

HOW TO PROFIT FROM YOUR PROBLEMS
Developing a Faith That Works - Part 2 of 15
James 1:2-6
Rick Warren

James 1:2-6

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds..."

How Can I Be Positive Under Pressure?

I. FOUR "FACTS OF LIFE" YOU NEED TO KNOW

"Consider it pure joy ... because you know ..."

1. PROBLEMS ARE _____

"... whenever you face trials ..."

2. PROBLEMS ARE _____

"... whenever you face trials ..."

"peripipto": fall into

3. PROBLEMS ARE _____

"... trials of many kinds ..."

4. PROBLEMS ARE _____

"Realize that they come ... to produce in you..." (Phillips)

3 PURPOSES OF PROBLEMS (vs.3-4)

- * Problems purify my _____
"You know that the testing of your faith..."

- * Problems fortify my _____
"... the testing ... develops perseverance..."

- * Problems sanctify my _____
"so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything!"

God's #1 Purpose in my life: _____

For further study: Rom. 5:3-5, 8:28-29

II. HOW TO HANDLE YOUR PROBLEMS

1. _____

"Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials..." (vs. 1)

2. _____

"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." (vs. 5)

3. _____

"But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt ..." (vs.6)

The result: James 1:12

HOW TO PROFIT FROM YOUR PROBLEMS

Developing a Faith That Works - Part 2 of 15

James 1:2-6

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We're going to look at "How to Profit From Your Problems". James is the most practical book in the New Testament. It is the "How To" manual for the Christian life.

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 drops a bomb in verse 2. He announces who he is and then in verse 2 he says, "*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, 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*". "*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.

Four facts of life from James that will help you with the problem you're going through right now:

I. FOUR "FACTS OF LIFE" YOU NEED TO KNOW

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 said "*In the world you will have tribulation.*" Peter said, "*Don't be surprised when you have problems.*" 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.

I was naive in my college days. I used to pray for trials. I have since learned you don't need to pray for trials. But I thought I needed to pray for trials. The next day my van blew up. Scott Peck's book The Road Less Traveled ... the first sentence is "Life is difficult." It is. It is inevitable that you will have problems in life.

2. Problems are unpredictable.

He says, "*...whenever you face problems ...*" The word "face" in Greek is "peripto". 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 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 crisis. They are unplanned and unpredictable -- when we least expect them. That's what makes a problem a problem. Often it's inconvenient when you fall into it suddenly.

HOW TO PROFIT FROM YOUR PROBLEMS

Developing A Faith That Works - Part 2 of 15

Story of a guy who was riding on a New York subway for the very first time. He got motion sickness standing cramped in next to the door. The subway stopped suddenly, the door opened and he lost his lunch right on the first guy standing in line. The thing was, the doors didn't shut and it took off again. "Why me?"

3. Problems 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.

Sign I saw this week: "Into every life some rain must fall, but this is ridiculous." Lots of varieties of problems in our life.

4. Problems are purposeful

They have a purpose. Pain can be productive. Pressure produces. Suffering can accomplish something. It has value in our lives. What value? Three purposes of problems in your life:

1) **Problems purify my faith.** He 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 said *"He has tested me through the refining fire and I have come out as pure gold."* 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.

We've been in a test for this land for over a year. We've been in a course on character development. God is much more interested in building disciples than He is in building buildings. Problems purify our faith.

2) **Problems fortify our patience.** *"...the testing of your faith develops 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. The Greek here is literally "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 TO PROFIT FROM YOUR PROBLEMS

Developing A Faith That Works - Part 2 of 15

How does God teach you patience? By everything going your way? No. 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. Lombardi said, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going."

3) Problems sanctify my character. They make me like Jesus. They help me mature. They help me to grow. *"The testing of your faith produces perseverance 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:

Through the word of God. John 17:17 *"Sanctify them through Thy truth. Thy word is truth."* James 1:22-25 *"The word makes us like Jesus"* it builds our character, matures us. But even if you read the Bible two hours a day, how many hours of your life are you not reading God's word? God demands even more in 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 *"We know that all things work together for good"* [not all things are good but they work together for good] *if we love God and are called according to His purpose."* The secret of Romans 8:28 is 8:29 *"For whom he did foreknow He did predestine to become conformed to the image of the Son of God."* Why do all things work together for good? In order to make me like Christ.

