

INTRODUCTION

Tonight I want to start with you on a journey through the epistle that James wrote to churches back in those days but that speaks to us today. When life hands you lemons, just make lemonade. When difficulties come your way, how do you react? How do you respond? When things are going really well, the sky is blue, you have plenty of money in the bank, you're healthy, your children are obedient, faith is almost an option. It's easy to praise the Lord then, but it's when things are going tough, the physical health is not there and your run out of month before the end of your money, and when you have problems with your family, that's when faith is not an option, faith is an absolute necessity.

I can honestly tell you it has been through the difficult times in my life that I have grown the most. I recall specifically when my mother lived with us and she had cancer. My dad had just died with cancer the year before that, and I used to drive her from our home down to Birmingham and at that time we were only about 30 minutes away for chemotherapy. From one perspective that was a really terrible time in our lives, as anyone of you know who have had loved ones taking chemotherapy. You basically dread it, then you have it and you're sick for a few days, you have a few good days in between and then you dread it again. Life is just miserable. But I was allowed to be my mother's pastor, not only her son, because she joined our church and some of those trips we took down to the hospital were some of the sweetest times my mother and I ever had. We talked about things like heaven and the Bible. That was a tough time, but somehow God turned that trial into a triumph.

If you're not a Christian, you can't understand that. People who are not Christians don't understand how God can give us the strength to take difficult times and turn them into times when faith grows. But I want us to learn tonight from the Bible how every one of us can turn trials into triumph. Let's look and see what the Bible says

We believe this James is the half-brother of Jesus, half-brother because they had the same mother, Mary, but they had absolutely different fathers. Jesus had God as His father and James had Joseph as his father. James, being the younger brother of Jesus, grew up in the same household. Imagine them playing together, probably running around like brothers do. But it's kind of interesting that when James, who we believe was the pastor of the church at Jerusalem, the head elder, when he wrote this book, he doesn't call himself a servant of God AND the half-brother of the Lord Jesus, but rather he said in Verse 1 "A servant [slave] of God and of Jesus Christ." At this point, he realized his half-brother Jesus was not just any half-brother, but he was the Lord of the universe.

James 1:1-12. "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings. Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. 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. 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. That man should not think he will receive anything from

the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does. The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. 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 man will fade away even while he goes about his business. 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."

Let's consider four actions, things you can do, that will assist you in turning your trials into triumphs. And all four of those words are found here in the text.

1. REJOICE! A joyful heart

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds." (vs. 2) It doesn't say IF you fall into temptations or trials, it says WHEN you do. If you are a Christian, you will face trials and face difficulties. It's not a matter of if; it's a matter of when. And the Bible says there will be trials of all kinds. The King James Version calls it, "divers temptations," which means "very colored." Trials come in all different shapes and sizes. It may be a physical, emotional, financial, marriage problem—all different kinds of trials and difficulties. The Bible says you will face them, but the big question is what are you going to do when you face them?

The Bible says to count it all joy. The word count or consider in verse 2 is an interesting word. If we have any CPAs or accountants here, people who work with figures, that word "count" is a financial word that means to establish an account. It is the picture of writing down everything you would consider an asset in one column, and writing down everything you consider a liability in another column, and then looking at the two and after considering that, you write over it all J-O-Y. In life when you write assets and liabilities, there is one thing you write in the asset column, the power of Jesus Christ. There is no liability on earth that can detract from the power of Jesus Christ. You may think it doesn't make sense, because you have ten times more liabilities than assets and I'm telling you to write "Joy" across it. No I'm not telling you that. The Bible is saying, "Consider it all joy when you fall into difficult trials."

Let's talk about the word Rejoice. Over and over again, the Bible says, "Rejoice in the Lord." The shortest verse in the Bible is not John 11:35, that says, "Jesus wept." That has two words. It is 1 Thessalonians 5:18 which says "Rejoice evermore" (KJV) because in the Greek that's only one word. In every circumstance, in every situation, rejoice. The Bible commands, not suggests, us that whatever situation we may find ourselves in we are to rejoice. You may say "I don't feel like rejoicing when I'm sick, I don't feel like rejoicing when I'm sad, I don't feel like rejoicing when I have difficulties in my life" The Bible didn't say to rejoice if you feel like it, it just says Rejoice. Period. I want to share a very exciting fact that when I learned it made all the difference in my demeanor, my personality and my countenance: Rejoicing is not a feeling—rejoicing is a decision. There is a difference between happiness and joy. Happiness is dependent on "happenings" If everything is going well, if people treat you nice, if you feel good, then you're happy. But joy is dependent on one thing—Jesus Christ. He is the same yesterday, today, and forevermore. Rejoice! Write JOY over any situation you are in.

