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. James 1:2-6 (NIV)

Many years ago, I was shown this little, but simple, illustration. Take your bible and into it, place this small piece of paper. (Oh, you don't have your bibles with you, again!) OK, then you will just have to watch me do this – and when you get home, you can show it to your neighbours and friends.

So, you take a piece of paper, which represents you. Place it into the bible. The bible represents Jesus. The greatest day in the life of any believer is the day he/she discovers the truth of this little illustration. You are in Christ. He has got you, in His care and that is the safest place to be!

With this firmly in your minds and hearts, today we are 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. That is why James gets down to business without much flourish or small talk**. *'Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds..."*** Basically, he is saying, 'You got problems? Be happy!"

One of the earlier paraphrases of the New Testament, the Phillips Version, puts it this way: ***"When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives my brothers, don't resent them as intruders, but <u>welcome them as friends!</u> Realise that they come to test your faith and to produce in you the quality of endurance. But let the process go on until that endurance is fully developed, and you will find you have become men of mature character with the right sort of independence."***

Welcoming problems, trials and temptations as friends!? Really!? James was not the only person to say something like this. Jesus also had this idea of rejoicing in the face of trials and troubles. ***"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*** (Matt 5:11-12 NIV). Paul too, had this crazy understanding of ***Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*** (Phil 4:4 NIV).

What James is saying is that your attitude in the midst of trials is determined by your understanding of where you are placed in Christ Jesus. Paul the apostle came under constant pressure, just read 2 Cor 11 to gain further insight into some of the things he had to endure. He said this, '***And he has anointed me as his preacher, his apostle, and his teacher of truth to the nations. The confidence of my calling enables me to overcome every difficulty without shame, for I have an intimate revelation of this God. And my faith in him convinces me that he is more than able to keep all that I've placed in his hands safe and secure until the fullness of his appearing***.' (12 Tim 1:11-12 TPT)

Knowing our place in Christ changes our attitude to the difficulties which we encounter listening to this on a daily basis. I am convinced that you are not experiencing life as a

bed of roses. For many listening to this, life for you may seem like you are on a rollercoaster on steroids!

But James is practical, and he is saying that there is something to be learned from the trials and troubles in life. You know, God never wastes an experience in our lives. He is a good, good Father! He protects us. Picture a father escorting his child to cross a busy road. He takes hold of the child's hand. The child no longer even looks left of right. The child listens to the father's voice, when to start walking. The child completely trusts the father to safely get to the other side of the road.

But then comes the day when your child asks to use the family car to take his girlfriend on a date. That's when all the years of nurturing, training and guiding is tested. So, what is God teaching us in the troubles we encounter? As Phillips Version puts it, ***Realise that they come to test your faith and to produce in you the quality of endurance.***

There are four facts of life which James claims will help us face the problems we are 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 said, *"In the world you will have tribulation."* (John 16:33). The apostle Peter knew a thing or two about troubles, trials and temptations. He stated, ***'Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.*** (1 Pet 4:12 NIV *cf* Acts 5:40).

Christians, especially those passionately in love with Jesus, encounter strong and fierce opposition from the pit of hell. Sometimes in the form of persecution. Most often in the form of daily irritations, fridges that break down, cars that won't start and you are already late for work.

But recently, Christians are encountering extreme opposition because of their moral and ethical viewpoints on issues such as abortion, gender identification challenges, assisted dying controversy & antisemitism. More and more, Christians today are hated for their faith in Jesus. More Christians have been martyred for their faith in this century than in the first three centuries of the church's history.

2. Problems are unpredictable.

He says, *"...whenever you face problems ..."* The word "face" in Greek is "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 don't wake up in the morning and decide, 'Well, today's a great day to have a crisis.' We don't plan a crisis. Crises are unpredictable. They happen when we least expect them.

3. Problems of many kinds

The Greek word translated 'Many" means diverse, variegated or multi coloured, motley, manifold. At the time of writing the Christians were experiencing many trials simply

because they were in Jesus and they responded differently to the prevailing culture of the time.

Today, Christians face trials from the cancel culture response of WOKE enthusiasts. Well, many Christians who value their place in Christ Jesus and are prepared to say no to lawlessness and permissiveness, they are bearing the brunt of trials, persecution and suffering.

But one thing is for sure, you don't get bored with problems!

4. Problems are purposeful

Problems have a purpose. As Allan so wonderfully explained to us two weeks ago, God is more interested in my growth to maturity than in my comfort. God does not waste an experience in our lives. On a more comforting note, remember that because we are in Christ, He is there with us in the troubles, trials and temptations – He does not suddenly disappear and say to us, 'You are now on your own!'

