

## The Need For Trials

### James 1:2-4

One day Charlie Brown and Linus were having a conversation. Charlie Brown sighed, "Just when you think everything is perfect, life deals you a blow." Linus replied, "I know what you mean...maybe we should all wear batting helmets!"

It would be a reasonable assumption that we have all felt like that on more than one occasion in life, especially in this past year. Each of us could share numerous times we have felt the sting of blows that have knocked us around in life. So how very important it is to have a passage like **James 1:2-4** that tells us trials are a normal, even expected part of our Christian faith, the reason those trials buffet us, and how we should respond to them. Let me remind you that the overarching theme of James is practical Christian living and right out of the gate, James challenges us to consider the reason behind the tests we encounter. We may not think it in the moment we are going through a trial, but this passage tells us that we need trials. We see in **verse 2** our need to ponder trials.

#### I. OUR NEED TO PONDER TRIALS – v. 2

**“Consider it pure joy, my brothers...”**  
**“Count it all joy, my brothers...”**

Admittedly, I don't like trials. I want to get through them as quickly as possible. As a matter of fact, I would say that I don't want them at all.

Growing up, and you may remember this as well yourself, but growing up when my baby teeth started to get loose, I was told by my parents to wiggle the loose tooth so it would come out. I didn't want to wiggle my tooth because it hurt. The thing was still attached to the nerve.

The very first word in the verse tells us to consider our attitude in trials.

#### A. Consider Our Attitude

The Greek word used here for **“consider”** or **“count”**, depending on your translation, primarily

means to lead the way and suggests to lead before the mind.

It's used in **Philippians 2:3** to consider others out of humility.

In **Philippians 3:7-8**, Paul considered anything that at one time he thought was of profit or benefit to him was now a loss for the sake of Christ and that everything was considered a loss when compared to knowing Christ.

Paul used the same word in **I Timothy 1:12** noting how Christ considered him faithful.

The meaning of James in using this particular word is that when trials come along in our life we are to closely or carefully look at them, examine them, understand them, mull them over in our mind, to ponder them in such a way that we learn from them and find joy in them. It's a word that implies learning value in what we are considering.

Football coaches will spend hours reviewing last week's game, sometimes frame by frame to consider how a certain play could be improved, looking for clues as to why a play didn't work. He'll watch games from his opponents to consider what plays he will plot out for certain situations.

In the same way, James is exhorting us to take time during trials to examine them in a way that will benefit us in our faith, as we will see in a moment to have joy in the trial.

Most of us are just grateful to get through them. I would even suggest that we would just as soon avoid them or when they do come along and we get past them we want to put as much distance as possible between us and a recent trial. “Good riddance to bad rubbish” as the saying goes.

Instead of telling us to forget about it and move on as quickly as possible, James says we are to consider it **“pure joy”**. The same word for joy in this verse is used in **verse 1** where it's translated **“greetings”**, which we discovered was more than just a general hello, but rather has the meaning of rejoicing. It's translated joy in **verse 2** giving the idea of delighting in something. James is telling us that our attitude in trials is to be one of delighting in

trials rather than how we normally respond in despair. Think about the last trial you encountered and consider your attitude.

But notice the kind of joy we are to have in our trials. It's to be with **"pure joy"**. Literally it means all joy. That word was used to describe something that was unmixed or undiluted. It isn't just to be some joy, it is to be all joy, unmixed joy, full joy and you need to know that this isn't a suggestion James is making. It's in the imperative, it's a command. It's a command because joy is not our natural response to trials. I am an Eeyore at heart. In my natural, sinful state my glass is half empty. But James is saying that in the middle of trials I am to have unmixed, full joy. How we face trials has everything to do with the attitude of the heart. **Am I going to face my trial in my human nature or in my spiritual nature? Am I going to let God's Spirit produce in me joy, because He's the only one who can? Galatians 5:22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace..."**

**Do you realize that the result of God's peace in your heart you will have joy?**

**Do you realize that the result of God's peace and joy in your heart eliminates anxiety and worry that otherwise are present in trials?**

**Philippians 4:6-7**

Warren Wiersbe says that **"Outlook determines outcome and attitude determines action."**

Consider for a moment what happened to Job in **chapters 1 and 2**. Everything except his wife and his life were stripped from him.

