

### When Times Are Tough – James 1:2-4

We're in James 1:2-4 having just started our series – Get Serious About Your Walk

And because James wastes no time in getting right to it, I won't either (Bibles)

You may remember that he was writing to people who were going through tough times, because they were rejected for who they were, and what they believed  
So James decides to be extra encouraging here, and says (James 1:2-4). . .

And they must have thought – “How nice, a letter from Pastor Wacko”

“Easy for him to say”

But on closer inspection, they must have realized (and we must too), that the principles involved here are *invaluable* for a victorious walk with Christ

The first of which is – when times are tough . . .

#### **Don't be surprised**

Though few would disagree with this truth, far too many are living in denial about it

And that your faith will be shaken to the core when you encounter tough times

The key word being “when”

The text says – *when* you meet trials of various kinds, not “if”

- Tough times in life are a given – for everybody  
We live in a fallen world, with sinful people, and a creation that groans to be freed from its bondage to decay (Rom 8:21)  
People die; People get sick; People get hurt  
Natural disasters befall; Things break; Accidents happen  
Tough times in life are a given for everybody  
I wish that I could spare myself and every one of you from them – but I can't

Despite the fact that I pray every day that God will protect our church family – I know that sometimes bad things will happen to some of you because we live in a fallen world  
I expect it and you should too

Why God allows the righteous to suffer is one of the most difficult and perplexing questions we can ask

While the Bible does give us answers, James barely touches it

But implicit in what he *does* say, is a conviction that the suffering of believers is always under the providential control of a God who loves us and is faithful to his promises

I'm convinced that far more would go wrong in the family of God, were it not for his divine protection, often times in response to our prayers  
But the fact remains that God does not spare us from every single hardship  
So don't be surprised, and don't let it shake your faith, when it happens

- Tough times are a given for believers – followers of Jesus Christ  
**Jn 16:33** – *In the world you will have tribulation.*  
**Acts 14:22** – *Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God*  
**1 Pet 4:12** – *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.*

Don't be surprised, even as a child of God, when tough times arise  
We are God's *scattered* people, not God's *sheltered* people

Whether from the persecution of man, the schemes of the devil, or the struggle of our flesh – tough times are a given for believers

The rubber meets the road here when it comes to our loved ones, doesn't it

If you live in denial thinking your loved ones will live forever – what's that going to do to your faith when they don't?

If you think you can spare your family/kids from every single hurt that comes along – What are you going to do when you fail?

Most people in this world live in denial, hoping against hope that bad things won't happen to them

As mature followers of Jesus Christ, we should be different

When you meet trials of various kinds, don't be surprised

#### **Consider yourself fortunate (v2-3)**

That's what it means to *count it all joy*

Tough times don't *have* to be all gloom and doom – in fact, they shouldn't be

*When you meet trials of various kinds* – when you encounter or “fall into” difficulties due to disappointment, injury, loneliness, criticism, fear, persecution, early pregnancy . . .

*Count it all joy* – adopt and retain an outlook of joy

Not a pretense of joy, but genuinely joyful attitude

- Obviously, this is a matter of the will, *not* our emotions  
Nobody *feels* joyful when they're devastated  
Nobody *feels* joyful when they've just been served divorce papers, or lost a child, or had their home broken into  
But God tells us here through James, that by a conscious decision of our will . . .  
We can and should consider ourselves fortunate in the midst of trial

If you're a rational person, about now you're thinking – that's crazy

Count it all *joy* when I go through tough times?! *That's* a denial of reality

No, it's a sincere trust in God's goodness/promise to work all things together for good

To use tough times for our benefit and his glory

And you can be assured that because God commands it, you can do it

He'll never lead where he doesn't provide

One of the best examples of that I've run into recently comes from the Peace Child – true story of Don and Carol Richardson, missionaries to PauPau Indonesia in early 60's  
Don recounts the first day, showing up at the village of cannibalistic headhunters where they had chosen to make their home

With his wife and 7 month old baby in tow, they were met by 200 tribesmen in full body paint, spears in hand, standing on the shore – not knowing what intentions were

As soon as they stepped ashore, they were enveloped by an intense throng of dancing, shouting, jumping tribesmen

To their relief, they soon figured out it was a celebration and not a funeral

After a full night, that actually went on for 3 days, Don and Carol lay inside their hut, underneath their mosquito net on their little mat – baby Stephen nestled between

He said, honey, close your eyes and tell me what you see . . .

She began to recount the full day of travel – going through the swampland, then the jungle in the dugout canoe  
Seeing birds, sunset, then the warriors dancing all around them to the beat of their drums and shrill cries  
Then she said this – “But I’m not afraid. I feel so different, as if God has given me *new emotional responses* to enable me to live here.”

