

How To Cope When Things Are Bad – James 5:7-12

Bibles (James 5:7-12); Ever noticed how people cope differently with hard times?

Some shrink back; Some lash out; Some live in denial; Some hang for dear life (frog)

Some sit and stare; Some forget everything they ever knew about life and godliness

We all tend to cope with hard times differently, but cope we must

Because whether we like it or not – sometimes things are really bad in our lives

We live in a fallen world where circumstances are difficult, situations crummy, and conditions terrible . . . Sometimes life just plain stinks

And after warning the indulgent rich in v1-6, that hard times are coming . . .

He turns to those who bare the brunt of that indulgence, those for whom hard times are the norm – and tells them how to cope

Something I think we could *all* use some help with every now and then

James 5:7-12 – When things are bad, James starts w/ a very simple encouragement to . . .

Hang in there (v7-8a)

Read v7a; *Be patient* – stay put and stand fast when you’d like to run away

Hang in there – and not just barely, but triumphantly

Jesus didn’t hang in there in death so you could hang by a thread and barely get by in life

He hung in there so you could experience life to the full, even when things are bad

How is that possible when I’m at the end of my rope and the bottom of my barrel?

How is that possible when . . . My business is bankrupt or my house is destroyed?

When my loved one is dead or my daughter is dying?

When my spouse has left me or my best friend hates me?

How can I hang in there triumphantly, when it can’t get any worse in my life?

The answer is that, it will get better; Hang in there, because it *will* get better

Be patient, therefore brothers, until the coming of the Lord (7)

The implication being, that when Jesus gets here, everything will be better

He will heal all wounds; Wipe all tears; Sooth all hurts; Mend all brokenness

No matter how hard life is, when Jesus returns, it will all be better

That’s how we can hang in there when things are bad – because we know there’s light at the end of the tunnel, even if we can’t see it

• It’s like when you got hurt as a kid – all you wanted was your mom

Why? Because she made everything better; Just her very presence made you feel better

I remember one time – I think I was about 8 years old

Playing “dirt bikes” – jumping our bicycles over a ramp; Decided I was going for it

So I pedaled as fast as I could, and pulled up as hard as I could

As soon as I left that ramp I knew I was in trouble, because I started rotating in mid-air, flipped upside down, and landed on my back in a patch of sandburs

With the wind knocked out of me, and sandburs sticking out of my back

I just started running for home; As soon as I could get a breath, I yelled, “Mom!”

And kept screaming until she met me; As soon as she did, *everything* was better

I hung in there because I knew it would be better if I could just make it to her

Same is true when things are bad in our lives –

If we just hang in there until he returns, everything will be better

Our patient endurance will produce precious fruit

• Like the farmer (7b) who – *waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains.*

That’s a farmer’s life, isn’t it? They plant, it rains, the crop grows, it rains some more

And eventually, having been patient, they harvest the precious fruit

The question is – how can they be so patient? How can they hang in there during the intervening dry months when it doesn’t look so good?

Answer is – because they know the script

They know what’s going to happen in the end, before they ever begin

And so do we – we know the script of our lives; we’ve read the last chapter

And we have the sure and everlasting promise of God himself, that it will get better, that precious fruit awaits – if we’re patient

So no matter how bad things are in your life – hang in there, triumphantly even

And keep the end in sight – *the coming of the Lord*

Confident that when he does, the fortunes of this life will be reversed, and everything will be better

8b – *Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand; IOW . . .*

Strengthen your resolve (v8b)

Solidify your staying power; Make firm your convictions, and finish strong . . .

Because relief is near – *the coming of the Lord is at hand*; It draws closer and closer

The closer I got to home (when hurt) the more resolved I was to get there/persevere

It’s like a tired/battered soldier in the middle of a fierce battle, that’s not going well at all

And more than anything he just wants to give it up and throw in the towel

But because he knows reinforcements are coming, he strengthens his resolve to keep fighting, and fight well

It’s the knowledge and certainty of the reinforcements that strengthens his resolve

In the same way, the knowledge and certainty of Christ’s return should strengthen *our* resolve when things are bad in *life*

We don’t know when he’s coming, but we *do* know; And when he does, victory is sure

Which should strengthen our resolve to fight the good fight and keep the faith, no matter how bad it gets

• This has never been so crucial as it is now

And it will be even more so tomorrow, 1 day closer to the last days and Christ’s return

And though we may get a temporary reprieve now and then . . .