**Job 2:7-10**

Now consider what he said in **1:21 "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."** That is the demonstration of pure joy. That is the difference between victory and defeat when it comes to the trials that we face. He already had his mind made up to be joyful in trials.

Warren Wiersbe suggests that if we want to end with joy after the trial, we must begin with joy in the trial.

**Ponder this from John Phillips: "the way we respond to testing tells us a great deal about our spiritual condition."**

**"Pure joy"** isn't our response in some trials or only to certain trials, but in all trials regardless of what they are.

Someone who knew a lot about joy in trials was the Apostle Paul. Read through his letter to the Philippians and it's filled with joyfulness in the middle of trials. While you're reading it just remember that he was sitting in a prison cell. We might conclude that he had every reason to be bitter and resentful for his imprisonment. Instead, we read an entirely different response. **"Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Philip. 4:4)**

**Acts 5:41 "The apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name."**

We read in **Acts 16:19-31** that Paul and Silas had been beaten and put in stocks, but we read that in the middle of the night they were singing. It was a demonstration of pure joy. Our attitude in the trial determines how we will respond. **Will it be delight or despair?**

We are to express pure joy.

**What is your attitude like when you face trials?**

Take time to consider it and respond with pure joy. And then we also see in **verse 2** the need to consider our adversity.

## **B. Consider Our Adversity**

**"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you face or fall into trials of many kinds."**

Now, I want you to note something of importance here. It's a little word right in the middle of the sentence. It's the word **"when"**. James doesn't use the word "if" because that implies the possibility we may not encounter trials. Instead, he uses the word "when", meaning that we will encounter trials. We may not know when, we may not know where, we may not know how, but we can expect them. On

one hand we can say that the trials are going to be certain. They're going to happen. On the other hand we can say that the trials are uncertain because we don't know the when or the how, just that they will.

Benjamin Franklin once quipped that two things were certain, death and taxes. But from what James writes here we can add a third thing that is certain and that is trials. We are going to face them, so be prepared and be prepared to respond with pure joy.

The word **“face”** literally means fall into. That doesn't suggest that trials are merely an accident of some kind but suggests the idea of encountering them at some time in our life. **John Phillips writes that “trials are not electives in God's school, they are required courses.”**

In **Luke 10:30**, Jesus told a parable using the same word. He described a man leaving Jerusalem who fell into the hands of robbers.

Peter also reminds us of falling into all kinds of trials and our need to respond with joy.

### **I Peter 1:6-8**

James wants to portray that these trials come in all shapes and sizes. That's the idea behind many kinds, they're not all alike and neither are they to the same degree. No two will be alike. They can be disappointments, sickness, or an injury. Other trials can come from persecution for faith. Let me just share some random verses about trials and persecution.

### **Matthew 5:10-12**

### **Romans 8:17-18**

### **Philippians 1:29**

### **I Peter 4:12-16**

### **I Peter 2:20-21**

Right now some of you are going through some trial. It could be around your health, something you are facing at work, something within your family or around a neighbor. Other trials can be from facing financial challenges. All that has transpired this past year around COVID has created new trials: parents adjusting to on line education for their kids who were home all day or themselves working from

home. Shortages of basic needs were a trial for many. It has challenged our attitudes and reactions. When it comes to trials, Solomon was right when he said that there is nothing new under the sun.

Let just interject one thought here before we move on and that is to say that the same word for trial here is going to be used in **verse 13**. Here it refers to external trials, things that are outside us. In **verse 13** the same word is used in a different context referring to temptations that are internal. But more on that in a couple of weeks.

All of that to say from our passage and the others that we read, don't be surprised at the trials you encounter. There will be lots of them and they will be of many different kinds. We have a need to ponder our trials because they help us consider our attitude and consider our adversity.

James gives us another response in our trials. We find it in **verse 3**. There we see our need to persevere through trials.

## **II. OUR NEED TO PERSEVERE THROUGH TRIALS – v. 3**

We have in our hymnals the chorus of one of my favorite songs written by Andre' Crouch.

