

Blokes' Church 1st June 2008
Men Maturing – James 1:2-12

DVD – Everybody loves Raymond – “The Article” – season 4.
opening scene 00:00-01:30 (Frank); scene after intro 02:00-4:43 (Ray)

How do **you** deal with the issues in your life? What **are** the issues in your life?
DO any of these ring bells for you?...

* **PPT** Working too much; drinking too much; relationship issues; depression; anxiety; pornography; adultery; time with family; cost of living, petrol prices; bills; study; sickness.

There's a whole lot more you could add to that list. But here's my first question for us today:

* **PPT** *How do we deal with the issues we face each day?*

I think guys like to problem solve. We like to find the answers, we like to fix things. My wife came to me a few weeks ago and told me her hair dryer wasn't working very well any more. What did I do? I got my screwdriver set, pulled it apart, poked around a bit, until there was no chance of ever putting it back together again, threw it in a bag, put it in the bin, went to the shop, bought another one. Problem solved.

But what happens when we don't know how to fix the problem? Or worse still – what if we don't understand what the problem is? We can't always “get a new one” of whatever is broken. You can't go and buy more time to have with your kids. Doing extra study after you fail an exam won't make you pass! There's isn't always a “**quick fix**” to our problems.

This passage from James challenges us to go on a different road. And I chose this passage because I think it really has something important for us to hear as men. Especially as Christian men. From verse 2:

2Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3because 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.

James is writing to a church full of people who are facing lots of difficult times. They're being persecuted for their faith, thrown out of their homes, even their cities. Some are homeless and starving. But through his letter, James doesn't tell them how to “fix” anything. He writes to them about how to **face** these issues as they live through them each day. James recognises that problems don't just disappear. There isn't always a quick fix. And if there's no way to fix them, we need to know how to get *through* them.

III – I grew up at a church in Parramatta, and I used to spend some time on Saturdays working in a caring centre that gave out free food and assistance to people who needed it. Often, they were people who were living on the streets each night. Homeless. Lonely. No prospects for a job. Drug dependent. Alcohol dependent. As much as I wanted their problems to be fixed, there was no quick fix. Sometimes it was just a matter of keeping them going for a few more days until there was room in one of the shelters.

* **PPT** I think our icon as blokes is often Bob the Builder. **Can we fix it? Yes we can.** That's often what we think. But how many times is the answer really: **No, we can't.**

For example: My kids hate me. My mum died. I'm depressed. I haven't made love to my wife in 3 months. My father never told me he loved me. I drink every night. I work 80 hours a week. There are usually **no quick fixes** for these things.

But James isn't saying that we should **ignore** our problems or do nothing about it. He's saying that when we **face** trials, we should persevere, so we **mature** not only as a man, but as a Christian man.

So here's my second question for us:

*** PPT** *When we go through trials and struggles, do we persevere and mature?*

There's a response psychologists like to call the **"fight or flight"** response. When we're faced with a challenge, we either stand up to it and fight, or we run away. Let me tell you a story about my Nana. When she was 90 years old, she was in her unit in Epping, on the 2nd floor, and she heard a noise in her bedroom. She went into the room and found a guy with a balaclava over his head, cutting through her flyscreen with a knife, trying to break in. Now, you're asking, did Nana fight or run? Nana didn't run. She was a tough Nana! But she didn't fight either. She didn't run over, grab the knife and wrestle the guy to the ground! **She stood there and faced him.** And she said, in her Nana voice, something like: **"What the devil do you think you're doing?"** Then the intruder kicked into his flight response and jumped off the balcony.

When *we* face struggles, we often feel it's wrong to run away. But we also often think that the proper thing is to jump in and fight it or fix it. But what about taking the time to stop and say: **"What's going on?"** Sometimes we need to face the issue and say: "Right. What's going on? How do I deal with this? How do I *persevere* through this?"

III – 4 years ago I had a bit of a life crisis. I was working too many hours. It sounds no big deal, but it was affecting my relationship with my family a lot. I was tired. Often angry. I knew I had to do something, but I didn't know where to start. I was constantly trying to deal with the *work* problem – change my hours, be more efficient – try to **fix** things. I put all the effort into work but very little into my relationships with my family and friends. I realised I couldn't work until 8 or 9 at night, come home, have dinner, and go to bed. I had responsibilities. I had to face the fact that when I came home from work, I had to do my "home" work. I had to work on my relationship with my family, not crash in front of the TV and do nothing. I had to help make dinner, do the vacuuming, mow the lawn. I had to give my wife a break from looking after the kids all day. And I had a responsibility to my friends. I couldn't just ignore them because I was tired and work was busy. I needed to persevere. Not just 9-5 at work, but outside of work too.

It doesn't matter if you're single, married, divorced, with or without kids – it doesn't matter what your issues are – when we're put through trials, what James teaches us is that if we respond with **perseverance**, 3 things happen:

*** PPT** – First, verse 4, we become mature and complete. When we face our trials right through to the end, we mature because we learn to overcome the hurdles. Sometimes, every day can be like finishing a marathon – you're tired, but the next day you're fitter and healthier because you finished yesterday.

*** PPT** – Secondly, verse 5, we learn that our perseverance as Christian men doesn't come from our own strength. It comes from our *faith in God*. Instead of assuming that we know better than God does, instead of trying to provide all our needs ourselves, perseverance helps us to trust in *God* to provide all we need.

*** PPT** – And thirdly, perseverance develops spiritual integrity. Verses 6-8 talk about men who flip flop. Men who can't commit to one thing or another. Men who trust God one minute and give up the next. Men who trust God and have good relationships when things are good. But when difficult times come along, their commitment is gone. Double minded. Unstable. Unreliable.

*** PPT** – Compare that to verse 12: *12Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.*

Let me finish with this thought: James is writing this to a community. He's saying we need to persevere **together**. I wouldn't be standing here today if not for the love of other Christian blokes who helped **me** through difficult times of testing. And that's where things like Bloke's church come in. Another avenue of strength. But don't let it stop there. Pray with one another regularly. Study the Bible together. Go fishing, play golf together. We need to build relationships that will help us persevere with the day to day issues that we all face.

But most of all, we need to persevere in our relationship with Jesus. Look at his life. Look at the way he persevered through trials, the way he completely trusted in God for everything, the way he committed his life, even to the point of death on the cross. Remember, in everything we go through, Jesus has been through it all. He not only knows everything we go through – every test, every temptation – he's been through it and understands what we face each day.

Let's pray.