I believe there are three main purposes of problems in our lives:

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 put this way, ***But he knows where I am going. And when he tests me, I will come out as pure as gold.*** (Job 23:10 NLT2) The first things trials do is test our faith. They purify us.

Your faith develops when things don't go as planned. Your faith develops when you don't feel like doing what's right – but you decide to honour God by obeying Him. It purifies your faith. Christians are like steel; when they're tested, they come out stronger.

2) Problems fortify our patience. You of course know that patience is not an overnight development. You don't wake up one morning and 'Hey presto!", you are a patient person. It is a process. It is the mixture of time plus trouble plus obedience plus time to reflect plus time to repent plus time to learn to trust in the wisdom of God. Or as the Phillips paraphrase puts it ***But let the process go on until that endurance is fully developed.***

God uses problems in our lives to teach us how to handle pressure, how to never give up. 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.

3) Problems sanctify my character. They make me more 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."* In the Christian life, character is the bottom line. Father God has an agenda in our lives. ***It is to conform us to the image of His Son Jesus***. He wants us to respond and live in the exact same way Jesus reacted and responded to the problems He encountered. Because we are in Christ (remember the paper in the bible) and we have the Spirit of God transforming us, we have everything needed to conform to His agenda.

God uses the circumstances in our lives to help in the transformation process. I want to place this before you. In Romans 8:28 ***And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them***. That's a favourite fridge magnet or coffee cup quote. But this

verse only finds meaning in the next verse ***For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*** (Romans 8:29 NIV) Why do all things work together for good? In order to make us like Christ.

I want to land this sermon on a personal testimony, which I hope will sum up all that I have been trying to communicate. Believe me when I say that I am cutting a long story very short.

Very soon after starting seminary training, we ran out of money. The sponsoring church was paying for my studies and giving me a living allowance of R22.50 per month. With a wife and one small child, that was clearly not sufficient.

It was then that we got down on our knees and prayed. "Lord, we need financial assistance, NOW!" The only response I heard from the Lord was, "Tithe". This conversation between myself and God went on for a couple of days.

Things came to a head when we needed to buy a pumpkin, which was our son's staple diet into which we would grate liver. The cost of the pumpkin was more than the total amount of money in our possession. Our prayers got a lot louder and so did the Lord's response.

I 'eventually' caved in and decided to obey the Lord's prompting. Can I tell you that giving away R2.25 was the hardest act of obedience I had ever done! It was also the biggest step of faith I had ever taken. BUT, it was the by far the greatest learning curve I had ever experienced.

The very next morning, two ladies from the farming community of Salem, just outside then Grahamstown, knocked on our door. They gave us a two cabbage boxes full of groceries, including two large pumpkins! Within the next two weeks, two congregations from Welkom and Odendaalsrus offered to financially support my family for the rest of my study period.

God had to teach me all the uncomfortable lessons I have already alluded today.

CONCLUSION

This is what we need to know so that we can learn to handle to problems in our daily experience.

HOW TO HANDLE YOUR PROBLEMS

1. Rejoice

"Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials ..." v. 1. The word, 'consider' is an accounting term meaning 'to count'. It is a verb, a doing word. In other words, the problems, trials and difficulties are your friends. I cannot tell you the joy that was ours when those two ladies knocked on our front door!

God can use them all for your growth and His glory. What makes a difference? ***Your attitude***. Although we cannot control the circumstances that happen in our life, we can control how we will respond to them.

2. Request

Pray. We can, and most definitely should, ask God for wisdom.

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. Many years ago, I heard this phrase:

God fixes a fix to fix you, but if this fix does not fix you, then He fixes another fix to fix you. But if you unfix the fix to fix you then He will fix another fix to fix you. (You got it? So, repeat it from memory).

Wisdom is learning to see life from God's point of view. Pray for wisdom to understand the problem.

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. Relax. Let God work. You're never a failure until you quit.

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.

I want to leave you with one final thought, from the Word. ***So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honour. Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.*** 1 Peter 5:6-7 (NLT2)

MINISTRY

1. If you are encountering problems of any shape, form, or gravity
2. If you are befuddled by what is happening in your life,
3. If you are experiencing stress levels which may fill you with a sense of dread.

SOME PITHY STATEMENTS TO PONDER

1. **Most people don’t act stupid, it’s the real thing**
2. **Some minds are like concrete: thoroughly mixed up and permanently set**
3. **The trouble with the rat race is that even if you win, you’re still a rat**
4. **If you don’t care where you are, then you ain’t lost**
5. **We are the people our parents warned us about**
6. **We live in an age where pizza gets to your house before the police**
7. **Doing nothing is very hard to do, you never know when you are finished**
8. **When all else fails, lower your standards**
9. **My mind is made up, don’t confuse me with the facts**
10. **The only reason people get lost in thought is because it’s unfamiliar territory**