

The path to pure joy **Facing Your Problems**

By Dave Batty

Do you know any Christians who are not happy? How recently have you heard a Christian complain about a problem he or she was encountering?

God clearly promises pure joy to His children. So why are so many Christians unhappy, disgruntled, and some down right ugly?

What would need to change in your life for you to be able to say, “My life is full of pure joy!”

God’s path to pure joy is spelled out in James 1:2-4. “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you

face trials of many kinds,³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

⁴Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (NIV)

I memorized these verses over 25 years ago, but as I looked at these verses recently I saw a new insight. The path to pure joy is not *having* problems—the path to God’s pure joy is mine when I *face* my problems.

Many people live with the false belief that if they had less problems, or if they had *no* problems—that is the path to pure joy. But this clearly contradicts the simple truth of God’s word.

What is our typical response to problems?

- We ignore them.
- We deny them
- We run from them
- We rationalize them
- We blame them on someone else—an enemy, a friend, a neighbor, a family member, or the devil.
- We pray and ask God to take the problems away.

But our obsession with getting rid of the problem may cause us to miss what God wants us to learn. We

blame it on the devil, failing to see God’s hand in it, not seizing this as an opportunity to draw closer to God and experience His pure joy.

Before you write me off and say, “Dave, you obviously don’t know about the problems I’m facing,” look

Many people live with the false belief that their life would be much happier if they had less problems.

with me at what James says about how to experience God’s pure joy.

James says, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.” (James 1:2-3 NIV) Every test, temptation, or trial is an opportunity to use God’s faith—His mighty power.

When I put God’s power to the test, will God fail me? Never! One reason I can have joy when I face my problems is that His power will see me through.

- ❖ **What can you do when God doesn’t take away your problems?**
- ❖ **Who pays when you run from your problems?**
- ❖ **What can you do when someone else’s problems affect you?**
- ❖ **How do your problems put you on the path to maturity?**
- ❖ **How can you take hold of God’s joy when you have problems?**

Facing our problems can be painful

Tracey used drugs for several years. Every time she was arrested, her dad would bail her out. She always promised to change—but it

Who pays when you run from your problems?

When Jonah* decided to run from his problems, he had to pay—real cash. He paid to ride a boat headed the opposite direction of his problem.

But when he runs from one problem, he ends up right in the middle of another problem—a violent storm at sea.

The sailors on the ship fear for their lives, and end up throwing all their cargo overboard in an attempt to save their ship, and their lives.

Jonah finally admits he is the cause of all their problems and tells them to throw him overboard. These innocent sailors experience a great financial loss because of Jonah's decision to run from his problem.

Only when Jonah faces his problem do the innocent sailors experience freedom from the damaging consequences of Jonah's problems.

When Jonah faces his "problems"—going to preach to the city of Nineveh—a great revival comes, and thousands repent and turn to God.

**This story is found in the Bible in the book of Jonah.*

never lasted. Soon she would be back to her addictions and her life of crime.

Arrested again for drug related crime, she pled with her father to bail her out again. He was ready to mortgage his home to pay bail. But her brother stepped in and convinced Dad not to bail her out.

So for 7 months she sat in jail. Forced to face her problems, she finally began to see the destruction going on in her life. She didn't die in jail—she met God! Ladies from a local church came weekly for a Bible study. For the first time Tracey learned about Jesus and how to experience His salvation. She began to develop a personal relationship with Jesus.

Since then she has been facing her problems, not running from them. She is now a student in Teen Challenge. Does she have joy? Lots of it! Does she still have problems—lots of them. The joy of Jesus has put a light in her eyes, and joy deep in her heart.

What brought her to the place of joy?—facing her problems.

But many of us are afraid to face our problems. We reason—"my problems cause me pain. Facing my problems will only increase the pain, so the best solution is to run from my problems."

That was the logic that Reneé lived by for years. "Once I began facing my problems, I did encounter pain. But then I experienced God's help and healing, and now I feel pretty good," she said with a smile.

What to do—not how

Let's be clear—James 1:2 tells us what we are to do, "consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds." (NIV) But it does not give a detailed strategy on how to experience this pure joy. We need to look beyond this verse in James for that help.

