

HOW TO DEAL WITH YOUR PROBLEMS

James 1:2-6

Good morning! Today we're going to start a new series I'm calling "Real Faith in the Real World". This series is based on the book of James. James has five chapters and so, for the next five Sundays, with the exception of Mother's Day Sunday, we're going to take a look at each chapter. Now, each chapter packs a lot of teaching in it and 30 minutes wouldn't do justice for each chapter and so we're just going to highlight something from each chapter that has great significance for our lives today.

Now, the book of James is generally believed to have been written by the half-brother of the Lord Jesus. He was not a follower of the Lord initially as John 7:5 tells us, "Even his brothers did not believe him". What changed his mind and heart? Most likely it was the resurrection of Jesus. The apostle Paul says in 1 Cor. 15:7, "Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles." The apostle Paul also considered James as a "pillar" of the early church together with Peter and John. In fact, James seemed to be the leader of the Jerusalem church.

Most likely, James wrote this letter to the early Christians in 40 AD, or about 15 years or so after the Lord Jesus went to heaven. His primary audience was the diaspora, a term applied to the Christian Jews who were dispersed into the various parts of the Roman Empire due to persecution and other reasons. His aim was to help them build their faith but, most importantly, how to exercise that faith in the midst of trials and difficulties and other issues they were facing since these Jews were living among gentiles.

So, James is the most practical book in the New Testament. It is the "How To" manual for the Christian life.

Today I'd like to share with you a message on "How to Deal with Your Problems". I thought I'd kick off this series by tackling something that's common to all of us. Problems. Who doesn't have any problems? You see, we're living in a real world where there are real problems. And it takes real faith to deal with your problems. How does it look like? Let's take a look at James 1:2-6.

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind."

Ok. Now, when someone writes a letter you normally figure that the guy is going to warm up and ease into his subject. Especially if it's a Christian letter. He's going to have a few preliminaries, opening remarks, giving thanks and praises to God, then move into his subject. Just like Paul in his letters. But James drops a bomb in verse 2. After introducing himself, in verse 2 he says, "*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds...*"

How would you like to get a letter like that? "This is a letter from me... You got problems? Be happy!" How? There's no way I could be happy. You don't know my situation. The key is the phrase "*because you know*" in verse 3.

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

Your attitude is determined by your understanding. Rejoicing is not just positive thinking but based on some facts of life.

Let me give you **these four facts of life you need to know** from James that will help you with the problem you're going through right now:

1. Problems are inevitable

Scripture doesn't say, "*If you encounter problems consider it joy*" but whenever -- count on it, you're going to have problems. If you don't have problems, check your pulse. It is a fact of life. Jesus says, "***In this world you will have trouble.***" (John 16:33) And Peter says, "***Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you.***" (1 Peter 4:12) Count on it. Problems are not an elective in life. They are a required course. You don't get out of them by saying you don't want to have any problems. Nobody's immune.

There was this guy who was shopping for a sofa and the salesman told him, "This sofa will seat five people without any problems." And the guy exclaimed, "Where in the world am I going to find five people without any problems?"

Problems are inevitable. Another fact about life is that

2. Problems are unpredictable.

He says, "*...whenever you face trials ...*" The word "face" in Greek is "peripipto". It literally means "to fall into" like falling into a trap. It is sudden. You don't expect it. It is similar to the word used in the story of the Good Samaritan where the man fell among thieves—it was unexpected.

Problems are not planned. We seldom can anticipate the problems we're going to experience in life. That's probably good because if we could anticipate them we'd run the other way and we wouldn't get the benefit from them. We don't plan to have a flat tire, or a certain sickness. They are unplanned and unpredictable. Oftentimes they come when we least expect them. That's what makes a problem a problem. Often, it's inconvenient when you fall into it suddenly.

Problems are unpredictable, inevitable, and

3. Problems are of many kinds.

They come in all shapes and sizes. One thing about problems, you don't get bored with them. There are a wide variety of them.

Have you ever tried to match paint? The word in the Greek for "many kinds" is literally "multi-colored". There are problems of many shades and varieties. They vary in intensity, they vary in variety, they vary in duration. Some are minor inconveniences. Some are major crises. We have all kinds and shapes of problems. They come in more than 31 flavors. Some problems are custom made and you know it.

There's a sign that says: "Into every life some rain must fall, but this is ridiculous." Can you relate? Lots of varieties of problems in our life.

