

Note: The sermon below will be delivered by the Rev. Caleb Kim on Sunday, June 1, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. at St. Andrew's Fenelon Falls and via Zoom.

Title: How to Profit from Our Problems

Series: Developing a Faith That Works - Part 1 of 6

I believe many of us remember the late Stephen Covey's well-known book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Since its publication in 1989, this book has inspired countless readers to pursue personal growth. As the title suggests, Covey outlined seven powerful habits that help people succeed in life. One of these habits, "Put First Things First," is often illustrated with a memorable object lesson involving a container and several items: water, sand, small gravel, and large rocks.

I've shared this illustration before, but I believe it is worth repeating. Imagine being asked to fit all of those items into one container... The lesson from this simple illustration is powerful: we must prioritize the most important things in life first.

Likewise, how we use our time reflects our priorities. In this bright season, God calls us to put first things first: our relationship with Jesus Christ, our connection with loved ones, our physical well-being, our work or studies, and our service to the church and community. When we begin each day with prayer and time in Scripture, everything else can fall into its proper place. That is how we live a fruitful and successful life.

Today we begin a new sermon series based on the Book of James—one of the most practical books in the entire Bible. It is often called a divine manual on maturity. One of the great challenges we face in our society—and within the church—is immaturity. We get ourselves into trouble by saying immature things, making immature decisions, and behaving in immature ways. But God calls us to grow, to develop, and to reach "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

One of the core ministries of our church, I believe, is to help every person grow—spiritually, emotionally, mentally—so that we can walk with God courage and confidence.

Before we go any further, let us take a moment to define maturity from a spiritual point of view. There are many common myths about it. Maturity is not age. Maturity is not appearance. Maturity is not achievement. Maturity is not academic.

According to the Bible, maturity is about attitude. It is about character. As the American evangelist D.L. Moody once said, "Character is what you are in the dark." A person's true character is revealed in what they do when no one is watching. We may think that no one ever will know—but remember: God knows. You know. And often, others come to know, too.

Throughout this summer, we will explore how to grow into mature Christians through the teachings of James. This morning we begin with the first message in this series: "How to Profit from Our Problems."

James 1:2 says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds..." The New King James Version puts it this way: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials..."

Let us be honest: our natural response to trials is not joy. We might say, "You don't know what I am going through." But James is inviting us to adopt a higher perspective. So how can we be positive in the face of problems?

Before we answer that question, I want us to look at four facts about problems that can leave us discouraged or tempted to give up. Then, we will reflect on three purposes behind those problems—God's purposes.

Firstly, problems are inevitable.

Secondly, problems are unpredictable.

Thirdly, problems are variable.

Fourthly, problems are purposeful.

So, what are those purposes. Let us consider three:

The first purpose of trials is that problems purify our faith. James speaks of the "testing" of our faith. This word is similar the refining of gold and silver. The metal is heated until it becomes so hot that impurities rise to the surface and are burned away.

Our faith is refined in the same way—when life doesn't go as planned, when we don't feel like doing what is right, and yet we choose to trust God. That is how our faith grows stronger. Christians are like steel: when we are tested, we become tougher and more resilient.

The second purpose is that problems fortify our patience. James continues, "...the testing of your faith produces perseverance." This is not passive patience—it's active endurance. The Greek word used here means "the ability to remain under pressure." Most of us don't enjoy pressure. We avoid it whenever we can. But God often uses the pressures of life to teach us how to stay steady—to keep going when we feel like giving up.

We learn patience in traffic jams, in grocery store lines, and during the long waiting seasons of life. And with each trial, our endurance muscles are being strengthened.

The third purpose is that problems sanctify our character. Let us look again at James 1:2-4: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." The key phrase is "because you know." We know that problems help us grow. They are not wasted. God uses them to mature us.

The Apostle Paul echoes this in Romans 8:28: "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." Not all things are good—but God can work all things together for good. How? Verse 29 explains: "For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son." God's long-term goal for our lives is to make us more like Jesus Christ.

In Ephesians 2:10, Paul writes, "For we are God's handiwork..." The Greek word here means masterpiece or work of art. God is shaping us into something beautiful—something that reflects His

glory. And He is far more interested in building our character than in preserving our comfort. He wants us to be mature, complete, not lacking anything. That is His desire for each of us. That is the truth we need to hold onto—especially in the middle of trials.

So, what should we do when we face problems. James gives us three clear actions to take.

Let us begin with the first: God wants us to rejoice. James writes, "Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials..." Now, let us be clear—James is not saying, "Fake it. Put on a plastic smile. Pretend everything is fine." No. God never asks us to deny reality or ignore our pain. We are not called to rejoice for the problem but to rejoice in the problem. There is a big difference.