James 1:3 gives a key part of the "how to" answer. Facing these problems is really a testing of my faith. These problems provide me the opportunity to learn how to use God's faith—His power—in facing these problems.

God's power is real and more than adequate. Your role is to prove to yourself that you can effectively handle God's power in the context of this problem.

It's much like a race car driver—the car has the power. But can the

Who has the problem?

For 17 years I said my husband drank too much. Finally I admitted he was an alcoholic and accepted the fact that he really needed help. I stopped making excuses for his behavior and insisted he get help.

When I started facing my problems, my husband started facing his problems.

C.K., Oregon

driver effectively use that power and complete the race and win? This takes perseverance.

When someone else's problems affect you

James talks of facing "trials of many kinds." Sometimes the problems are the results of our own decisions. Other trials are when somebody else's problem causes damage in our lives.

In the Old Testament, a young man, David, went to visit his brothers who were at war with the Philistines. When he came to the camp, he found everyone trembling in fear because of Goliath. When David offers to fight Goliath, his brothers get angry. But David's offer is reported to the king. The king tries to get David to use his armor, which David declines. He goes out to battle Goliath, confident that God will give him the power to win.

"David said to the Philistine, 'You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. . . . All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give all of you into our hands.' "

(1 Samuel 17:45-47 NIV)

When David faced his problem—Goliath—God's deliverance came quickly. David understood that the victory is the result of God's power working

through him. Clearly there was great joy as the army of Israel went to bed that night. But the greatest amount of "pure joy" must have been in David's heart, because he had faced the problem—all the others were simply observers.

Not all our problems fit the David and Goliath situation.

Jessica was sexually abused by her stepfather for 10 years. As a young adult she lived with fierce rage against her stepfather and her mother

who allowed this to continue for so many years. "Since coming to Christ, I've learned that God can bring healing into my life where I was so deeply damaged. God is restoring me—it's a difficult process."

"For many years I used drugs to hide the pain of abuse," she said with a touch of sadness. "But now God is giving me freedom from my hurts of the past. I can now forgive those who hurt me and pray for them and have compassion for them."

Uncertain about how to face your problems?

Angela's story*

"I just found marijuana in your son's suitcase. What do you want me to do?" My mom was calling from half way across the country.

I had not seen my teenage sons in over four years. Because of my lifestyle of drug addiction I had lost custody of them, and was prohibited from having contact with them. Six months ago I finally came to the end of my rope. After 20 years of addiction I cried out for help. My mom had helped me get into Teen Challenge.

Now my mom wanted me to solve a problem that was out of my control. "Mom, I don't know what to do, but I will call you back with an answer."

I went to the prayer room and cried out to God—what should I do? In past years I knew exactly how to run from my

problems. If I couldn't run, I knew how to get others to rescue me. Facing my problems has been a difficult change since becoming a Christian. As I prayed, God's peace replaced the anxiety in my heart.

"Mom, I want you to call the boy's father and tell them exactly what you found. And if he is not willing to deal with this, then call the police."

It was not an easy phone call to make, but I'm finding that when I face my problems, God is there to help me. I'm learning to stand on the promise of James 1:5 "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." (NIV)

**Name changed to protect identity of those involved.*

When God doesn't take your problems away

Paul talks of another kind of trial he faced as a missionary. He describes it as “a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.” (2 Corinthians 12:7 NIV) This is no tiny problem—this was a big time hassle. He even attributes it to Satan.

So what does Paul do? This mighty man of God prays—“Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.” (2 Corinthians 12:8 NIV) Paul's first, second, and third response to this problem was to cry out to God—“take it away!”

Got problems? God is complimenting you!

When a problem comes your way, your first reaction may be dismay, anger, irritation, etc. But as you choose to pursue God's response, you can discover His pure joy.

What you think about the problem will have a major impact on your emotions. So begin to look at each problem in your life as a compliment from God. He trusts you, He believes in you to respond appropriately. He promised never to tempt you beyond your ability, as you rely on His power to help you. (See 1 Corinthians 10:13)

His first three responses were not to thank God for the problem. He did not rebuke the devil. He didn't claim his deliverance. Sometimes claiming deliverance is really a form of denying reality. Paul pleads with God for deliverance.

