

Practical Christianity; When Tough Times Tackle You

In upcoming weeks we will discuss how we can start living a practical life of faith.

- Now I'm **not** attempting to reduce Christianity to some list of rules to follow.
- And I am **not** saying - if you follow these rules, life will be great!
- **But**, we need to understand, we must come to a point in life where we start trusting God... and this trust starts by taking steps of faith, **trusting in Jesus by acting on the promises and principles that are found in God's word.**

In upcoming weeks, we'll look at how God wants us to take practical steps of faith in every circumstance we experience.

Today we're going to look at how James opens his letter to Christians and how he talks about something we all face, "When you face tough trials and tough times."

Talking about tough times, I've had my share. Back in the early 1990s: Chelsea dying during birth, a week later having Kayla diagnosed as severely cognitively disabled. Going bankrupt because of the slow economy because of the 1st Gulf War. Struggling to pay bills and basic needs.

Now you may or may not be having those kind of struggles, but I'm sure you've had days that felt awful close or even worse. No one is immune to tough times!

- We all face problems of different degrees... the loss of a job because of COVID-19, broken relationships, and difficulties at work or with neighbors. Maybe it's a lingering illness or a depression that won't go away. Maybe a wayward child, an unfaithful spouse, an abusive parent; things that make us feel overwhelmed.

But is there hope? Is there help available when we face trials in life? Does the Bible offer help? Well, let's turn to the Book of James 1:1-12

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 and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. ⁵ 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. ⁸ Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

⁹ Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. ¹⁰ But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. ¹¹ For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.

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.

In today's scripture, James is writing to Christians going through tough times, Christians being driven from their homes and treated brutally, persecuted because of their faith. But James addresses this situation in a practical way... instead of being comforting and sympathetic, he challenges them. **James challenged them to rethink their troubles and trust God in tough times.**

We face the same question as those early Christians: **How can I change the way I respond to hard times? You see that's the real question to ask.** But since we're creatures of comfort, we like to ask, "**How can I avoid troubles?**" We don't want to go through tough times, but the truth is we can't avoid them. They're inescapable.

James says something odd **in verse 2**, "*Consider it pure joy **whenever** you face trials of many kinds.*" He didn't say "IF" you have problems, he said "WHENEVER." Over our lifetime we'll face many problems and difficulties.

So what we need to name our **WHENEVERs**:

How can I change the way I respond to tough times and not become overwhelmed – **WHENEVER** – I am struck with fear or dread, anxiety or worry?

How can I respond in a way that enables me to face the hard times with peace, joy, and the power of God?

Let's look at God's principles that we heard in today's scripture and see how they can apply to our lives.

1. **Consider the purpose of the trial.**

Look at verses 2-4. **Understand**, God doesn't give us trials just to make us suffer – like a mean kid holding a magnifying glass over ants on a sunny day. **But** we live in a sin cursed world where problems, trials and pain prevail... but God **is in** control, so Paul said in Romans 8:28, *“We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”*

Do you know; God goes through trials **with** us for a reason. Knowing our trials in life have a purpose... that ***makes a big difference*** in how we face them.

- ***In fact, our hard times show us how genuine our faith is.*** The troubles and trials we face become a test of faith. *You either pass it or fail it.*
 - To pass the test means it was only a trial.
 - To fail means it turned into a temptation; temptations to loose your temper, to be unforgiving or to fall into the victim trap, to have a pity party. Trials are tests that reveal the genuineness and strength of our faith.
- ***Trials can also produce perseverance.*** Look at verse 4, the word perseverance comes from 2 Greek words, “To remain” or “to remain under.” The implied meaning is “One who remains under trials and doesn't crack.” The idea is stability in the midst of a trial, facing it with faith in Jesus Christ.

God wants to bring us to a place where we patiently wait for the Spirit of God to work in us. And that work is to develop within us the **assurance** that God's in control.

James tells us in verse 4 that God's goal is to make us "...mature and complete, not lacking anything." Knowing that God has a purpose for our trials gives us hope and strength... knowing that, helps us to persevere and helps us make it to the other side.

2. The 2nd principle to **TRUST in the LORD all the way through the trial.** Since God is at work, we need to look to God in faith. In **verse 5**, James tells us that if we lack wisdom, all we need to do **is ask for it.**

To trust God means to seek and ask the Lord for the ability, the power to follow His will through the trial! ***Then we need to believe that God's way is better than ours.*** We do this by seeking advice from mature Christians, searching the scriptures for answers, and praying for wisdom.

When we trust that God will show us what we need to know and trust that we will receive what is needed to successfully face the trial. **Then** we're responding in faith and depending on God. *But any Christian who thinks that he or she can do it on their own is setting themselves up for failure and disappointment!* By the way, look at **verses 7 & 8**, to trust Jesus also means **not to doubt** that he's at work. Doubt results in anxiety, and kills the perseverance God's building in us. Jesus said in Mark 10:15, "*Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will not enter into it.*" **We need to trust God just like a child trusts their parents.**

3. We should look at the big picture.

We need a clear understanding of who we are and of our situation.

- Look at verses 9-11, humble circumstances are high positions and the rich are low positions. This means, **we need to see ourselves from God's perspective.** James point is that some things we think are important; may not be that important at all. Fifty years from now, who'll care how much money we made? What'll matter will be the relationships we had with our kids and how we touched the lives around us for the glory of God!
- **We also need to understand the power of our response.** Proverbs 21:23 say's, "*Whoever guards their mouth and tongue keeps their soul from troubles.*" Sometimes, by reacting the wrong way, we cause our own problems.

When we walk away from God's will, make decisions apart from God **and act on our own desires**; we often cause our own trials because we reacted with bitterness, selfishness and didn't trust God.

4. Also when looking at the big picture and facing tough times: **We can focus on the reward during trials**. If we persevere under trial, verse 12 tells us of at least 2 rewards we can look forward to:

- **Blessedness**. The word "blessedness" in this context means "genuinely happy." It's the kind of happiness that isn't dependent on circumstances and is available **only** if we depend on the Lord in all of our tough times. If we depend on Jesus in our trials, we can have inner peace that goes beyond human understanding.

- And second, we can have **A crown of life**. I don't believe this crown of life is **only** our eternal life in heaven...

I believe it's also the power to live life to its fullest potential today and the power to follow Jesus Christ victoriously. We were created to be victors, not victims of the trials and problems we face. We are to be those who have "Stood the test."

5. **Finally, remember, we are to consider it pure joy**.

Remember verse 2! Have you ever noticed that in your trials, you're more sensitive to the presence of God? When you're going through difficult times, you pray more? There's potential for your intimacy with God to increase! You start asking others to pray for you and that draws you closer to God, closer to the very source of your joy. In this way, we're privileged to have our faith tested.

Prayer: Lord, when we look at the tough times of life... and consider how we can trust you, we stand amazed. When we remember your promise that there will be a reward for us when we persevere... we consider it a joy. **We also consider it a gift that you – God Almighty, have turned to us and you think that we are important enough to take the time and effort, and make each of us complete and mature in Christ.**

Lord, help us remember the promise that if we trust you - we **will** see your hand at work, we will see your Spirit moving in our trials and tribulations – not by blind faith, but by experience.

Heavenly Father, no matter what hard times we may face, may we have the assurance that you know all about them and know that you care, that you are in control and we are not alone.

Pray for:

- Pray for the health and safety of our children returning to school
- Pray for the teachers, support staff and administration
- Pray for our medical professionals and those struggling with COVID, acute and chronic medical conditions

- Pray for our communities, pray for justice and safety in our communities, for our police and community leaders