We just finished twelve weeks on the fruit of the spirit. 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 God's workmanship"* -- God wants to make a masterpiece out of you. He

HOW TO PROFIT FROM YOUR PROBLEMS

Developing A Faith That Works - Part 2 of 15

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.

This is what you need to know. And then there are three things you need to do.

II. HOW TO HANDLE YOUR PROBLEMS

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, be a Polyanna." 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 feel bad!" He's not having 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 I Thessalonians 5:18 *"In everything give thanks for this is the will of God concerning 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." 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 bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth."* 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.

From Strange and Unusual Events of 1982 from the Encyclopedia Britannica Yearbook:

HOW TO PROFIT FROM YOUR PROBLEMS

Developing A Faith That Works - Part 2 of 15

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.

2. Request

Pray. Of all times to pray, pray when you've got problems. What do you pray about? v. 5 *"If any of you lack wisdom, you should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given to him."* 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?"

3. Relax

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. *"When he asks he must believe and not doubt."* Relax. Let God work.

Letter:

HOW TO PROFIT FROM YOUR PROBLEMS

Developing A Faith That Works - Part 2 of 15

Dear Pastor Rick, It has amazed me how the Lord has moved in my life in the past two years. I've always known about the Lord and went to church. But when I lost my mother two years ago things changed. Watching someone I loved and respected so much and be eaten away by cancer so quickly, I kept asking that one question, "Why?" But strange things happened. God took over in my life. So many things happened to change my life even through such adversity and sadness. Then four months later the man I had loved for six years ended our relationship. But God was there again giving me wisdom and strength and protection. Then I had to overcome a drinking problem. And I did. It's been one year and two weeks that the Lord has kept me from drinking. He moved in again at that point and saved me from myself. Since then I'm trusting Him more and more each day and it is so exciting. Yes, there are still problems and sometimes deep depression but He is there. I know now that if I choose I can trust Him. Do you know what that has done for me? Each day is a growing experience for me with Him. I know God sent me to this church to hear your teaching. I wish and hope the Lord will make me grow so I can help others in their hard times and help them to know Him."

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 man who perseveres under trial. 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. 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

HOW TO PROFIT FROM YOUR PROBLEMS

Developing A Faith That Works - Part 2 of 15

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."

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, as I look out on to these faces, I see many, many needs. There are those here Lord that had a very discouraging week. Some have been living with a persistent problem that has carried on and on for days and weeks and even years and there has been no relief. Lord, they have wanted to doubt and say, "Where are you, Lord? Don't you know?" Lord, like the disciples in the boat when it began to toss we come to You and say "Don't You care?" and yet, Lord, we know You do care. And because You care, You're allowing these situations in our lives, not to break us but to make us. Not to destroy us, but to develop us. Lord, help us to be triumphant under trials. Help us to learn from this passage how to suffer successfully, how to profit from our problems, how to be positive under pressure. Work in our lives for our growth and Your glory.

With our heads bowed in the quietness of this moment, there are some of you who may never have invited Jesus Christ into your life. You've heard about God and Christ and maybe you even went to church as a kid. I'm not talking about a religion, I'm talking about a relationship. I don't care if your background is Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Buddhist, Mormon, Baptist. I don't care what it is. The issue is your relationship to God. It's not where you've been that counts it's the direction your feet are headed now. Would you say, "Jesus Christ, I don't understand it all, but as much as I know how, I want You to come into my life. Lord, please come in. Make me the person You want me to be. Help me to understand it more. As much as I know how I want to live for You. Thank You for loving me. Thank You for forgiving me. Thank You for dying for me. Please help me to understand it more."

If you prayed that prayer in your heart, I believe God heard you. This is the beginning of a new journey called the Christian life. Today's your day to open up your heart to Christ. You're no accident. God knew you'd be here a thousand years before you were born. He put you here for a purpose. I made a decision like this years ago. It was the turning point in my life. My life has not been a bed of roses but I have a power that I can rely on now. Today, you're opening your life to Jesus Christ. You're saying, Jesus Christ I don't understand it all but I want to be a Christian, a believer. And that's great. God's happy. The Bible says there is a party in heaven when one person commits their life to Christ.

There are others of you who know the Lord but you're going through a tough time right now. Ask the Lord to give you the courage and the choice to rejoice.

Father, today, thank You for Your Word. Thank You that it is clear. It is relevant. It applies to our lives. It helps us. Lord, encourage us this week as we meditate on this passage. In Jesus' name. Amen.