In general, life as we know it is not going to get any easier, or any better

In fact, as we approach the end times, things will get progressively worse the Bible says . .

Until the Great Tribulation when God unleashes his wrath on those in rebellion

And the powers of darkness respond with a fury as yet unseen on this earth

And those who are alive and remain will suffer more than we ever thought possible

No wonder James says – *Establish your hearts*

It’s the only way to cope when things go from bad to worse

But when they do, we can draw strength from the fact that with Christ, comes victory

So whether it's good times or bad, strengthen your resolve to . . .
Hang in there and stand firm in the things of the Lord
To love him with all your heart/soul/mind/strength; Avoid sin and resist temptation

So that you can say like Paul in **2 Cor 4:8-9** – *We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed*
When things are bad, strengthen your resolve to stay the course – because relief is near

Then, in v9, after telling us what *to* do, he tells us what *not* to do (read v9)
Stick together (v9)
Having begun the paragraph by referring to the coming of the Lord as a time of relief in order to comfort us, and help us cope when things are bad . . .
Here in v9, he reminds us that Christ's coming will also include a serious assessment of our soul
Which is never so much at risk, as when things are bad – because that's when we tend to grumble the most

Isn't that true in your family? That when things are bad, grumbling is the default?
It could be innocent as – “Dad, are we there yet?” To . . .
I can't believe you didn't make the reservations! What are going to do, sleep in the car?
(Any resemblance to real persons or events is entirely coincidental here)

Isn't that what we tend to do when things are bad – take it out on those closest to us?
Especially in the family of God
We divide ourselves into little pockets of those who agree with us, vs those who don't
And instead of sticking together, we tear ourselves apart
James is like – you do that, and you're gonna have to answer for it
You will be judged accordingly

- I praise God he's protected us in this – protected us from the grumbling that divides so many churches
But it doesn't just happen – just like you have to be proactive about it your *own* family, we have to be proactive about it in our *church* family
We've tried to be diligent about that as leaders, and lovingly lean into problems and problem people, and speak the truth in love
There's little doubt that God has blessed that in our church

But we're not immune; We're not immune from . . .
Complaining, grumbling, back-biting, in-fighting when things aren't going well
We're not immune fr people who look for things that are wrong even when they're not
Who complain just because they're dissatisfied; Or nit-pick because they want attention
We're not immune from that

Few things are more divisive in a church
Few things divide us more, when we need each other the most
We *will* answer for it if we ever succumb to that – *the Judge is standing at the door*
Hearing every word, and knowing every heart

- When things are bad, stick together

Squelch the grumbling that divides and stay close to those who love you most
There's no better way to cope

Then in v10, he returns to the idea of patience when things are bad, and says . . . (v10-11)
When things are bad and at their worst . . .

Imitate the best (v10-11)

Don't pick some half-hearted hero to follow, who barely limped over the finish line
Look to those who finished *strong*; Look to the *best* and imitate them

That's what the word *example* means – refers to someone that spurs others to imitation
10 – *As an example* of someone to imitate when it comes to *suffering and patience, take the prophets*; Consider their life – see what they did; how they persevered
Not only did they do God's work; But they *remained steadfast* in doing so, even when things were bad

Consequently, they were *blessed* – privileged and fortunate in their relationship with God, even though many of them didn't experience his full blessing until the other side of heaven
In fact, Heb 11:13 says – they only saw the things promised from *afar*

- All of which means, that when things are bad, we're not alone
We have many godly examples, like Job and the prophets, to imitate
People who have endured far worse than we ever will, and yet kept the faith

Like **Heb 11:35-38** says – *Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life* [they remained faithful to God because of the hope set before them]. *Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated – of whom the world was not worthy – wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

