

**December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2006**  
**“The Purpose of Trials”**

Reverend Darryl R. Curtis

**James 1:2-4**

**2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,**

**3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.**

**4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.**

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

**James 1:2-3** tells us:

**2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,**

**3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.**

This Scripture that links joy and trials is a curious one. Generally speaking, we think of avoidance rather than joyful anticipation when the topic of trials comes up. A good example exists in **Matthew 16:21**, in which Jesus predicts His suffering at the hands of the Jews and Romans, followed by His death on the Cross. The Bible says:

**21 From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.**

Did you happen to listen to Jesus' prophecy to His disciples that I just read? He told them that He would suffer at the hands of the Jewish leadership and be killed, which is certainly a trial, but Jesus also prophesied that He had a requirement to endure His trial with patience, and that His trial would culminate in triumph, that being, His resurrection from the dead on the third day after His death. Even though Jesus prophesied a triumphant resurrection as the end for His trial, Peter found it necessary to rebuke Jesus for making the prophecy in the next verse. **Matthew 16:22** tells us:

**22 Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!”**

Why did Peter rebuke Jesus? The answer is given in Luke's account of Jesus' prophecy, which ends with Luke explaining, in **Luke 18:34**:

**34 But they [the disciples] understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken.**

Peter and the other disciples understood neither the physical nor the spiritual significance of Jesus' death, burial and, most importantly, resurrection, so rather agreeing with Jesus, Peter

maintained the human perspective. The human perspective is generally to try to avoid trials at all costs, especially those that may end in great bodily harm or death to ourselves or our loved ones.

James' pronouncement in **James 1:2-3** that we should embrace trials is, from a human standpoint, counterintuitive, even to those of us who know the history of Christianity and understand the commitment that Christianity requires.

Any of us who have accomplished an objective know that the enduring of trials is usually part of the successful completion of a task. I remember, however, listening just very recently to a conversation after one of our services in which members of the congregation were discussing the budgetary problems of one of the departments of state government, and the possibility that some people may have to endure trials in associate with that budget shortfall. Although James tells us to count trials as joy, no one involved in the conversation seemed to be rejoicing over the prospect of this particular trial. By the same token, I was not particularly rejoicing either.

Peter was not able to get with the program of counting trials as joy. The Bible tells us of Peter's continued negative reaction to this particular trial on the night that Jesus was arrested.

**Mark 14:27-31** says:

**27 Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered.'**

**28 "But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."**

**29 Peter said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be."**

**30 Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times."**

**31 But he spoke more vehemently, "If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And they all said likewise.**

Jesus is warning Peter and the other disciples that they are going to fail the test when the test actually comes. They are all going to stumble. And, just as Jesus said, when the trial actually came, neither Peter nor any of the disciples were up to the test. The following passages of Scripture from Matthew and Luke tell the story: **Matthew 26:56b-58, 69-74, Luke 22:61-62**

**56b Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled.**

**57 And those who had laid hold of Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.**

**58 But Peter followed Him at a distance to the high priest's courtyard. And he went in and sat with the servants to see the end.**

**69 Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came to him, saying, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee."**

**70 But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you are saying."**

**71 And when he had gone out to the gateway, another girl saw him and said to those who were there, "This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth."**

**72 But again he denied with an oath, "I do not know the Man!"**

**73 And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, "Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you."**

**74 Then he began to curse and swear, saying, "I do not know the Man!" Immediately a rooster crowed.**

**61 And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the**

Lord, how He had said to him, **“Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.”**  
**62 So Peter went out and wept bitterly.**

Peter and the disciples promised to go with Jesus to the end, ostensibly to protect Jesus. Peter, however, was deterred from action by two servant girls, neither of whom had any military or prosecutorial authority, and a few people that happened to be standing by, who also were not directly involved with the prosecution of Jesus. When the crowd challenged Peter because his accent was Galilean, Peter became aggressive to the point of profanity, not in his protection of Jesus, but in his denials of being with Jesus. Then Jesus turned and looked at Peter.