Problems are unpredictable, inevitable, of many kinds, and

4. Problems are purposeful

They have a purpose. You see, pain can be productive. No pain, no gain. Suffering can accomplish something. It has value in our lives. What value? Three purposes of problems in your life:

a. Problems purify my faith. James uses the word "testing", as in testing gold and silver. You would heat them up very hot until the impurities -- the dross -- was burned off. Job says, "*When he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.*" (Job 23:10)

The first things trials do is test our faith. They purify us. Christians are a lot like tea bags. You don't know what's inside of them until you drop them in hot water. Then you know. Your faith develops when things don't go as planned. Your faith develops when you don't feel like doing what's right. It purifies your faith. Christians are like steel; when they're tested, they come out stronger.

b. Problems fortify our patience. Verse 3 says "*...the testing of your faith produces perseverance.*" He's talking about staying power, not a passive patience, but staying power, endurance. The ability to keep on keeping on, the ability to hang in there. In other words, it is the ability to stay under pressure. We don't like pressure and we do everything we can to avoid it. We run from it, take drugs, drink alcohol, go to Disneyland, anything to get away from pressure. But God uses problems in our lives to teach us how to handle pressure, how to never give up. There was a time in my life I prayed for patience, and the problems got worse. Finally, after a while, I realized I was a lot more patient than when I first started out.

How does God teach you patience? By everything going your way? No. God teaches you patience in traffic jams, in grocery lines, in raising kids.

We live in a comfortable and convenient society. Everybody wants it now. If I can't have it now, forget it. Endurance, today, is a rare quality. Lombardi said, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going."

c. Problems sanctify my character. They make me like Jesus. They help me mature. They help me to grow. Verse 4 says, "*Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*" That's God's long-range goal. His ultimate purpose for you is maturity. God wants you to grow up. He wants you to mature. In the Christian life, character is the bottom line. So many Christians I talk to have absolutely no idea of God's agenda in their life. They don't know what's happening and as a result they are overwhelmed by their problems.

Let me repeat it. God's number one purpose in your life is to make you like Jesus Christ. God is much more interested in building my character than in making me comfortable. If God is going to make me like Jesus, He's going to take

me through the things Jesus went through. There were times when Jesus was lonely, fatigued, tempted to be depressed and discouraged. The Bible says there are two ways that God makes us like Jesus:

First, **through the word of God.** John 17:17 *"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."* And if you look at James 1:22-25, you see there that the word must be applied in our lives to build our character, to mature us. **"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."** (James 1:22) Then, the second way,

Through the circumstances of life. Here's where James hits it right on the head. So many Christians I meet say, "Everything was going great when I first became a believer. Then all of these problems came. Maybe God doesn't love me. Maybe I'm not a Christian. Maybe I'm not really saved. Maybe I've missed the boat." You are exactly where God wants you. You're in a character course. He's making you like Jesus. **Romans 8:28 "And we know that in all things God works for the good [not all things are good but they work together for good] of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."** Now, the secret of Romans 8:28 is 8:29 **"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son."** Why do all things work together for good? In order to make me like Christ.

Galatians 5:22-23 says, "...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." How does God teach us the fruit of the spirit? By putting us in the exact opposite situation. If God wants to teach you love, He puts you around unlovely people. If He wants to teach you joy, He puts you in times of tragedy and sadness so you will learn joy in the situation. Peace? God puts you around chaos. The dinner's burning, the telephone rings, the cat grabs the dog, the kid's diaper is dirty -- that's

where you learn peace. It's easy to be peaceful laying on the beach in Tahiti. Anybody can do that. Patience? Through times of waiting. Ephesians says "*We are his workmanship*" (Eph. 2:10 ESV) -- God wants to make a masterpiece out of you. He wants us to be mature, complete, not lacking anything. That is a picture of Jesus Christ. That's what He wants you to be like.

All these things I mentioned, these are what you need to know. And then there are three things you need to do. So, we come to the practical part of this message.

HOW TO HANDLE YOUR PROBLEMS

What do you do when you have problems? First,

1. Rejoice

"Consider it pure joy... whenever you face trials ..." v. 1. Don't misunderstand what he's saying. He's not saying "Fake it. Put on a plastic smile. Pretend." God never asks you to deny reality. He doesn't mean some kind of psychological pump-up based on nothing. He's also not talking about masochism. "Good! I get to suffer! I just love to suffer! I feel so spiritual when I suffer!" Christians don't have a martyr complex. We don't rejoice for the problem, we rejoice in the problem. We don't thank God for the situation. Why would I thank God for evil? But I thank God in the situation. One of the most misunderstood verses in the Bible is **1 Thessalonians 5:18** "*Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus..*" If you want to know God's will for your life it's simple. "*Give thanks in all circumstances.*" It does not say, "For everything give thanks." Why should I thank God for giving me leukemia? "Thank You for that accident.... Thank You for that war.... Thank You that I just lost my mother." No! What kind of God do you think He is?

It says "*In everything give thanks.*" Why? It means we can thank God because we know that He can even take the bad in our lives and turn it around and bring

good out of it. I don't care where your problems come from. You may have caused them yourself. The devil may have caused them. They may be a problem that society has brought on you. But the source of your problems doesn't really matter. God can use them all for your growth and His glory.

What makes a difference? Your attitude. It says "*Consider it pure joy...*" The word "consider" means a deliberate look at. It means to evaluate, to make up your mind once and for all. While I'm living in the present, I look to the forward benefit of this problem. Consideration is a choice. Although I cannot control the circumstances that happen to me in life, I can control how I will respond to them.