God answers Paul—“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9 NIV) No miraculous deliverance came from God—the problem stayed in Paul's life.

Paul discovered the same truth James talks about, “You've got to face this problem, and God's faith—His power—is available to you.” The revelation from God to Paul contains an awesome promise—“My power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9 NIV) God's great power is available to help us deal “perfectly” with whatever test comes our way—especially when we are weak.

So how does Paul respond to God's answer of “No,” when pleading for God to take away this problem? Does he get angry at God?

Paul says, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:9b-10 NIV)

Paul's response shows that he chose to be happy even when the trial remained in his life. He now chose to delight in his weaknesses—

why? Because that's when God's power can become perfect in him.

Paul's joy is not based on problems—his focus is to delight on how God's power can work in his

*God's pure joy comes,
not in seeing the
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your life.*

life. The joy comes not in seeing the problem go away, the joy comes in seeing God's power at work in his life.

The path to perseverance

This problem stayed in Paul's life—perhaps for years! Which brings us to the next part of James explanation of the path to joy—“the testing of your faith develops perseverance.” (James 1:3b NIV) We don't need perseverance for the quick solution. We need perseverance for the long haul—for the problems that just don't go away.

Have you been facing a trial in your life for 5 years? or 20 years? Both Paul and James have the answer for you. God's faith—God's power—is available to see you through. That's what perseverance is all about!

Many Christians don't want to hear this, but God's word clearly states it—some problems are here to stay for a long time.

Every day I get letters from people asking me to pray for their unsaved husband, or wife, or children. “My husband is addicted to drugs.” “Pray for my 12 year old granddaughter with a liver disease.” “Pray for my hateful neighbors.” “My daughter is living with an abusive husband. Pray for her.”

God’s awesome power is available to help us face the long-term problem situations, not just for instant miracles. God’s power is available to help us develop perseverance as we face trials every day. When those trials are someone else’s problem “dumping garbage at our feet,” we can’t force that person to change. But we can use God’s power to respond to the situation with godly character.

I recently talked to a young married man. He struggles with sexual temptations, desiring a friend-

ship with a certain woman. He’s hoping she will find a husband. But the solution is not for the other person to change. He must face his own problem even if the other person never changes.

Taking hold of God’s joy

It’s easy to tell someone else, “You should consider it pure joy when you face trials. God will help you!”

But to move into this place of pure joy yourself—when *you* are living with a problem—this can be very tough!

So how can you possess this “pure joy” when you are living with a major problem? You may have to do some tough self-talk. Paul talked about his struggle—“I take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:5)

You may have to do serious battle with your thoughts and emotions. Begin by standing on God’s truth, and keep His truth close to your heart. “I’m going to claim this promise of God for me today.”

Tim, a young college student, described his battle this way. “I have to keep rehearsing God’s truth, because if I listen to my emotions, I get confused.”

You may not feel joy as you face this problem—so fight to take hold of that joy! You’ve got to fix your eyes on Jesus and stand in His truth.

One strategy that may help you is to write down the problem you

are facing and then write how you will respond to this problem today.

For example, “As I go through this day, and face this problem, I will quote James 1:2-4.” Or find another verse that speaks directly to the problem in your life.

You can make a list of the specific lessons God is teaching you through this problem. “I will look for God’s power to respond in His way to this problem.”

You can set as your goal, “I will do God’s will today in spite of this problem in my life.” Don’t let this problem rob you of the joy of completing what God wants you to do today.

At the end of the day, look for those “seconds of joy” you experienced today. Then look for the “minutes of joy” you experienced—

Don’t look for shortcuts to joy

King David writes in that most familiar Psalm 23—“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” (Psalm 23:4 NIV) David sees the path taking him *through* the valley, not discovering a short-cut around it.

We can have the same confidence that David had as we walk through our dark valleys, so close to death’s door we see its shadow.

Who’s in control?

Some problems that come our way are out of our control. That is a problem for some people—they want to be in control!

But God doesn’t promise pure joy to those who control the problems of others. His joy is promised to those who face their own problems.

Jesus often faced criticism and problems from people who hated him. His solution was not to force others to change. His solution was to respond the way God wanted Him to respond no matter how others responded.

then the hours of joy.

