**Title of Series: Joy Amid Trials Date of Delivery: 11/10/2024**

**Lesson 2 of 7: Paul’s Chains Advance the Gospel**

**Series principal Bible verse**: Philippians (1:12-30)

**Lesson objective:** *After defining and classifying trials, participants will spend time in self reflection, determining how to positively reframe trials in their life.*

**Special note to teachers:** No tech version (see below), Powerpoint version ([CLICK HERE](https://www.canva.com/design/DAGS_qCyZYE/7bwsb0C3dp12zDV02TSJTA/view?utm_content=DAGS_qCyZYE&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=editor))

**Introduction:** ([Powerpoint with video](https://www.canva.com/design/DAGS_qCyZYE/7bwsb0C3dp12zDV02TSJTA/view?utm_content=DAGS_qCyZYE&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=editor)) Imagine this: you are a crippled individual who happens to be one of the privileged people to be in the inner circle of the Healer, Jesus. You follow him wherever his ministry takes him, but the excessive walking wears greatly on you. As your physical stamina decreases, hope increases believing that one day he will heal you. After all, you’ve traveled far and wide preaching and healing in his name. After Jesus ends the disciple meeting, you catch him just before he leaves and finally ask him: “I’ve seen you heal countless others, but why not me?”   
  
**Main Point 1:** What are trials? Time to define.

1. Have a few people read aloud Philippians 1:12-17, James 1:2-4, John 15:18-19. As they read, challenge the rest of the class to jot down points that help define trials.
2. Briefly compare Christianity viewpoint of suffering to other world religions. The four main religions in the world are Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Each of them has its own perspective on the purpose of trials or suffering in life:
3. \*\*Christianity\*\*:
   1. \*\*Belief on Trials\*\*: Christians generally believe that trials are tests of faith, allowed by God to help believers grow spiritually, strengthen their character, and rely on God's grace. Suffering can be seen as a part of the human condition that brings people closer to God. In the New Testament, James 1:2-4 emphasizes that perseverance through trials leads to maturity and completeness.
   2. \*\*Purpose\*\*: Trials are viewed as a means of refining faith, teaching reliance on God, and preparing believers for eternal life.
4. \*\*Islam\*\*:
   1. \*\*Belief on Trials\*\*: In Islam, trials (fitnah) are considered a test from Allah to assess a person's faith, patience, and character. These tests can come in various forms—through hardships, wealth, health, or relationships. Trials are seen as opportunities to purify the soul and draw closer to Allah by remaining steadfast and faithful.
   2. \*\*Purpose\*\*: The purpose of trials in Islam is to test and strengthen a believer’s faith, cleanse them of sin, and remind them of their dependence on Allah, ultimately leading to greater rewards in the afterlife (Akhirah).
5. \*\*Hinduism\*\*:
   1. \*\*Belief on Trials\*\*: Hinduism teaches that trials in life are part of the karma (cause and effect) from one’s actions, either in this life or previous ones. Suffering and challenges are seen as part of the cycle of samsara (rebirth) and are linked to one's actions (karma) from previous lifetimes. The goal is to endure trials with detachment and see them as a path to spiritual progress.
   2. \*\*Purpose\*\*: Trials are viewed as a way to burn off bad karma, learn important spiritual lessons, and progress toward moksha (liberation from the cycle of rebirth).
6. \*\*Buddhism\*\*:
   1. \*\*Belief on Trials\*\*: In Buddhism, trials and suffering (dukkha) are intrinsic to life. The first of the Four Noble Truths acknowledges that suffering is a fundamental part of existence. Trials are not seen as punishments but as a consequence of desire, attachment, and ignorance. By understanding the causes of suffering, one can follow the Eightfold Path to end it.
   2. \*\*Purpose\*\*: The purpose of trials is to help individuals recognize the impermanence of life, eliminate attachments, and achieve enlightenment (nirvana), freeing themselves from the cycle of suffering.

C. Ask the whole group:

Q: “What common viewpoint of suffering/trials do these religions share?” Or “What makes Christianity unique in its view on suffering?”

A: Each religion views trials as a way to test and refine one's character, bringing them closer to their ultimate spiritual goals, but Christianity is unique in its understanding of grace - suffering is not a means to become worthy of reward, but a refinement to become more Christlike. The other religions see suffering at a some level of transactional sequence in which I am owed or am more worthy of reward, enlightenment, etc. Pointing this unique quality out will alleviate any 'accusations' of placing Christianity on a same plane as false religions. Another "purpose" of suffering is that inasmuch as we are made in the image of God, God suffers so we suffer. Love is most poignantly and clearly revealed through suffering.

**Main Point 2:** How do we know if they’re good or bad? Further examination.

1. Have the class silently read Philippians 1:18-26
2. With the person to their left, have the partners briefly discuss the difference between a “good” or “bad” trial.
3. Next, you will poll the audience with a sorting game. You will read each scenario and ask the audience to give a thumbs up, if they think it’s a good trial, or a thumbs down if they think it’s a bad trial.
   1. You lose your job because you refused to follow the morally questionable procedures, in turn causing great financial stress on your family.
   2. Your spouse catches you in a lie, which leads to great mistrust and strain on the relationship.
   3. You are dealing with a chronic illness that hinders you from going to worship with fellow believers.
   4. You are angry with your dear friend for their regrettable choices and lash out and hurt them with your words.
4. Remind the class that it's difficult, if not impossible, to discern whether suffering is "good" or "bad". It's not really about good or bad, it's more about our response and how we can turn it into good (testimony).

**Main Point 3:** How can you find the joy/good in the bad? Mindset shift.

1. Read Philippians 1:27-30
2. Ask the class to split up into groups of 3-5 people. Each group will be assigned one of the scenarios below. Don’t reveal the Biblical character until after the discussion. One (or two) person(s) will be the voice/defender of the person undergoing trials, and the rest at the table will be interviewing them to find the “good” or “bad” in these trials.
3. A nomadic, innocent man is arrested for peaceful protest, and after facing an unfair trial is given the death penalty. (Jesus)
4. An unemployed, teenage girl has an unplanned pregnancy and is ostracized by the church. (Mary)
5. A passionate, aspiring, Christian author has a degenerative eye disease that hinders his ability to write. (Paul, 2 Cor. 12:7)
6. A successful businessman is ridiculed and rejected by his community for his controversial career. (Matthew)

C. Reveal the Bible character associated with each trial and examine how they turned their TRIAL into their TESTIMONY.

**Call To Action:** Ask the audience to silently think of a recent trial in their life and ask them this question:

1. Based on your earlier discussion, is this a good or bad trial?
2. How can you specifically aim to turn your TRIAL into your TESTIMONY?

Allow them time to think about these questions. If time permits, they can write down their revelations and plans for application.

**Conclusion:** Reread Phil. 1:12 and remind the class that trials are inevitable, and whether they are good or bad, God can use them for your refinement and His glory. Next week, we will be examining how humility can aid us in trials as well.