*I've had many tears and sorrows*

*I've had questions for tomorrow*

*There's been times I didn't know right from wrong*

*But in every situation*

*God gave blessed consolation*

*That my trials come to only make me strong.*

*Through it all*

*Through it all*

*I've learned to trust in Jesus*

*I've learned to trust in God*

*Through it all*

*Through it all*

*I've learned to depend upon His Word*

*So I thank God for the mountains*

*And I thank Him for the valleys*

*And I thank Him for the storms He brought me through*

*For if I'd never had a problem*

I'd never know that God could solve them  
 I'd never know what faith in His Word could do  
 That's the reason I say that  
 Through it all  
 Through it all  
 I've learned to trust in Jesus  
 I've learned to trust in God  
 Through it all  
 Through it all  
 I've learned to depend upon His Word

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**“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.”**

This verse tells us that trials grow our faith.

### A. Trials Grow Our Faith

Like an athlete who must go through the trials of physical exercise to develop his muscles, so the Christian must go through trials to develop the spiritual muscles of his faith. *At the gym, my friend Jimi uses 100 lbs. of weights when seated at the universal. He didn't start there, but over time has built up the muscle to pull the weight. I would be nowhere near that.*

When God sends us trials of various kinds to grow our faith, He doesn't plunge us right into the most difficult thing imaginable, He starts off with some smaller ones.

The first test Abraham was given wasn't to sacrifice Isaac on the mountain, there were other things along the way to grow his faith.

The trials that David went through in his youth helped grow him in faith to face the trials as king.

James says that we know trials grow our faith. We know it not because we have read about it in a textbook, we know it out of experience. You can read in a book that fire is hot, but when you reach out and touch it you now know by experience that the fire is hot.

That's what James is saying. It's one thing to read

about all the Old Testament saints who went through trials and the spiritual growth that resulted, but when we experience trials ourselves that's a whole other level of understanding as we see experientially that they do in fact grow our faith.

James also wants us to understand that the trials we encounter prove or test our faith. The word “test” is a term used by assayers who determine the value of gold. They call it the acid test. It was a method of testing gold giving an incontestable result.

Developed in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the test relied on nitric acid's ability to dissolve other metals more readily than gold. In this way they could determine if what a gold digger found was actually gold.

Jewelers sometimes test a diamond's genuineness by putting it in clear water. The real diamond will sparkle with a special brilliance while a fake diamond will have little sparkle. Now, ladies, don't run home and see if your diamond is genuine.

Trials are the acid test of faith, to grow it and to determine that faith is genuine. Jesus gave an illustration of a true shepherd vs. a hireling. The true shepherd would face the many trials of shepherding sheep while the hireling would run away at the first sign of trouble. Genuine faith will stand strong in the face of trials.

We need trials to grow our faith. Consider that your trials are a way of demonstrating to others real faith while at the same time being used to develop a stronger faith in you. So don't begrudge them or wish they hadn't shown up. Consider them as essential to your spiritual growth.

### **Romans 8:28**

Trials not only grow our faith, they give us forbearance.

### B. Trials Give Us Forbearance

Patience, perseverance, endurance, or steadfastness, they all carry the same idea of sticking it out, hanging in there, not letting it defeat you or deter you. As one author noted that the result of testing is **“steadfastness, a life of faithful endurance amid troubles and afflictions.”**

The word also means that there is going to be some effort on your part in the trial to keep going, to continue in spite of the difficulty being encountered. **Why do you persist in the trial?** Because you know that it will grow your faith.

If an athlete doesn't persist in his training, he'll never reach his goal, he'll never develop his skill.

In their commentary, Walvoord and Zuck note that "There is no gain in endurance without some investment in trials."

When I trained for the 1999 Detroit Marathon, I embarked on an 18-week training regimen to prepare for that race. It assumed that I already had a base level of training, and each week the schedule grew more difficult with longer runs at faster speeds, until the week of the race. I trained in the rain and heat and wind. I trained on different terrain. I ran in shorter race conditions. Each session helped to increase my endurance.

Perseverance then is a permanent inner quality of strength which increases each time a trial is patiently and trustingly endured. But this kind of perseverance also knows that it can't endure in its own power, but must rely on the indwelling Holy Spirit to help us through the trial. We can't just grit our teeth and push forward in our own strength, we must depend on the power of the Holy Spirit to help us through it. We can persevere knowing God is with us.

**Psalm 23:4**

**II Corinthians 12:9-10**

**Philippians 4:13**

We have a need to persevere during our trials, whatever form they take, because they help grow our faith as we grow in our endurance through them. The final thing we note from **verse 4** is our need for perfection from trials.