You might be thinking it's easy for me to tell you to rejoice, but I am not the one telling you to rejoice, the Word of God is. And if you remember, Philippians 4:4 which says, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" was written by a man who at that moment was in a damp, dusty, dark dungeon in Rome and as far as he knew, was waiting to have his head chopped off the next day. And while this apostle Paul was in prison, he wrote an epistle of joy that said "Rejoice!" The Bible says if you are ever going to turn your trials into triumphs, you're going to have to rejoice in the midst of those difficulties.

"I don't feel like it." Then rejoice anyway! I used to have a little sign on my desk that said: Rejoice even when you don't feel like it, keep rejoicing until you do feel like it, and then rejoice because you feel like it. The very time you need to rejoice is when you don't feel like rejoicing. If someone came and delivered a letter to your door saying you just won the Publishers Clearinghouse sweepstakes for \$15 million, you're going to probably rejoice. Even a lost person who is not a Christian will say, "Thank you, God!" if he wins the big sweepstakes. It's easy then. But it's when you go through the difficult times that you need to rejoice the most.

When my mother had cancer we came to the point where we could rejoice in the midst of her suffering. We weren't rejoicing because she had cancer or suffering from chemotherapy, but we were rejoicing because Jesus Christ was in control, that He was Lord. We knew the very worst thing that could happen was her death, but then she would go to be with Jesus and after all, that's not all that bad.

2. REALIZE! An understanding heart

"Because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance." (vs. 3) You are supposed to know your testing produces more faith. Going through a tough time produces more faith. Faith is like a muscle. When you don't use a muscle, it atrophies or becomes weak. When you are going through wonderful times, you don't have to exercise a lot of faith. It's when you're going through those tough times that you exercise faith.

Some people say if we could just see miracles we would have more faith. That is absolutely not true. Miracles don't produce faith: Faith may produce miracles. Some people are "miracle-mongers," here a miracle, there a miracle, everywhere a miracle.

In Jasper, Alabama someone looked at the wood grain of a hospital room door and said, "Wow, I see the face of Jesus in that wood grain!" Someone else looked at it and said, "Wow, I see the face of Jesus too!" It spread like wildfire and hundreds of people came from all over to the hospital. These were not people who go to church and Sunday School regularly, who faithfully tithe, they just want to see a miracle! They lined up, took pictures and even televised the door that had the "face of Jesus." They were looking for a miracle but did that so-called miracle produce faith? How many of those people were in prayer meeting on Wednesday night? Probably none of them. Another lady in Indiana turned on her kitchen light in her house trailer and lo and behold reflected on the trailer next to her was the face of Jesus. The report was in the newspaper, and hundreds of people lined up and paid her \$10 a person to flip on her light and see the face of Jesus on the trailer next door. I liked what one man said in an interview, "It looks more like Willie Nelson to me!"

"If I could just see a miracle I would have more faith." No you wouldn't. In Luke 16, Jesus tell us about the rich man in hell who looks up and sees Lazarus in heaven. The Bible says the man was in torment but he had one urgent request. He asked Abraham to send Lazarus back to his five brothers who were still alive, "Let Lazarus warn them not to come to this place" (Luke 16:28) Abraham made a profound statement in response: "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." (Luke 16:31)

Trials increase your faith. Like the adaptation from Robert Browning Hamilton's poem says, "I walked a mile with Laughter, / She chatted all the way, / But I was none the wiser / For all she had to say. / But I walked a mile with Sorrow / And ne'er a word said she, / But, oh! The things I learned from her, / When sorrow walked with me." We learn in the difficult times.

Verse 3 says "The testing of your faith develops perseverance." Romans 5:3-5 tells us why we can rejoice in our suffering. "Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance [patience]; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us." If you want to get in on God's plan for developing your character, to make you mature, to make you conformed to the image of Christ, here it is: God allows trials to come into your life to test you because testing produces patience, and patience produces character, and character produces hope. There is no shortcut to character and hope.

A lady came into my office once and asked that I pray with her about having more patience. She said I'm the most impatient person and I want God to give me patience. So I bowed my head and said "Lord I want you to bring a lot of tribulation and trouble into this lady's life." She said, "What?!" And I showed Romans 5:3, "But we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance." There is no shortcut to patience. Tribulation produces patience.

Here is an over-arching question: Do you know why God saved you? You might say, "To forgive my sins." No, that is a benefit or result of it. You may say Jesus saved you to take you to heaven when you die. No, that's another benefit of it. If the only reason you became a Christian is to go to heaven when you die, the best thing we could do for you is when you walk up out of the baptistery, take a .44 magnum and shoot you! There you go, head on up to heaven.

Allow me to tell you why God saved you: He saved you to conform you to the image of His Son according to Romans 8. He wants to make you like Jesus in your character. And there is no shortcut, no easy way, no feeling you can have, no pill you can take, no Christian experience you can have so that it happens automatically. It takes tribulation that produces patience, that produces character that produces hope. No shortcut.