Victor Frankl, the Jewish psychologist who spent time in the Nazi concentration camp in Germany said, "They stripped me naked. They took everything -- my wedding ring, watch. I stood there naked and all of a sudden realized at that moment that although they could take everything away from me -- my wife, my family, my possessions -- they could not take away my freedom to choose how I was going to respond."

You choose to rejoice in the situation. **Psalm 34:1 "I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips."** Even when I don't feel like it, even when things aren't going right. Problems do not automatically produce blessings. For some people, problems destroy them. You'll either be bitter or better. The difference between bitter and better is the letter "i". **I** make the difference -- my attitude. Problems break some people, make some people brittle. It's how you choose to respond. Choose to rejoice.

Let me share with you this account from Strange and Unusual Events of 1982 from the Encyclopedia Britannica Yearbook:

Brian Hise had more than his share of bad luck in July. His apartment in Provo, Utah became flooded from a broken pipe in the upstairs apartment. The

manager told him to go out and rent a water vacuum. That's when he discovered that his car had a flat tire. He changed it and went inside again and called a friend for help. From the electric shock he got from the phone, he inadvertently ripped the instrument from the wall. Before he could leave the apartment a second time a neighbor had to kick the door down because water damage had jammed it tight. While all of this was going on, someone stole Hise's car. But it was almost out of gas so he found the car a few blocks away, but had to push it to a gas station where he filled up the tank. That evening Hise attended a military ceremony at his university. He injured himself severely when he somehow sat on his bayonet which had been tossed in the front seat of the car. Doctors were able to stitch up the wound but no one was able to resuscitate four of Hise's canaries who were crushed to death from falling plaster. After Hise slipped on the wet carpet and badly injured his tailbone, he said he began to wonder if "God wanted me dead but kept missing."

That's what I call a good attitude! It is your choice to rejoice. Then,

2. Request

In short, pray. Of all times to pray, pray when you've got problems. What do you pray about? Verse 5 says, *"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."* You ought to pray for wisdom when you're in the middle of problems. Why should I pray for wisdom? So you won't waste the opportunity to grow. If you don't learn it this time there will be one more lap around the desert! God will give you another opportunity. Learn from the problem. We become overwhelmed when we don't understand what God's doing. Pray for wisdom. Wisdom is seeing life from God's point of view. Pray for wisdom to understand the problem. Request.

There is no situation of life that you can't learn from if you have the right attitude. Don't ask "Why?", ask "What?". "Why" is to purify your faith, fortify your patience, sanctify your character. But ask "What do You want to teach me in this problem, Lord? What do You want me to learn? What characteristics can I develop?"

Finally, when problems come,

3. Relax

Trust God to know what's best for your life. Cooperate with His purpose so you don't short circuit the process. That's what's called faith. **Verse 6, "But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt."** Relax. Let God work.

My heart breaks when I think about the heartache and pain many of the people in our church feel. There are some people in this church that are going to be in God's Hall of Fame. You have maintained a sweet spirit in the odds of incredible pressure -- things that people did to you, that people did about you, situations you have been living with. It's not always easy to have a joyful heart in the middle of problems. Even when you want to have a joyful attitude it's still difficult. That's why you need to pray for two things: wisdom to understand the trial and faith to endure the trial. You need them both. James says you need wisdom to know what's going on and faith to hang in there and never, never give up. You're never a failure until you quit.

God says the devil wants to use problems to defeat you, but God wants to use those problems to develop you. Which will it be?

Some of you are going through some tough times right now. It's pretty hard. God cares. He cares about you very much. God sees everything you're going through. He's got your number! The very hairs of your head are numbered. He knows exactly where you are. He hasn't lost your number! He cares. God has the

power to do something about that problem. He could change it in a snap. He's a miracle working God. Why doesn't He? Because there's a greater purpose. The greater purpose is what He wants to do in you. God is more interested in building your character than in making life comfortable. Once you've learned those qualities, He may be free to remove that situation. But there are some things in life we're never going to be free from on this side of Heaven. They are thorns in the flesh. We will deal with them and carry them. Nothing comes into your life without the Heavenly Father's permission.

There is a fantastic promise in *v. 12 "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him."* God says there will be a reward. I don't think when we get to heaven the rewards will go to the pastors, and evangelists, and the Billy Grahams. I think the rewards will go to the people who quietly put up with difficult situations and developed the character of Jesus Christ in their life. He says, "There will be a crown of life. Cast all your cares upon Him."

The question is, are you sure you're going to get this crown of life? And you go, ah, maybe, I think so. I'm a good person. Friend, let me tell you that the only way to make sure you're going to heaven is to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. Our good works will not get us to heaven. The Bible says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast." (Eph. 2:8-9) Only Jesus can take you to heaven. He says, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Jesus died for your sins, he was buried, and rose again from the dead. He did this for you because you cannot die for your own sins. You have to be redeemed

from your sins. The Bible says we are all sinners and condemned to die, condemned to an eternity in hell. But God loves us so much he sent his only Son Jesus to die for our sins. All you need to do is to believe in Jesus, believe that he died and rose again for you, and you will receive the gift of eternal life. The Bible says, “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”