Jesus’ trial was to go to the Cross.

Peter’s trial was simply to watch.

Jesus was able to endure His trial, His crucifixion, with a positive demeanor, while Peter began cursing when challenged about why he was watching, about his affiliation with Jesus. As has already been mentioned, the disciples, including Peter, did not understand the import of Jesus’ prophecies, and the idea of resurrection from the dead on the third day was just a little bit past them.

What is the point of these trials? Paul expands on James’ declaration that trials produces patience in **Romans 5:3-5**, which reads:

**3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;**

**4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope.**

**5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.**

James and Paul combine to tell us that trials produce patience, perseverance, character and hope. The major benefit of enduring trials, from the standpoint of the Bible, is to help us develop patience, perseverance and character to recognize that neither the Plan of God, the situation in the world, nor our own personal destiny revolve around our desires of the moment.

Regardless of what you have in mind to do right now, God is teaching us through these Scriptures that He has another agenda. God is teaching us through these Scriptures to not be in a self-centered hurry to obtain our objectives and to not be impatient with life.

God wants us to realize that maturity is the function of a process which we must endure patiently, and He is teaching us that as prepared as we may feel that we are by our previous experiences, our experiences are no match for the myriad of circumstances and situations that life can throw at us.

If we patiently endure our circumstances while maintaining our faith in Him, we will eventually be able to triumph over our circumstances, if not in this life, certainly in the next. Paul tells us, in **2Corinthians 4:16-18**:

**16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.**

**17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,**

**18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.**

We have already mentioned the fact that one of the reasons that Jesus was able to endure

His trial with equanimity and the apostles were not even able to watch Jesus undergoing the trial with composure was the fact that Jesus had a perspective on the outcome of the trial that the apostles did not. Jesus knew the magnitude of the pain that He was to endure at the hands of the Jews and the Romans, and weighed His suffering against the opportunity that His suffering would produce in the lives of those of us whom He is saving.

Jesus knew that we would have no chance to enter the Kingdom of God if He did not make the choice to suffer, and His love both for us and for His Father in Heaven led Him to make the decision to go to the Cross. And it was a decision, not a given. As the ordeal of the Cross loomed ever closer, Jesus felt the need to ask God for a reprieve. **Matthew 26:36-39** records:

**36 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, “Sit here while I go and pray over there.”**

**37 And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed.**

**38 Then He said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.”**

**39 He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.”**

There is a certain affinity that we have for the flesh that makes it difficult for us to be sanguine about the prospect of being injured, and Jesus was contemplating the prospect of being killed by an extremely hideous, painful process. His assertion, “nevertheless, not as I will” makes it clear that He did not really want to suffer this death, but was volunteering to do it only to fulfill the will of God. God recognized Jesus’ reticence to suffer, as **Luke 22:43-44** tells us:

**43 Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him.**

**44 And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.**

Jesus’ anticipation of His crucifixion caused Him such agony that even He needed strengthening from Heaven to prepare to undergo the process. This Cross situation was actually a serious trial for Jesus, as He was not preparing to face it as God, but as a man.

Can you comprehend that going to the Cross was a wise decision for Jesus? Those of us who have seen the movie *The Passion of the Christ* have somewhat of an idea of the magnitude of the suffering involved in Jesus’ sacrifice, and we may marvel at the ability of someone to come to the personal decision to endure that level of suffering for the sake of another. One of the reasons that those who do not believe the Bible consider it a work of fiction is that they are led by their short term focus on current pleasures to the point that they simply cannot consider the discipline required to give oneself in the way that Jesus did so. As a matter of fact, the overriding characteristic of those who choose not to believe in Jesus and reject the opportunity to join the Christian band is their self-centeredness, which clashes with the prime directive of Christianity to give oneself.