God can't use people until they go through some tough times. There are so many examples in the Bible. According to Genesis, Joseph spent 13 years in service and prison before he got to the point where God placed him as second in command in Egypt. Moses was 80 years old before God could really use him; he had to go through a 40 year tribulation time on the back side of a desert before God got him ready.

“Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete.” No one is perfect except the Lord Jesus. A pastor asked his congregation if anyone had ever met a perfect person. One man in the back sheepishly raised his hand and replied, “No, but I’ve heard about him.” When the preacher asked him who it was, the man said, “My wife’s first husband.” The Bible is not talking about being without fault, but about being mature

3. REMAIN! A surrendered heart

“Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (vs. 4) You must be steadfast and participate with God to allow Him to do IN you and THROUGH you what He wants to. I don’t like to use a lot of big spiritual words, but there are three words you need to understand from the Bible: Salvation, Sanctification, Service.

Salvation is what God did FOR you on Calvary. Sanctification is a process that involves what God is doing IN you right now. Service is what God does THROUGH you. This is all part of the process of cooperating with God. Remain—don’t give up on God! When you are in the middle of a difficult time, don’t quit, participate and cooperate with God to allow Him to do with you what He wants to. I have learned that when I go through a tough time, a time of tribulation where things are not going smooth, I immediately say, “Lord you have my attention, what are You trying to teach me? I want to be a good student and learn as quickly as I can. Teach me in a hurry.”

I had a friend in college, a great Christian with an amazing faith named Mike Reynolds who is a chaplain for the Army now. But back in college his mom and dad died in a car wreck. Two weeks later he had an almost fatal car crash himself. I went to visit him in the hospital in Birmingham. I asked him how he wanted me to pray for him. He said, “I want you to pray that I won’t waste this experience, that God will teach me something during this time.” He was saying he didn’t want to waste the crisis and the sorrow—he wanted to learn something. He was participating with God. When tough times come, you can rebel against God and react negatively and ask, “Why God?” Or you can participate with God and cooperate with Him and surrender your heart and let patience have her way with you.

4. RECEIVE! A prayerful heart

“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) This is the heart of the passage. What causes you the greatest heartache when you are going through a tough time? You want to ask why is this happening and what you need to pray for during these times is God give me wisdom to understand what is happening.

Hindsight is 20/20. Foresight is looking forward. But even better to have is insight, to understand what is happening when you are going through a difficult time. That’s where wisdom comes in. What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom? Knowledge is the ability to take things apart and analyze. Wisdom is the ability to put things together and understand what is happening. I have car, and with enough tools and a sledge hammer, I could take it apart and analyze it. But if you lay out all the components of an automobile and give me

a complete book, I could not begin to put it back together. But some of you guys here wouldn't even need a book. That is wisdom. Knowledge is ability to take something apart; wisdom is the ability to put things together. The Bible says to pray for wisdom. The Bible says to pray in faith believing and don't doubt or you're like a double-minded man, unstable in all your ways.

I think about Simon Peter when he walked on the water. He wasn't standing on the waves, he was standing on the Word, because Jesus had said, "Walk to me." We can't walk on water because we haven't had a word from Jesus, but Peter was standing there and his faith began to waver, he began to feel the waves and the wind and began to sink. How many times has that happened to you when you pray for something and get double-minded? Faith says, "Yes, yes, yes." Doubt says, "No, no, no." The Bible says if you are double-minded when you are praying don't expect to receive anything from the Lord. So when you pray with faith, believe that God will give you the wisdom you need for your circumstances.

So, that's the secret: Rejoice in the midst of it. Are you going through a tough time? You don't have to figure it out, you don't have to understand. Just start rejoicing. Don't rejoice in the difficult problems that are happening, rejoice in the Lord! Then realize you're being tested and it's going to produce more faith, then realize you must remain steadfast and cooperate with the tribulation, and then with a prayerful heart receive by faith the wisdom God wants to give you.

CONCLUSION

History is full of people who were victims but became victors. One of my favorites is a dear old saint named Fanny Crosby. They used to call her Aunt Fanny. When Fanny Crosby was a child, she developed an eye inflammation and through the carelessness of a hometown physician, he treated her eyes with what was akin to acid and she became permanently blind. It so disturbed that physician that he left town. But because she was blind, God gave her wonderful insight into the truth that she would have never seen had she had physical sight. Fanny Crosby wrote over 4,000 songs: "To God be the Glory," "Blessed Assurance." She wrote so many beautiful songs and late in life someone asked her about the physician who through his carelessness she became blind. Fanny said, "I thank God for what that physician did. If I had the opportunity to go back and receive my sight, I would not do it because in my blindness I have been able to see so many things that otherwise I would never have seen." That's just one example of thousands of people who counted it all joy and they turned their trial into a triumph.

OUTLINE

1. REJOICE! A joyful heart (vs. 2)
2. REALIZE! An understanding heart (vs. 3)
3. REMAIN! A surrendered heart (vs. 4)
4. RECEIVE! A prayerful heart (vs. 5)

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes