

Persevere Through Problems Series

May 15, 2024

Scripture: James 1:1-18

Summary: Problems are the path to perfection.

I don't know about you, but I don't like having problems in my life.

In fact, I'll do just about anything to avoid them. But avoiding problems doesn't make them go away.

Instead, often they only get worse.

Did you know that's true in our spiritual lives as well?

God has a purpose for problems in our lives. He wants to use hard circumstances to change and shape us. So instead of trying to avoid trials, we need to welcome them, to see them as opportunities for us to grow closer to God.

Problems are the path to perfection.

That's exactly the message of the passage this evening.

Look at James 1:1-18 (read verses).

Problems promote progress in our pursuit of perfection.

Instead of running away from problems and trials, we need to pursue them. We need to rejoice over them. Why should we develop this attitude?

Because trials are valuable.

Look again at verses 2 (read verse).

2My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

James commands us to consider it pure joy whenever we face trials of many kinds.

Now you notice that this is a command.

It's not natural to look forward to problems. But we need to train our minds to think in this way: trials and problems are welcome in our lives.

In fact, not only should we welcome them, but we should be happy, joyful, that they have come.

Now why in the world should we learn to think in this way?

We need to have these 180 degrees change in attitude, because trials are very valuable.

Look at what verses 3 and 4 say (read verses).

Trials are so valuable, because they are the only way, we will become all that God wants us to be. Through trials God perfects us. We become mature and complete, not lacking anything. And it's the only way we can really come to know and love God with all our hearts.

Someone said this: You'll never know that God is all you need until God is all you've got.

Think about all of the major characters in the Bible, everyone who was close to God and made a difference for God's kingdom.

How many of them went through suffering, problems and trials?

Think about Moses. He was chased out of Egypt after killing a man. He lived in the desert for 40 years before God called him. Then he had to lead the people out of Egypt. Did his problems stop after crossing the Red Sea? No the people rebelled and would have kicked him out if they could. And this man was called the friend of God.

How about King David, did he go through suffering and trials? You bet he did. After killing Goliath and becoming famous, King Saul became jealous of him and tried to kill him. David escaped, but was a fugitive, hunted by Saul until Saul's death. After Saul's death and being crowned king, was his life all peaches and cream? No, his own son conspired against him and tried to kill him. Yet David was called a man after God's heart.

And what about Paul the apostle, did he have an easy life? Not on your life. As he went and preached the gospel he faced unrelenting opposition. He was

stoned, beaten, whipped and imprisoned. And as tradition tells it, he ended up dying, burnt alive at a stake. But through this man, the Word of God spread throughout the Greek speaking world.

And of course there is Jesus Christ Himself. Did Jesus suffer? Of course He did. Remember His sacrifice for us on the cross.

Hebrews 5:7-10 makes an interesting observation of what suffering achieved in Jesus' life (read verses). It says that Jesus learned obedience through suffering and so was made perfect.

Now if Jesus had to learn through trials, problems and suffering, don't you think we have too as well?

Verses 3 and 4 in James 1 describe the process that happens when we undergo trials.

Let's look at that process more closely (read verses 3 & 4).

Trials work to test our faith until we develop perseverance. Faith makes all of the difference.

Trials hit both people with faith, and those without.

But for those who have no faith, trials are devastating. They have no one to turn to. They have no hope to carry them through.

People of God, on the other hand have the power of faith to sustain them through their trials, losses and suffering.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 says this (read verses). As Christians our faith makes all the difference. We believe that there is a God who is in control and this very trial we are facing is orchestrated by Him, not to torture us, but to refine us, to make us more like Christ. And we believe that the end result will be good.

In fact, it will be more than good. It will be glorious. No matter how bad things are on this earth, there is an eternity where God will wipe away every tear and heal every disease.

Faith is crucial in our dealing with problems. But there is a further step in the process of problems perfecting us.

For trials to fulfill God's purpose in our lives, we must endure them. Gold won't be refined if it is only left in the fire until it is half melted and then taken out. It must stay in the furnace until it becomes all liquid so that the dross, the impurities can float to the top and be skimmed off.

In the same way, for trials to complete their work in us, we must persevere under them. This word persevere is translated in different ways in different versions of the Bible.

It's translated as "endure" in the NASB.

In the KJV it is rendered as "patience".

In the ESV the word used is "steadfastness".

The word means remaining under the pressure of problems. It means bearing with the trial and not being beaten down and crushed. It means keeping going even when we think we can't go on anymore. This is also true in the spiritual realm.

Read through Revelation 2 and the same refrain ends each letter to the churches: "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life".

Perseverance, endurance, patience, indomitable spirit, that's the key to grow spiritually. And we only develop this essential quality through trials, suffering and loss.

And as we develop perseverance, then problems become the path to perfection.

But though trials are valuable, they are still hard.

In the rest of the passage there are instructions to help us endure trials, grow in perseverance, and become mature and complete.

The first instruction is this: Get help. We were never designed to handle the difficulties of life by ourselves. That's why the next verses urge us to turn to God.

Look at verse 5 (read verse). I think it is perfectly natural for people to turn the God and pray when they undergo hardship. It's been said that as long as they have exams, they'll never be able to ban prayer from schools.

But when we have a problem and we go to God for help, how do we pray? Well, for me, I'll often pray for God to take the problem away. I'll ask Him to heal me, or to give me a job, or to fix this broken relationship, or to take this difficult person out of my life.

But according to verse 5, what should we ask for? We should ask for wisdom.

That may seem strange to us at first, but if we think about it, it makes perfect sense.

In verses two to four we learned that trials are valuable and that they must finish their work before we can be all that God wants us to be.

If that's true, then it's just making sense that God won't change our circumstances to relieve our pain. He allowed them into our lives to achieve good. So instead of praying for God to change our circumstances, what should we pray for? We should pray for wisdom.

Wisdom will allow us to see how God is using this trial in our lives to mold us and shape us into godly people. You know it's tough enough to go through a trial and learn and grow from it. What a waste it would be to go through suffering and miss the point and not learn anything. That's why we need God's wisdom. We need wisdom to understand what God is doing in our lives. Once we understand that, we will understand how we should respond to the trial.

There is a condition though. Not everyone who asks for wisdom will get it. Look at verses 6 and 7 (read verses). If we want to receive wisdom from God, then we need to believe and not doubt.

Does this mean that we can't have any questions in our mind?

Does it mean that our faith must be so great, that we are unshakeable?

Well, I don't think so. I think of what Jesus says about faith. He says that if our faith is as big as a mustard seed, we can move mountains. How big is a mustard seed? It's tiny. It's 1/16 of an inch. If you laid 8 mustard seeds side by side, they would be the size of a grain of salt. You see the issue isn't how great and strong our faith is, the issue is who do we have our faith in.

You see it doesn't matter how much faith you have in something if it isn't trustworthy.

We can have small faith, but if it's in the right person, then we will be fine. But we can have a strong, powerful faith in the wrong thing and we will still face disaster. The NLT translates verse 6 as: "be sure that your faith is in God alone."

When we are double-minded, we are not putting our full trust in God. A double-minded person will ask God for help, but he will also try to make his own plan of getting out of the mess that he's in.

That kind of person can't expect to have his prayers answered. When we come to God, crying for help in our struggles, we need to depend on Him alone.

How do we endure trials? Get help.

There is a second thing we need to do to persevere under trials.

Judge right.

When God does give us wisdom, then we will be able to judge our lives and the lives of others from God's point of view. And often God's perspective is 180 degrees opposite to the world's viewpoint.

Look at verses 9-12 (read verses).

Doesn't this verse sound backwards to you?

Those in humble circumstances, the poor, ought to take pride in their high position.

The rich on the other hand should be humble.

Why should the rich be humble?

It's because what they have won't last. It will all fade away.

On the other hand, the person who perseveres, who endures under trials will receive a crown that will last for eternity.

Psalm 73 lays it out for us. Verses 4-12 describe how we often view people who are rich (read verses).

When we look at the wealthy in this way, it's no wonder we have problems persevering. Why should we endure problems following God, when we could follow the rich and live a life of prosperity and ease? That's exactly the thoughts of verses 13-14 (read verses).

But then the Psalm writer gets the right perspective.

Look at verses 16-20 (read verses).

The rich may look like they have it made, but their life is hanging by a thread. They will be swept away like a bad dream. The comfort and ease they enjoy now is just a blimp on the radar screen of eternity. It just won't last.

But for those who live for God and love Him with all their hearts, they will receive a reward that will never fade away and this reward will satisfy every need and fulfill our every desire.

What reward is this? It's God, Himself. Look at verses 23-26 (read verses). These are some of the most precious verses in the Bible to me.

Once we are with our God, then nothing on earth, no new car, or mansion or anything else will mean anything. Isn't that worth persevering for?

We need to judge right.

We need to see our troubles and hardships from God's perspective.

Problems are the path to perfection when we will see God face to face. Undergoing any trial is worth that.

How do we endure problems? First, we need to get help.

Second, we need to judge right.

But there is a third thing we must do. Stay pure.

Look at verses 13 to 15 (read verses). When trials hit, we have a choice.

We can persevere under the trial, or we can try to escape and run away.

When we try to run, we run right into the sin.

We give in to fear and we think of any way to get out of our situation, even if we act against what the Bible teaches.

What are some examples? Think about marriage. A husband and wife hit some very difficult relationship issues, but instead of persevering and working it out, they decide to get a divorce. This even happens in Christian marriages. Or think about financial problems. A man has large amounts of debt, but instead of trying to work it out and repay all that he has borrowed, he decides to declare bankruptcy and defaults on his loans. Or you may be really struggling with a subject in school and though you've tried, you can't get the marks you need.

So, on the next test you decide to cheat. After all everyone else is doing it and they don't get caught. In fact, because others cheat it makes it unfair for you since you don't. But what does the Bible say?

Trials are an opportunity for spiritual growth, but they also offer an excuse to sin.

We act in an unbiblical manner and then we say that the trial was too hard for us.

We just couldn't take it anymore.

We had to get out of the situation by any way necessary.

We didn't have a choice. But that kind of thinking is a lie.

God will never allow us to face circumstances beyond our ability to bear.

Look at 1 Cor. 10:13 (read verse). God will always give us the strength that we need to persevere under any trial or temptation He has allowed in our lives.

In reality, the temptation doesn't come from our circumstances; it comes from within us.

Look at verse 14 (read verse). We can't blame God for circumstances forcing us to sin. The fault lies within us. And if we continue in this lifestyle, we will face disaster.

That's exactly what verse 15 says (read verse). Persevering under trials may be hard, but trying to escape through sin, though it might gain us a temporary reprieve, in the end the result will be death.

How do we persevere under trials?

First, we need to get help.

Second, we need to judge right.

And third we need to stay pure.

The fourth way to endure problems is this: Trust God.

Look at verses 16 to 18 (read verses). God is the only real source for good and perfect gifts.

In our experience with sufferings and trials, we need to believe this truth. The truth is, we may very well never understand in this life the reason for the trials and suffering that we go through. We may never see how our pain and loss fits into God's plan. But through it all we have to hold on to these beliefs: God is good, and He will make all wrongs right and heaven is real and is better than we could ever imagine.

There's poem that says;

I believe in the sun even when it is not shining.

I believe in love even when there's no one there.

And I believe in God even when he is silent.

I believe through any trial there is always a way.

May there someday be sunshine.

May there someday be happiness.

May there someday be love.

May there someday be peace....

And you know, someday there will be sunshine, happiness, love, and peace, and God Himself who will answer every question, wipe away every tear, heal every disease and free us to live forever with Him. Believe that and endure the trial. Trust God.

Problems are the path to perfection. How do we persevere under trials?

- 1. Get help.**
- 2. Judge right.**
- 3. Stay pure.**
- 4. Trust God.**