### **III. OUR NEED FOR PERFECTION FROM TRIALS – v. 4**

**"Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete (whole), not lacking anything."**

Here we see first that trials help examine growing faith.

#### **A. Trials Help Examine Growing Faith**

The end result of trials from God's perspective is mature faith. The word carries the idea of being perfect, finished or complete.

J. Vernon McGee adds that "Trials are meaningless, suffering is senseless, and testing is irrational unless there is some good purpose for them."

Again, from **Romans 8:28** **"and we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."**

We may not understand it, we might not like it, but we must rest confidently in the wisdom of God who is using this trial to bring us into the likeness of His character and therefore in His sovereign will He has allowed it. He has a purpose for it. If clay had feelings, it would wonder why the potter continually kneads it and folds it and spins it, sometimes even stopping to pull out a little pebble. Eventually after a long arduous process the piece is ready.

If we really want to grow in our faith, we will take the time to examine our life and what God is trying to teach us in the process of the testing.

Two people can look at the same storm and have an entirely different outlook. One sees the gloom of spoiled plans for the day while the other looks beyond the storm seeing the beauty of blooming flowers and a fragrance that freshens the air. One will grow by trials, the other will groan from them.

Let me share with you and excerpt from Streams in the Desert that paints a picture for us. "Perhaps you are undergoing some trial as God's child, and you are saying to Him, 'O God, it is raining very hard on me tonight, and this test seems beyond my power to endure. Disappointments are pouring in, washing away and utterly defeating my chosen plans. My trembling heart is grieved and is cowering at the intensity of my suffering. Surely the rains of affliction are beating down upon my soul.' Dear

friend, you are completely mistaken. God is not raining rain on you – He is raining blessings. If you will only believe your Father’s Word, you will realize that springing up beneath the pounding rain are spiritual flowers. And they are more beautiful and fragrant than those that ever grew before in your stormless and suffering-free life.”

**What do you see from this picture of a storm? Do you see only the storm, or do you see the beauty that comes because of the storm?**

**How will you choose to see your trials?**

According to our passage, the storms of life that we encounter help us reach an intended end, something God has used to perfect us as we examine its value and grow our faith from it. This verse then tells us that trials help encourage godly living.

## **B. Trials Help Encourage Godly Living**

John Newton, author of the hymn “Amazing Grace” wrote another hymn that should encourage us when facing trials.

Though troubles assail us  
And dangers affright,  
Though all friends should fail us  
And foes all unite,  
Yet one thing secures us,  
Whatever betide,  
The promise assures us,  
“The Lord will provide.”

In the trials we face, God is developing His character in us through His empowering and enabling and indwelling Holy Spirit. By letting perseverance have its perfect work in us suggests a cooperative effort between us and God that allows Him to do in us what He desires in order to bring the intended purpose of His character that will then be evident because we have allowed the trial to reach its intended end.

Perhaps this morning **Psalm 40:1-2** might be of encouragement to you for what you are facing.

**Psalm 40:1-2 “I waited patiently for the Lord; He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; He**

**set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.”**

The baker must wait patiently for the dough to rise and then wait for the time in the oven before the bread is ready.

The farmer must wait patiently for the planted seed to take root and spring forth in an abundant harvest. We must wait patiently through the trial to allow its full affect to mature us in our faith as we grow in God’s character. If we ask God to remove the trial, it will not complete its intended purpose.

**II Thessalonians 1:3-4 “We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefor, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.”**

There are a number of benefits that result from our trials from strengthening our faith, to humbling us, to weaning us from the pull of the world, to helping us be an encouragement to others during the trials they face. Our passage is clear that our response to trials should be unfiltered joy and perseverance because those trials help mature our faith when we let them complete their intended purpose in us.

It’s natural and human to resist the trial, even resent the trial. It’s natural to rejoice when the trial is over, but James is suggesting that we respond with joy while in the very middle of the trial, while it’s going on, while the heat and pressure of the trial is weighing in on us.

Charlie Brown was right. “**Just when you think everything is perfect, life deals you a blow.**” But I’m not so sure we need a batting helmet as Linus suggests. I think that what we need is the knowledge that God is using the trial to make us more like Him in character. We are all well aware that trials are going to happen. **How will we respond, and will we let it grow our faith and our character?**

Whether we like it or not, we need trials.