

## HOW TO PROFIT FROM YOUR PROBLEMS

I remember when I was in University I worked for a summer at Canada's Wonderland on the roller coaster Skyrider. One of the things you always had to deal with was people getting motion sick on the ride. Eating funnel cakes and lots of fried food and then getting on a fast moving ride that went upside down was not a good combination. Usually people would throw up on the exit ramp of in the bushes leaving the ride. Of course you could not say that someone threw up, because that would gross people out. Instead we had a code word - Protein Spill. This one day was especially bad. As the train hit the brakes a guy at the back got sick and, as the ride ground to a stop, he projected over 20 feet. It was the protein spill record! All those poor people, just enjoying the ride and suddenly BLAH! I will never forget the look of this one poor guy. The ride stops and people are getting off and he is just covered and he looked at me and just said "why me" and slowly walked away.

Have you ever felt that poor guy. You are just going along minding your own business and suddenly BLAH! Life is going along fine and suddenly something happens and you find yourself in pain asking the question "why me?" Today we are starting a new summer series looking at the boom of James. For the next three months we will be going through this book verse by verse.

James 1:1-6 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings. 2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. 6 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

When you write a letter you normally figure that the guy is going to warm up and ease into his subject. He's going to have a few preliminaries, opening remarks, and then move into the message. But James gets right to the point. James starts after his brief greeting by saying that there are four facts when it comes to trials.

### a. Problems are Inevitable

It says here "*whenever* you face trials." It does not say, "If you face trials" or "you might face trials." The assumption is that all of will face trials in life. If you don't have problems, check your pulse. It is a fact of life. Jesus said,

John 16:33 I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

1 Peter 4:12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.

Peter said problems should not surprise us. We should 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. In a way, trials are a bit like aging. You know it is going to happen and you know there will be times when things will be difficult.

Three elderly ladies were discussing the trials of getting older. One said, "Sometimes I catch myself with a jar of mayonnaise in my hand, standing in front of the refrigerator, and I can't remember if I need to put it away or start making a sandwich." The second lady chimed in, "Yes, sometimes I find myself on the landing of the stairs and can't remember whether I was going up or down." "Well," the third one said, "I'm glad I don't have that problem -- knock on wood." As she rapped her knuckles on the table she paused and then said, "That must be the door. I'll get it!"

Problems are inevitable, but secondly;

b. Problems are Unpredictable

It says "whenever you *face* trials." The word used for face is the Greek word PERIPIPTO. It literally means to fall into unexpectedly. It is the same word used in the story of the Good Samaritan where the man fell among thieves -- it was unexpected. Trials are not planned. We seldom can anticipate them. 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. We don't plan to suddenly get fired from a job we depend on. We don't plan to get cancer. They are unplanned and unpredictable -- when we least expect them. That's what makes a problem a problem.

c. Problems are Diverse

It goes on to say "whenever you face trials *of many kinds*." Problems 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.

Maybe you have seen that old sign: "Into every life a little rain must fall, but this is ridiculous." Lots of varieties of problems in our life. Times change, and with it the problems we face change.

Travel has changed. More than two hundred years ago George Washington traveled from Virginia to Washington D.C. by horseback. It could take him ten days traveling at a speed of twenty five miles per day. Today astronauts can enter a space shuttle and travel at twenty five thousand miles per hour. At that speed you could fly from New York City to San Francisco in eight minutes. Yet with all the advances there comes the same problems. Today with air travel it is possible to have breakfast in New York, lunch in Dallas, and dinner in Los Angeles -- and have your luggage wind up in Mexico. One man put it this way:

"My great-grandfather rode a horse, but was afraid of the train. My grandfather rode on a train, but was afraid of a car. My father rode in a car, but was afraid of an airplane. I ride in an airplane, but I'm afraid of a horse."

d. Problems are Purposeful

James goes on to say “because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance .” Problems have a purpose. Pain can be productive. Pressure produces. Suffering can accomplish something. It has value in our lives. What value? Here are three purposes for problems in your life:

First, they test our faith. It says in verse 3 the ‘testing of your 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. There is a show on now called Forged in Fire. Christians are like steel; when they're tested they come out stronger.

There is a Chinese proverb, "A gem is not polished without rubbing, nor a man made better without trials."