Now, the vast majority of us who have joined the Christian band are self-centered to some degree as well, which is why the Scripture tells us to anticipate the fact that we will have to

undergo trials to develop the patience, maturity and ability to adhere to Christian principles in our interactions with others.

Coming to a saving knowledge of and faith in the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ does not bestow Christian maturity on us any more than being able to heal the sick and raise the dead made Jesus Christ our Savior.

Jesus Christ became our Savior took on the trial of the Cross; when He gave Himself for us, as the writer of the Hebrews tells us in **Hebrews 5:5, 7-9**, which says:

**5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He [God] who said to Him: “You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.”**

**7 who, in the days of His flesh, when He [Christ] had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him [God] who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear,**

**8 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.**

**9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.**

The Scripture tells us that God heard Jesus’ cry to be saved from death, and that rather than allowing Jesus to avoid the suffering of the Cross, God sent an angel to strengthen Jesus, that Jesus might successfully endure the suffering of the Cross, as the Cross was intended to be not just salvation for us, but the lesson of obedience for Jesus that would perfect Him and make Him the perfect arbiter of eternal salvation for us. The writer of Hebrews describes our relationship to Jesus, in **Hebrews 4:14-16**:

**14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.**

**15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.**

**16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

Our prayer period is coming up shortly. We need mercy and grace to help us. There is no question about it. All of us that believe in God are bringing our personal concerns to Him with a request for His help in the name of Jesus. Jesus is our great High Priest, the one that intercedes with God for us, the one who can sanctify our illegitimate sacrifice with His own blood and make it holy.

Listen to that which the Bible says about prayers. **Isaiah 59:1-2** says:

**1 Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear.**

**2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.**

Our prayers can be earnest and heartfelt, yet never avail if there is unconfessed sin in us. We are not heard for our much zeal and fervor and emotion and agony. Praying when we are disobeying God is powerless praying. Let us never forget that right living is a necessary condition for the person who prays. **1John 1:6-9** tells us:

**6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.**

**7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.**

**8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.**

**9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

We need someone worthy to intercede for us when we pray, and Jesus, who eradicated the influence of sin by His sacrifice on the Cross, is that one. By His successful endurance of His trial, we now have access to the grace of God. We are called to emulate His example, avoid walking in darkness by renouncing sin, and walk in His light, and receive the cleansing from unrighteousness that He wants to give us all. God sends us trials so that we can practice following in Jesus' footsteps, and we are called by the Scriptures to rejoice when we see the trial and the potential for personal growth that the trial brings us.

As well as being repentant of our sin, we also need to be aware of the potentially selfish nature of our prayers. **James 4:3** tells us:

**3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.**

We all are naturally selfish. As we grow in grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ and emulate His example, we find ourselves becoming more selfless, because His sacrifice on Calvary was the most selfless act in the history of the world. Jesus instructs us, in **Matthew 7:7** and **Matthews 6:33**:

**7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.**

**33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.**

Are selfish prayers answered? Ought we consider the wishes of God before we pray, and pray the "nevertheless" prayer, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" that Jesus prayed in Gethsemane? Listen to Jesus' interact with a man asking a request of Him in **Luke 12:13-21**:

**13 Then one from the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."**

**14 But He said to him, "Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?"**

**15 And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."**

**16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.**

**17 And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?'**

**18 So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.**

**19 And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." '**

**20 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'**

**21 "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."**

When we pray and as we live, we must, as Jesus said, take heed and beware of covetousness. Having the correct attitude in trying situations is one way to develop this discipline. It is certainly not wrong to pray “take this cup from me”, when faced with trials, because Jesus prayed that very prayer. However, we need to be sensitive to the fact that it may be God’s will that we endure the consequences of drinking the cup in His strength and with His help even as did Jesus, rather than coveting the ease of being relieved of the responsibility of drinking the cup.

