

- Is there someone you know individually, or a situation of which you know as a group where someone is facing trouble or tough circumstances? How can you as an individual or the group comfort others with the comfort we have received from God? Keep an eye out in the months to come!

As your time together continues, spend some time praying using the following guidelines. For some of you, praying in a group and sharing may be a new experience – that’s OK. Just contribute at the level which you feel is comfortable for you. You may want for example to pray a simple one-liner. Areas for prayer...



WORSHIPPING. Spend some time thanking God that He has a purpose even in our troubles. Our lives are not a tangled mess, even at times when we don’t understand what is going on in them. Acknowledge that His agenda for our lives is Christ-likeness, that and so even our problems are Father-filtered.



CARING. Pray for anyone in the group or who has a connection with the group who may be experiencing certain struggles at the moment. Pray for each other, that when trouble comes (and it will), that God might give us wisdom to see our lives and our situations from His perspective, and that we might have the wisdom to ask God, ‘what do you want me to learn from this situation?’



ENGAGING. You will hopefully have received a ‘circles of life’ diagram. Spend some time both tonight and over the course of the next week or so prayerfully listing 1-2 people in each circle who don’t know Jesus and don’t as yet know the resources of the Lord for when they face trouble in their lives. Over the course of the forthcoming weeks you’ll be encouraged to pray for these people – praying for them helps us to develop a heart for them.

midweek ministry @ Ballyloughan

worshipping, growing, caring, serving, engaging

James: A down-to-earth faith
1 - How to face trouble (1:2-8)
Notes for 26th September Teaching Night

Introduction

James: a really ‘down-to-earth’ letter full of practical application. Written v1, to “*the Twelve tribes scattered among the nations*” - Christians scattered across the known world, forced out of their home city of Jerusalem because of persecution (see Acts 8:1-3, Acts 11:19-21). James (the half-brother of Jesus) was their pastor back in Jerusalem. The danger for these Christians was to quietly slip into the background, for their faith to become almost a hobby. But James writes with much to challenge and much to encourage.

HOW TO FACE TROUBLE

I. FOUR FACTS OF LIFE YOU NEED TO KNOW...

- i. **Problems are _____.** “*whenever you face trials...*” v2
- ii. **Problems are _____.** “*whenever you face trials...*” v2
Literally ‘fall into unexpectedly’.
- iii. **Problems of _____.** “*whenever you face trials of many kinds...*” v2. Literally ‘multi-coloured trials.’
- iv. **Problems are _____.** The overriding belief in our western world today is that problems are a bad thing, to be avoided at all costs. But James says that problems have a purpose, pain can be productive, suffering can accomplish something.

II. THREE PURPOSES OF PROBLEMS...

- i. **Problems purify my _____.** “*the testing of your faith...*” v3.
1 Peter 1:7: “*all kinds of trials have come so that your faith...may be proved genuine...*” Problems test our faith to show if it’s the real thing. Remember the parable of the sower? Christians are like tea-bags illustration! Alec Motyer: “*we say that we believe God is our Father, but as long as we remain untested on the point, our belief falls short of steady conviction. But suppose the day comes – as it*

does and will – when circumstances seem to mock our creed, when the cruelty of life denies his fatherliness, his silence calls into question his almightiness, and the sheer haphazard, meaningless jumble of events challenges the possibility of a Creator’s ordering hand. It is in this way that life’s trials test our faith for genuineness.”

ii. Problems strengthen my _____. “the testing of your faith develops *perseverance*” v3 - endurance, stickability, strong consistency. Young couple encountering challenges in their relationship illustration! It’s the same with us and God - He uses problems to bring us closer to himself, to develop strong consistency.

iii. Problems help me _____. “...must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” v4. God’s long range goal for our lives, His ultimate purpose for us is Christ-likeness. Romans 8:29 - God’s intention for us is that we may ‘be conformed to the likeness of his Son.’ God is more interested in building my character than He is in making me comfortable, more interested in making me holy than constantly happy. He uses problems to help me grow in Christ-likeness. They make me like Jesus. They help me mature - many Christians have no idea of what God’s agenda is for their lives, and as a result they are overwhelmed when problems come. The most godly Christians are regularly those whose faith has been tested through the fire of trials, who have been tenderized by pain.

III. HOW TO HANDLE YOUR PROBLEMS

i. R _____. “Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials...” v2. James does not mean that we should be happy all the time or go around wearing an SWEG – a Sickly Wet Evangelical Grin! God never belittles our pain. He knows what it’s like to face trials of many kinds because He’s been there and done it. ‘Rejoicing’ means having a state of settled contentment as we know that God can take even the bad in our lives and bring good out of it, that He uses even trials, great calamities, small pressures, and overwhelming sorrows as a means of achieving the goal of Christ-likeness in our lives. It’s knowing that my loving Father uses trouble for His perfecting ends.

ii. R _____. “if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously without finding fault, and it will be given to him” v5. In the tangle of our problems, we should ask God for wisdom - so that we aren’t overwhelmed, so that we don’t see life as a purposeless mess, so that we might see how trials can be used for God’s purposes, so that we don’t waste the opportunity to grow. Wise people ask, “Lord, what are you wanting to teach me here? What do you want me to learn. What characteristics do you want me to develop?”

Follow-on Material for 3rd October

NB: This is only a guide...pick and choose your questions!



GROWING

- How does our society normally react to the idea of hardship and trouble?
- Read James 1v4; Romans 8v29; Ephesians 4v24b. What is God’s unwavering agenda for our lives? How does God’s agenda for us sometimes conflict with our own agenda for our lives?
- With this in mind, share why James says that we ought to “consider it pure joy” when we face trouble. Does this mean that we should look for problems? Does it mean that we don’t pray against problems?
- What assurance does James have about the results that come from the various trials of life? (vs 3,4)
- How does a person’s relationship with God change as he / she goes through trials and problems? (vs 3,4)
- Most of the time we don’t understand why problems come our way or what their purpose could be. In v5 however, how does James encourage us? How can these words help us when we find ourselves in circumstances that don’t make sense to us?
- What do you think James would say to a follower of Jesus who was ready to ‘pack-in’ their faith in the middle of a trial?
- What good has ever come out of a difficult situation in your life?



SERVING

- Read together 2 Corinthians 1:3-5. According to these verses, how can the difficulties of life prepare you and provide opportunities to serve others? Have you seen this at work in your life either as a recipient of the comfort of others or a comfort provider?