grace instead.

Second Corinthians 12, 7 says, Paul talking about this thorn that he experienced in his flesh, so to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me to keep me from becoming conceited, that he would learn that God's grace is sufficient and all he needs.

Third, trials wean our dependence off of worldly things. Trials reveal idols. They reveal the things that we are tempted to rely upon other than God.

And God uses trials to reveal the inability of those idols to give what only he can to us. In Psalm 115, the psalmist describes how idols transform those who worship them into their image.

[30 : 05] And idols are deaf and they're dumb and they're mute. And so he pleads with God to resist this. In Psalm 115, 8 through 9, those who make them, speaking of idols, become like them.

So do all who trust in them. Oh, Israel, trust in the Lord. He is their help and their shield. Fourth, trials draw us nearer to God.

The harder and the longer the trial, the more we look forward to being with the Lord in our heavenly home, don't we? 2 Corinthians 4, 16 through 17 says, So we do not lose heart.

Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

Fifth, trials expose what we truly love. Remember, Abraham takes Isaac, the son of the promise up to the mountain, and he is prepared to sacrifice his son because he had faith that God would keep his promise, even if that meant raising his son back to life.

[31 : 22] And in that moment, it was revealed that his supreme love was for the Lord through that very difficult trial. Sixth, trials are given to teach us to truly value God's blessings.

The sin nature wires us to place improper evaluations on things. We tend to treasure cheap things of this world and place a lesser valuation on the things that truly matter in this life.

We invest more of our time in the things that are passing away and less time on our own spiritual growth and maturity. Philippians 3, 13-14 says, brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Seventh, the Lord uses trials to strengthen our faith, to teach us to endure. God's promise is that whatever trial he gives to you, he will use it to strengthen your faith and he will cause you to endure it.

He'll never give you more than you can handle. 1 Corinthians 10-13. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape that you may be able to endure it.

[33 : 13] And then finally, the Lord uses trials to enable you to better help others when they are going through a trial. 2 Corinthians 1-3-4.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

And so here's the thing. If you understand this with the mind of Christ, and you see at least those eight reasons why God used trials trials and how they are beneficial to us, you can see how trials are very productive.

It is essential for us then to respond to those trials rightly, welcoming them with a joyful attitude and with an understanding mind.

And I'm not going to sit here and act like this is easy, because it's hard. And it's often through trials that we learn these lessons, and I know many of you have gone through some very hard trials and

are going through hard trials right now.

[34 : 36] As I was preparing this sermon, I had a flashback to college, and our baseball coach required us to go to the weight room three times a week during the middle of the day.

And our strength and conditioning coach, his name was Coach Cross. Coach Cross was in his 80s. He was very grouchy.

And he had a hatred may be too strong of a word, but he just kept an eye out on freshmen. He was always looking at the freshmen and just watching over the freshmen.

What we were doing. If you didn't do things his way, if he thought you were taking it easy and not giving 100% on whatever exercise lift we were supposed to be doing, he would make an example of you, and he would do so before the entire weight room, which was embarrassing, especially when the female athletes were in the room as well.

One time, he noticed that I was doing something wrong with my hand clean. And he stopped everybody, he yelled at me, he said, drop and give me 100 push-ups, and then he pointed to my partner and he said, and you do 100 push-ups too, because you didn't correct him.

[36 : 02] You should have known what he was doing wrong. That was the kind of man that he was. He was tough. And he did not take any kind of pushback or criticism.

And so, when you would go into the weight room, there would be a whiteboard in the back. And on the whiteboard would be all of the lifts, all of the exercises that Coach Cross had for you to do.

You've got to understand, this was probably late in the morning, right before lunch, I'm hungry, I've already gone to one class, I've got to do all of this stuff, then I've got to go eat, and then I've got another class, and we have practice later today.

So I would look at that whiteboard every day, just hoping that it would be small, and it never was.

The lift was always long. And I would think in my mind, this old man is crazy.

He's trying to kill us. He needs to retire. Freshman year, sophomore year, to my junior year, I began to notice that the more I did Coach Cross's routine, the more I experienced the results physically.

[37 : 17] I was stronger, I was faster, I had more stamina than I ever had before in my life. And I realized it was through Coach Cross's trials that these things came, and they wouldn't have come otherwise.

exercise. And you know, by the time my senior year, me and Coach Cross became pretty friendly. I got in, I did my work, it wasn't like I saw the exercise board and I'm like, oh yes, I can't wait to do that today.

That's not the kind of joy we're talking about here, but it was the joy in knowing I'll do that because I know what it will produce within me. It'll make me a better athlete. It'll make me a better teammate.

And so I did it with joy, a different kind, a joyful attitude. In fact, I remember one time, I think one of the greatest compliments I ever got, Coach Cross, our baseball coach, came in, he didn't come in all the time, and he said, you know, this guy's really come a long way.

It's like, oh, you know, I'll never forget that because that guy did not give compliments. But without his discipline, without those trials, I wouldn't have been able to experience those results.

[38 : 34] And so when it comes to trials, you have to understand that God is using them for your good. Your faith will increase. Your knowledge of him will grow. Your relationship with him will be deeper and stronger.

You'll have the right perspective on life. Your goals will be prioritized correctly. God uses them to make you more like Christ.

And because of that, you can go through your trials with joy. So the main point of application is this. Think about your trials with the mind of Christ.

And one way I think that is helpful to put yourself into that mind frame, right? It's yours. You have it. Holy Spirit is living inside of you. But to ask this question when you're going through a trial, Lord, what are you teaching me through this?

And if you put yourself in that frame of mind, you're going to go through that trial, learning what God has for you in it. And in that, there is joy.

[39 : 45] There is joy. Three questions of application. Question number one. What qualifies as a trial? What qualifies as a trial?

How have you persevered through such times in your life? Or how has God caused you to persevere through such times in your life?

Question number two. How should the need to persevere in faith affect how we counsel those undergoing a trial? How can we be used of the Lord to be an encouragement to others who are going through trials?

And then finally, why is an understanding of God's sovereignty crucial to persevering faith? And I encourage you to go and read Hebrews 11 as you think about and as you answer that question. Let's pray. Lord, this is a hard command. God, we acknowledge that so often when a trial comes our way, the first thought we have is not thinking about how you're going to use this for our good, but wishing that it hadn't come at all.

[41 : 10] And wishing that the trial would be short. And hoping that it will be. And God, oftentimes when trials come, we end up feeling angry and depressed and sad.

And we don't count it all joy. But God, you have promised us that trials will come. And you have promised us that we can encounter and go through a trial with joy because you have given us your spirit, you have given us your word, you have given us salvation in your son.

and you have told us that you will use it for a greater good that maybe we don't realize in the trial. So God, I pray for all of us.

I pray that we would endure our trials with the mind of Christ. God, I pray that when we, and if that's the case today, when we go through or if we're in a trial, Lord, that your spirit would speak to us, reminding us of your word, and that we would think with the mind of Christ.

God, that we would have a different attitude towards the trial that we're going through, knowing that you are using it to make us more like Jesus. And God, may that be our greatest goal in this life, to pursue Christ's likeness, to pursue his kingdom and his righteousness, to be his bond slave, and to live our lives in pursuit of him.

[42 : 41] And if so, Lord, we know that trials will be experiences that we go through with a joyful attitude and an understanding mind.

And we pray for your help. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.