When things are bad, you're not alone
That's the first thing to remember when you're struggling to cope
There are many others who have gone before you, and you can look to their life to find strength in yours

- People like Isaiah – who spoke to a people he knew would not listen, and according to tradition was sawn in two for it
Jeremiah – who because of his unrelenting faithfulness in preaching God's word, was arrested as a traitor, and thrown into an abandoned well to die
Micaiah – a prophet during Ahab's wicked reign, who was thrown into prison and fed bread and water for saying the nation would collapse because of its sin
Ezekiel – who persevered through the loss of his wife (*the delight of his eyes*), when God took her as an example and a sign to the sinful people around him . . .
Of what would happen to their loved ones when God judges them
Daniel – thrown into the lions den for praying, and showed no fear in doing so

John the Baptist – who was beheaded because he spoke the truth and was hated for it
Stephen (leader, NT church) – stoned to death because he upset the religious status quo

Paul – persecuted, beaten, flogged, imprisoned . . . for spreading the word
Remember, James himself was stoned to death, according to a 2nd cent historian
Because he refused to renounce his commitment to Jesus

Every single one of these men . . . Remained steadfast when times were bad
Kept the faith and maintained their integrity no matter what their circumstance
Waited patiently for the Lord to transform their situation
Their example ought to encourage us to do the same

- Then there’s Job, who he mentions by name – the example “par excellence”
The ultimate example of steadfastness during hard times, and the blessing he received because of it
He was stripped of his health, wealth, and family
His friends opposed him; His wife was a downer; God wouldn’t answer him
Although he complained bitterly about his treatment – struggling and questioning, and sometimes even defying God . . .
He *never* abandoned his faith; The flame of hope was never extinguished in his heart

In the end, his integrity/faithfulness was rewarded, wasn’t it
Showing that *the Lord is compassionate and merciful* (11b)
That God really *is* good, and that he really does reward those whose hearts are completely his – no matter how bad things get

That doesn’t mean that material prosperity is always the reward
And it doesn’t mean that it always comes on this side of heaven
There are too many examples to the contrary in the Bible, for that conclusion
But James does encourage us to imitate the best when things are at their worst . . .
Because like them, we can be confident that in the end, God will bless

Then he ends by saying this (v12)
Certainly this truth applies to all times, just like the others do
But it’s especially important when things are bad, to . . .
Keep it real (v12)
To say it like it is, do what you say, and not play games

How easy is it when things are bad . . . To say things you don’t mean?
To make foxhole bargains with God – “I swear God, I’ll live right”
Or fudge on the truth in your desperation to change the situation
Or sugar coat things to make yourself look better than you really are

James is like, don’t go there, because you will be judged for it – you’ll *fall under condemnation*
It’s the same thing Jesus said in **Mt 12:36-37** – *I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.*
We will be judged for our words

- But to get the full force of this, it’s necessary to understand some background re oaths
In the OT, vows/oaths were a legitimate part of communication

Deut 10:20 – *You shall fear the Lord your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear.*
Oaths were legit

And once made, they were not to be broken under any circumstance
Nu 30:2 – *If a man vows a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.*
So oaths/promises/vows were a legitimate part of life

The problem arose around the time of Christ, when some rabbis began to teach that an oath was not binding if it omitted God’s name or did not imply it
So if you swore by some person or some thing, but avoided mentioning or implying God, you were not bound to your promise or statement
In fact, the Mishnah (compilation of Jewish oral law), devotes a whole section to an elaborate discussion of when oaths are binding, and when they’re not

The final effect, whether intended or not, was disingenuous speech
People would say things to make you *think* they were telling the truth, when they really weren’t
Kind of like a grown-up version of having your fingers crossed when u say something

James is saying here – knock it off
Keep it simple and say it like it is – in good times *or* in bad
Do what you say, and don’t play games . . .
No matter how strong the temptation to come off looking better than you are
No matter who’s involved; No matter how bad it gets
Keep it real – because the name and fame of Jesus is still on the line

Hard times don’t excuse you from being a faithful ambassador for Christ
From representing him to those who watch
From telling the truth and keeping your word
When things are bad – do what you say, say what you do, and keep it real