Secondly, this testing develops perseverance. That means staying power. Not a passive waiting, but an active watching. The ability to keep on keeping on, the ability to hang in there. The Greek word here for perseverance literally means "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 on vacation, anything to get away from pressure. But God uses problems in our lives to teach us how to handle pressure

When they first manufactured golf balls, they made the covers smooth. Then they discovered that after a ball had been roughed up one could get more distance out of it. So they started manufacturing them with dimpled covers. So it is with life; it takes some rough spots to make us go the farthest.

How does God teach you patience? Do you learn it when everything is going your way? No. You only learn long suffering from suffering long. God teaches you patience in traffic jams, in grocery lines, the waiting periods of life. 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.

Thirdly, verse 4 goes on to say “Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” That's God's long range goal. His ultimate purpose 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.

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:

How to handle your problems;

1. Rejoice (vs. 1-4)

James 1:2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds

Don't misunderstand what he's saying. He's not saying fake it. Put on a plastic smile and pretend that everything is going great. God never asks you to deny reality. Not just the power of empty positive thinking.

God is also not talking about masochism. God does not want us to suffer for the sake of suffering. 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. IN everything, give thanks. It does not say, FOR everything give thanks. You do not thank God for giving you cancer or for a natural disaster or for war. 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 take even the bad in our lives and turn it around and bring good out of it. Where your problems come from is not the issue. You may have caused them yourself. The devil may have caused them. They may be just the result of living in a fallen and sinful world. The source isn't the issue. 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 to take a deliberate look at. It means to evaluate, to make up your mind about it. 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, my 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.

Psalms 34:1 I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips.

We read those words but often forget the description that comes with that psalm;

Psalms 34:1 Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he left. 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 one little letter, the letter I. I make the difference -- my attitude. Problems break some people, but make other people better. It's how you choose to respond. Choose to rejoice.

## 2. Request (vs. 5)

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

How do you deal with problems? You pray. You ought to pray for wisdom when you're in the middle of problems. Why pray for wisdom? So you will not 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, rather ask WHAT. The 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?"

### 3. Relax (vs. 6)

Trust God to know what's best for your life. Co-operate with His purpose so you don't short circuit the process. That's what's called faith.

James 1:6 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt...

In other words - relax. Let God work. There are so many people who attend this church that are hurting. Even through the pain they have maintained a sweet spirit in the odds of incredible pressure, things that hopefully many of us will never have to face.

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?

In the bible we read that Job repented, not of any past sins that might have caused his trouble, but of his mistrust of God in the midst of it. Ultimately, God never answered Job's questions. Job never actually found out why all of this loss and horror had occurred. It was as if the answer to Job's queries was simply God's presence. God was saying, 'If you know Who I am, then you will trust Me. That will be enough.' In the final scene, Job was restored. God triumphed over the mockeries of Satan, Job's possessions were multiplied and the story was complete.

Some of you are going through some tough times right now. Things are tough. I just want to remind you this morning that God cares about what you are going through. He cares about you very much. God knows what is going on in your life. The very hairs of your head are numbered. He knows exactly where you are. He cares.

God has the power to do something about that problem. He is a miracle working God. Maybe God will miraculously intervene in your life. Maybe He will not because there is a greater purpose. God is more interested in building your character than in making life comfortable. 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.

In a few weeks we will get to this verse;

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

God says there will be a reward, and the reward is eternal life with Jesus. The reward is not just for people like Billy Graham, it is for everyone. It goes to all who quietly put up with difficult situations and developed the character of Jesus Christ in their life.

This past Wednesday Mike Brandon, a faithful friend and servant here at the church died after months of battling cancer. I had a chance to visit Mike a few months ago. He knew that he was going to die, and yet there was a very calm assurance, not just from him but from the whole family.

Joe Scriven was a missionary from Ireland to Canada in the 1840s. He lived in Woodstock ON. He was joined by his fiancé who was also from Ireland. Just before the wedding, she died of pneumonia. Joe buried her with his own hands, and a broken heart. Shortly after he received news that his mother in Ireland was very ill and was expected to die. So he picked up a pen and wrote her a letter. In that letter he wrote a poem,

"What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer! Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged. Take it to the Lord in prayer."

In the 1860s that poem Joe wrote to his mother was turned into the hymn What a Friend We Have in Jesus that we know and love today. Out of such pain came something so beautiful, something that has blessed so many around the world.

How do you profit from your problems. You rejoice, and request, and then relax, knowing that God has a plan for your life. God can turn any hurt into healing. He can transform any trial into a testimony.