Tomorrow the battle to experience pure joy may have to start again with seizing “seconds of joy” before you find the “minutes” and “hours” of joy. But if you pursue God’s way of responding to each situation that you face today, you can possess this “pure joy” and accomplish all that God has for you to do today.

Joy is not the goal

The “pure joy” should not be our goal. This joy is the benefit of facing each problem with God’s help, and responding the way He wants us to.

If guilt, anger, sadness, depression, hopelessness or other negative emotions and attitudes seem to overwhelm you, it’s time to stand up and fight. Not the other people causing the problem—but fight your attitudes and emotions. “I refuse to allow these negative feelings to dominate me.”

Instead, you can choose to fix your eyes on Jesus and seize hold of His peace and joy, and walk in obedience to Him.

Every day you may need to do a major “housing cleaning” of your thoughts. The old negative thoughts may return every day—but you can choose to stand on God’s truth. Or you can go with the old familiar paths—back to anger, fear, frustration, etc.

Joshua in the Old Testament threw down a challenge to his people—“choose today whom you will serve. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Pure joy is the hidden reward that comes with each problem. And with these problems comes the path to maturity.

God’s path to maturity

James offers more benefits as we face our problems—over the long haul. “Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (James 1:4 NIV)

We all want to be “mature and complete.” But God, just give me your blessing! Let the anointing of the Holy Spirit come on me! Let

Pure joy is the hidden reward that comes with each problem. And with these problems comes the path to maturity.

people be healed when I pray! Let this be my path to spiritual maturity!

But God’s word is clear—the path to maturity is learning how to face our problems with His power. God promises He will never leave us or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6 and Hebrews 13:5)

Our own decisions have taken us down paths filled with all kinds of problems. God’s solution requires us to do more than face our problems. He also calls us to be His disciples—to follow Him. Some of our problems are the result of failing to follow Him. We went our own way, and ended up in a big mess.

“Dealing with the immaturity of others really irritated me,” states

John, a successful businessman. “I found these people made me angry and frustrated. I faced these problems every day—responding with anger—which only created more problems.”

It was only when John began to take a closer look at how God wanted him to respond that he began to experience God’s victory in his life. Facing our problems in our own strength, using our own wisdom, can be the formula for disaster, not joy.

Paul discovered the secret of joy in his life—learning to let God’s power work through him in his times of weakness. Pure joy is yours if you will simply reach out and take it—with the “strings” God attaches—face trials of many kinds, and use His power to deal with them.

Conclusion

As you look at the problems in your life today—take time to do a reality check in 2 areas. First, what are your attitudes toward this problem? What is the attitude Jesus would have toward this problem?

Second, what are the tools and strategies you will use to face this problem and respond God’s way?

God has an abundance of pure joy waiting for each of His children. As we approach the days ahead, we can have confidence that no problem will be too big for God—His power will see us through.

The more problems we face, the greater our potential to experience God’s pure joy. God’s promise to Paul is also for you, “My power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9 NIV)

Facing your problems

The path to pure joy Discussion Guide

The following questions can be used for your personal reflection on this topic, or it can be used as a guide for a group discussion. If this is used in a group setting, please understand that you are not required to disclose the specific details of past sins, failures, or personal experiences.

1. What is the attitude you have commonly had toward problems in your life?
2. Read James 1:2-4
 - A. How does this scripture speak to some of the big problems you have had in the past or are still facing today?
 - B. How hard is it for you to face a problem, instead of ignoring it, or running from it, or blaming it on others?
3. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.
 - A. Why did God allow problems to come into Paul's life?
 - B. When God refused to remove the problems from Paul's life, how did Paul respond?
 - C. How does Paul's experience speak to the problems you are facing in your life?
4. Read 2 Peter 2:9 and James 1:5. How do these scriptures offer hope to you?
5. Read 2 Peter 1:3-11.
 - A. What does verse 3 promise to you regarding the problems in your life?
 - B. How do the "tools" described in verses 5-9 help you with facing your problems?
6. What is one problem in your life which you need to face in a new way with God's help?
What are some things you can do differently than you have done in the past regarding this problem?



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