There is no question that I pray that things will go well for myself, my wife and my son. I pray for those of you that have children, that their educational pursuits will be successful and their resulting occupational opportunities will be bright. I pray for those whose names come before the altar, who need physical healing or healing of some other kind. I believe that we have the responsibility to intercede for those who have needs, but at the same time, I am becoming more and more aware that the responsibility for the lives of those for whom I pray rests in God’s hands, and that their ease in every situation may not be that which is on God’s agenda for them. I have come to the conclusion from my earnest and honest study of the Scripture that God is not a cosmic genie with the charge to grant us wishes, but that God is our Heavenly Father, and as such disciplines us according to that from which He knows we will benefit. Paul, who received great revelations from God, tells us about His trials with God, in **2Corinthians 12:7**, which says: **7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.**

Some theologians speculate that this thorn was poor vision, as God blinded Paul for three days after He spoke to him on the Damascus Road, and then, in later epistles, Paul talks about the fact that his handwriting is noticeably larger than usual handwriting. Regardless as to what the thorn actually was, we know that Paul wanted the thorn removed from him, because the Scripture tells us, in **2Corinthians 12:8**:

**8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.**

But God spoke to Paul, making it clear that the thorn was not going anywhere.

**2Corinthians 12:9-10** tells us:

**9 And He [Jesus] said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.**

**10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

Paul learned to count his trial as joy, and to boast in those infirmities with which the Lord provided him discipline. Paul prayed three times that the trial be removed, but once he was given the understanding that the trial was to benefit him, he then prayed the “Nevertheless” prayer, “Nevertheless, not my will but Yours, Lord, be done.

Let us be faithful Christians, who study our Bibles, develop a mature Christian mindset, and realize that God allows us to be tested and tried, in order to prove just how ‘Christian’ we really are...

God allows our...

...love and loyalty to be examined, and this He does through problems, persecutions and pressures...

...courage and faith to be tested, and this He does through defeats, despairs, and difficulties...

...confidence and hope to be tried, and this He does through sorrow, sickness, and suffering...

...devotion and integrity to be inspected, and this He does through rivals, ridicule, and reproach...

...wisdom and commitment to be proven, and this He does through conflicts, calamities, and complications...

...character and morals to be analyzed, and this He does through troubles, trials, and temptation...

and that God also allows our...

...maturity and spirituality to be verified, and this He does through adversities, anxieties, and afflictions...

What will we do when the trials come? There may be trials in which it seems that our...

...aspirations turn into ashes...

...desires turn into despairs...

...blessings turn into burdens...

...comforts turn into cares...

...happiness turns into heartaches...

...privileges turn into problems...

and our...

...fancies turn into failures, but let us be mature Christians, keeping our eyes on Jesus, knowing that ALL things work together for good to them that love God...Realizing that adverse circumstances are intended by God to make us, not break us...and not only just 'make' us, but to make us...

...better...not bitter...

...stronger...not weaker...

...wiser...not foolish...

...mature...not childish...

...fruitful...not barren...

...richer...not poorer...

and that they are intended to also 'make' us...

...mellow...not hateful, hard, or harsh...!

Let us come to grips with the fact that...

...diamonds do not sparkle...until they have been cut and polished...

...stars do not shine their brightest...until it is the darkest...

...roses do not release their true fragrance...until they have been bruised, or crushed...

and that...

...the brook would lose its song...if all of the stones were removed...therefore, let realize that God's purpose in allowing adverse circumstances and afflictions to come upon us is...



...to help us...not hurt us...  
...to bless us...not burden us...  
...to develop us...not destroy us...  
...to cleanse us...not corrupt us...  
...to refine us...not ruin us...  
...to mold us...not shatter us...

and they are intended by God...

...to train us...and not just to torment and torture us, therefore let us submit to the will of God...!

Our text, **James 1:2-4**, tells us:

**2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,**

**3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.**

**4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.**

May our objective for the New Year be the development of the maturity to say to God,  
“Not My Will, but Yours, be done.”

Reverend Darryl R. Curtis  
Family Life Baptist Church