That’s exactly what James is talking about here  
When times are tough, we can count it all joy because we can count on God to give us new emotional responses to do it  
He never leads where he doesn’t provide – but he expects us to follow

Having said that, James is *not* suggesting that joy s/b our *only* response in tough times  
He’s not saying – “never be grieved by difficulties, never be upset”  
The word *all* suggests intensity, not exclusivity  
In other words – joy is not the only legitimate emotion in tough times, but it should *never* be absent; it should *never* be lacking; Why? . . .

- **Because tough times produce perseverance**

When times are tough, you can consider yourself fortunate b/c tough times produce P  
That’s what the verse says – *the testing of your faith produces steadfastness*  
Staying power; A courageous perseverance in the face of suffering and difficulty

The point is – you should consider yourself fortunate because – *you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness*  
You can be confident of good result – which is increased P to endure tough times

The word steadfastness literally means – “to bear up under”  
Like bearing up under the weight of someone on your back, and sticking with it, beyond what you think you’re able – that’s P  
It may not be pleasant at the time, but in the long run, you’ll be better off for it  
Don’t know of better example to illustrate, than this scene from Facing the Giants (**video**)  
Tough times produce P – *if* you keep going; and don’t quit; and give it your best

- 2 things are implied here – We *need* P; It doesn’t come *easy*  
Since James is addressing believers, the testing of our faith is *not* intended to determine whether we have it or not  
Rather, it’s intended to purify/refine what already exists  
In order for that to happen, we *need* to persevere in order to excel in our faith

It’s like a butterfly getting out of its cocoon  
Biologists say that if you relieve it of its struggle to break free, you essentially destroy its life because it won’t have the strength to soar as it should  
So too, if God were to relieve us of all struggle, and we didn’t persevere in it – we’d never learn, nor be able, to soar like we should

But that P doesn’t come easy – second implication of this text  
We are not prone to persevere; We are prone to ease  
P is a learned thing, and there’s only one way to learn it – the hard way

I can talk about P until I’m blue in the face  
Tell you how hard it is; What the benefits are  
You can read a book, pray a prayer, or listen to 10 messages if you want  
But the only way for you to *grow* in P, is to do it  
To patiently endure the trials you meet  
That’s why you can consider yourself fortunate when times are tough

**Tough it out (v4)**

When times are tough – don’t be surprised, consider yourself fortunate, and tough it out  
As in – *let steadfastness have its full effect* (v4)  
Stay in the game; Don’t short-circuit the process and don’t throw in the towel  
Throw the towel away

When times are tough in your marriage, your job, your ministry  
Or in your battle against lust, greed, gossip, materialism, or a lack of contentment  
Whatever it is – when times are tough, tough it out  
If you don’t, you’ll miss the benefits

You’ll miss the *full effect* of what God wants to accomplish in you . . .

- **Because the benefits of perseverance take time**

It takes *time* to see the fruit of persevering in a difficult marriage  
It takes *time* to see the benefits of loving a prodigal son or daughter  
It takes *time* to see the full effect of forgiving someone who wronged you  
The benefits of tough times take time – so *let steadfastness have its full effect*

You know how a pearl is produced, right?  
A piece of sand gets inside an oyster shell, and causes an irritation – a tough time  
Slowly, over time, the oyster surrounds that grain of sand with tissue that hardens smooth  
Forming layer upon layer until it’s no longer an irritation, but a beautiful pearl  
Had the oyster not toughed it out, the benefits would never be seen

Is that not what God wants us to do?  
To tough it out when irritating situations come our way, and in so doing create pearls out of tough times?  
It is – the result is a beautiful, pearl-adorned life, pleasing to God, encouraging to others

Have you seen people like that?  
People who are beautiful/attractive, not because of their looks, but b/c of their pearls?  
Their trials turned triumph because they toughed it out over a long period of time?  
I want to be like that

Tough it out because the benefits of P take time . . .

- **And the result of perseverance is maturity**

4 – *Let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing*  
*Perfect* – mature; *Complete* – whole, of sound mind and heart  
*Lacking in nothing* – having all the attributes/virtues of godliness at your disposal, *including* the desire to apply them

P in tough times leads to maturity

That ongoing process whereby a thousand parts of our character are constantly being honed, shaped, tempered, strengthened, and unified into a complete package that lives life to the full and glorifies God more and more

That's spiritual maturity – the result of P and the God's goal for our lives

God desires that we grow up in Christ

Mature in our actions and our thoughts; Able to discern what is better and best

Tried and true by good times *and* bad

God doesn't save us so that we would remain in the spiritual nursery all our lives, to be spoon fed like babies and led around like toddlers

He saves us so that we will grow up – *perfect and complete, lacking in nothing* as followers of his Son

And he uses tough times to make it happen – *if* we persevere

Maturity is God's goal for our lives, it comes as a result of P . . .

And it's revealed by strings upon strings of trials turned pearls

### **Summary**

When times are tough – don't be surprised

Rather, consider yourself fortunate, and tough it out

Because the benefits take time, and the result is maturity in Christ

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