Why would we thank God for something evil or painful? We don't. But we can thank God in the middle of it, because we trust that He can take even the worst circumstances and turn them around for our good and for His glory. As Paul writes 1 Thessalonians 5:18: "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." It doesn't say, "Give thanks for all circumstances," but "in" them. We can give thanks not because of the problems, but because God is with us in them, and He is at work through them. The word James uses "consider" means to deliberately evaluate, to make up our minds in advance. In other words, joy is a choice.

Victor Frankl, the Jewish psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, wrote in his book "Man's Search for Meaning"...

Let me share with you a story from post-World War II Japan... Thankfulness is a kind of medicine. When we begin to count our blessings—one by one—we discover that we have much to be grateful for. Joy doesn't come from pretending life is perfect. It comes from remembering that God is still good, God is still in control, and God is still working—even in the darkest seasons of our lives.

Secondly, God wants us to pray. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." When we are in the middle of a problem, one of the best things we can do is pray for wisdom. Why? Because we often become overwhelmed when we cannot make sense of what God is doing. Wisdom helps us see life from God's point of view. And when we begin to see as God sees, we begin to respond as God desires.

There is nothing too big for God to handle, and nothing too small for us to bring before Him. 1 Peter 5:7 says, "Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you." Prayer is where we unload our burdens. It is where we bring what weighs us down—just like we might do with a close friend. But unlike human friends, who are limited in their wisdom and strength, God is all-knowing and all-powerful. He truly has all the answers we need.

Throughout the Bible, we see that even the most faithful people endured difficult challenges. One powerful example is Job... Job's story teaches us that our greatest trials can become our greatest growth when we bring them to God with the right attitude.

Friends, there is no situation in life from which we cannot learn—if we are willing to pray and listen. God is in control of every matter that concerns us. He invites us to bring everything to Him in prayer. We have a friend in Jesus Christ—the Creator of all things. He is bigger than any problem we face. He knows our weaknesses. He understands our pain. And He lovingly invites us to cast our burdens upon Him. Let us bring our problems to Him—because He is already waiting to hear from us.

Thirdly, God wants us to relax and trust Him. James 1:6 says, "But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt." In other words, God wants us to trust Him. He wants us to relax—not because our problems are small, but because He is bigger than anything we are facing. Relaxing in God is what the Bible calls faith. Faith means trusting that God knows what is best for our lives—even when we don't understand. It means choosing to rest in His love and His plan, even when life feels overwhelming.

I'll be honest—my heart often breaks when I think about the pain and heartache so many people around me are going through. Some of you may be in the middle of a deep trial right now. You want to have joy. You're trying to hold on. But it is hard. That is why James shows us that during trials, we need to pray for two things: Wisdom to understand what God might be teaching us. Faith to endure the trial and keep moving forward. We need wisdom to recognize what God is doing. And we need faith to stay the course, even when nothing makes sense. We are never a failure unless we quit. God wants us to keep going and not give up.

Remember: the enemy wants to use problems to defeat us. But God wants to use problems to develop us. There are times when life gets incredibly difficult—and maybe some of you are facing one of those challenges now. If so, please hear this clearly: God sees you. He knows what you are going through. He cares deeply. He has the power to change your situation in a moment. He is a miracle worker and a way maker. But sometimes, instead of removing the problem, God chooses to use the problem to fulfill a greater purpose. Why? Once again, He is far more interested in developing our character than in making us comfortable.

Some struggles may remain with us for a long time—perhaps even a lifetime. The Apostle Paul called them "thorns in the flesh." And yet, even those are allowed by God, who uses them to keep us dependant on His grace. Whatever comes into our life—no matter how painful—has first passed through the loving hands of our Heavenly Father. Nothing happens without His permission. And everything He allows—one more time—He will use for our good and for His glory.

So, friends, rejoice in our trails, pray through our trials, and trust God in our trials. Because when we do, something beautiful happens: We begin to grow in faith. We begin to develop perseverance. We begin to become mature and complete—not lacking anything. That's what James teaches us. And that is what God desires for each one of us.

Let me close this message with a story about an old missionary couple... James echoes the same truth: "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (James 1:12). Friends, we are not home yet. Our full reward will not be found in this world, but in the world to come. God is not unjust. He sees our faithfulness. He knows our suffering. And He will reward us—not with temporary crowns, but with a crown of life that lasts forever.

One day, Christ Himself will say: "Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done" (Revelation 22:12). So don't give up. Don't lose heart. Rejoice. Pray. Trust. And remember: we are not home yet.

**In this sermon, I have adapted many materials from Rev. Rick Warren's series of sermons "Developing a Faith That Works."*