



## EXPLORE THE BIBLE.

Acts 1 – 12 Sermon Series  
Supports Session 13: Praying  
Sermon Title: “Understanding Trials” (James 1:2-4)

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### Connection to Session 13

Being a Christian does not isolate someone from experiencing significant trials. We learned this to be the case for Peter throughout our group study of Acts 1–12. Given the fact that Peter experienced trials during his lifetime, today’s Christians can be assured that we too will experience trials.

### Introduction/Opening

If we were to reflect upon the times in which we grew the most in our faith, many of us would have to acknowledge that it was during a time of trial and struggle. After we have weathered the trial, often we can see how God walked with us each step of the way. While we would never wish our trial upon someone else, we would also not give up the growth in our faith that we experienced. We will learn in today’s sermon how we are to respond to trials.

### Outline

#### I. Trials are inevitable (v. 2)

- a. **I am to count my trials as great joy.** The only command in the verses we are looking at today is found here. The Bible commands us to consider it great joy when we encounter trials. The command is given not because trials are fun, but rather because we learn that God is faithful to His promise to never leave us nor forsake us. When we are walking through a trial, we learn more about the presence and grace of God as we increasingly learn to depend upon Him.

It is also important for us to understand the difference between joy and happiness. Joy is not dependent upon one’s circumstances. We may be facing a trial of a recent passing of a loved one and still have joy because we know our loved one is with Jesus. Yes, we are sad to know they are not with us. But we still have joy because we know they are with Jesus.

- b. **I will experience trials.** James was clear in His message to the church. He said “when” as opposed to “if” we experience trials: “whenever you experience various trials” (v. 2). God is gracious in that He tells us we will experience trials. Since we know that trials are coming, we can prepare our hearts for the inevitable.

Also, since we know we will experience trials, we are less apt to be disappointed or surprised when we find ourselves in one.

## II. The purposes for my trials (v. 3)

- a. **Trials are a test.** How did our teachers know if we understood a subject matter? Many times, the teacher would give us a test. The test was not to serve as a “gotcha” approach to teaching. Instead, the test was used to see if we were ready for the next related subject matter. When we passed the test, the teacher knew it was time to move on to the next subject matter being studied.

God is not using trials to determine our understanding of basic math or chemistry. But the Bible does tell us that He uses trials to test our faith. We can learn two interesting facts about the word “test.” First, it is important to know that the word James used here is “testing” (v. 3). This is a verb, which is an action word, and it is written to show multiple actions. Therefore, we can expect our faith to be tested multiple times via trials. Second, if we look at the Greek, we come to understand that the word “test” means to prove authenticity. Therefore, God wants to prove the authenticity of our faith repeatedly through trials. When this occurs, those around us can see Jesus in us as we travel the path in front of us.

- b. **Trials produce endurance.** What makes a coach great? A great coach can see something in a person that others cannot. A great coach can motivate athletes to do things they did not think possible. A great coach inspires his players to work hard now so they can accomplish greater things in the future.

How should we understand the word “endurance.” It is helpful for us to look at the original language once again. The word “endurance” means to stand up under significant pressure or strain. When we think that we cannot endure another agonizing step during our trials, God is able to see something in us that we cannot see. He walks with us throughout the trial, and we can endure through His strength and not our own.

## III. Trials mature me (v. 4). If we have ever been around children, we enjoy watching them learn to walk. The process begins with the child pulling up on things and then standing on their own. As they learn to stand, they appreciate helping hands as they put one foot in front of the other. In time, however, the goal is to remove the hands so they learn to take steps on their own. During this process, we know that they are maturing a little more with each additional step.

We celebrate children maturing in walking, and God celebrates us maturing in our faith. As a child learns to walk, we all know that bumps will happen along the way. Similarly, God knows that we will have bumps as we learn to walk by faith and not

by sight. But, just like a loving parent is there for the child learning to walk, God is there as we learn to navigate the trials in this life.

### **Conclusion**

We would all agree that trials are inevitable, and they are not fun. But we can also see the hand of God upon us throughout the trial. God commands us to consider it great joy when we encounter trials. We may not understand why we are going through the trials, but we can celebrate the fact that God is walking with us and growing our faith as we learn to endure.

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