

Seeking Wisdom James 1:1-8

Slide 1

As we start a new series today, for the next three weeks, we're going to look at the first chapter of the book of James. Most likely this letter was written around 48AD to Jewish Christians living outside Palestine.

James's readers were suffering persecution and living in poverty. They were in social and spiritual conflict. Many believers were living in a worldly manner.

James was writing to them to correct and challenge them to seek God's wisdom to work out these problems.

He is considered to be the half-brother of Jesus. Half-brother because they had the same mother, but Jesus was born supernaturally.

When Jesus started His ministry, James was against Him, as was his family, but somewhere along the way, James and others in his family came to see Jesus as the Messiah.

The book of Acts tells us that James became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. In fact, Paul referred to James as "*a pillar*" of that church.

Acts 12 says that when Peter was delivered from prison by an angel, he made a point of sending a message to James to let him know what happened.

It was James who moderated the church conference described in Acts 15 which dealt with the potentially divisive issue of what to do with Gentile converts to Christianity.

James was able to bring peace and unity to the church. It's believed James was martyred in 62AD.

James' letter is filled with practical teaching, enabling God's people to flourish as they journey through life in this fallen world.

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James 1:1, *"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings."*

Because of Roman persecution, many early Jewish Christians fled from Jerusalem.

They feared for their lives, so they went to areas that were more sympathetic towards them, areas where they were not threatened by the fact that Jesus was their King.

James is reminding these Jewish Christians of their spiritual heritage as the people of God. In so doing, he tells them what nobody really wants to hear.

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."*

So, what's he getting at? *"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds."*

James isn't telling us to jump up and down when bad things happen to us. James isn't telling us to put a "pasted-on fake smile" nor is he advocating some form of masochism in which we seek painful things.

James is writing about an attitude of joy that comes from knowing pain's purpose. We're to count it for joy because things are happening in our lives and, if we're willing, our lives will change for the good.

I found the following story on the Internet: Someone let their pet ferret play in a pile of clothes in the laundry basket. The ferret was having a great time frolicking in the clothes. And finally, he fell asleep.

It had been a glorious day for the ferret, but mom didn't see him sleeping and threw the pile of laundry into the washing machine. Things went from good to bad before he knew what was happening.

The lid was shut and all was dark. Water started pouring in and when the churning finally stopped and began to drain out the ferret must've thought he made it, then the rinse cycle began. And just when he thought the worse was over, the spin cycle began.

Later that night, the little ferret was found in the washing machine, alive, wet and confused. Can you relate to that ferret? One minute your life is going great, and like the ferret, you're singing and thinking it doesn't get any better than this.

Then all of the sudden, out of nowhere, your world becomes a place of spinning darkness. Your boss tells you you're no longer needed. Your spouse tells you, *'I don't love you anymore.'*

The phone rings and you hear the words *"there's been an accident."* The doctor gives you a report that rattles your world.

You didn't see it coming, but in the blink of an eye, you find yourself sucked into the darkness and your world begins to spin out of control. If you haven't been there, James tells us someday you will.

When that happens, James has challenging words, yet they are words that can bring comfort. Notice that James doesn't say if you face trials, but when you face trials.

Trials, hardships and difficulties are part of life. If you think your life is going to be smooth and calm, you're fooling yourself.

Jesus warned His disciples, *"In this world you will have trouble."* Paul warned his listeners that, *"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."*

Be joyful when you face trials? Come on. That's absurd. That may sound good on paper, but not in reality.

But remember, James is about building character. We know people who have endured and people who have given up. Many of us do that.

If God doesn't solve our problem in the first 24 hours, we give up on Him. We stop pounding on His door with prayer.

We go off seeking other solutions to our problems, which can easily lead to bitter spirits and angry lives.

Then there are those who face amazing difficulties in life and somehow, they make it to the other side.

What can we learn about those people who face their trials head on, trusting that God is good and sovereign?

What can be learn by trusting that while life may not make sense, God has a plan that will work out, even though it will be painful.

This is why, when we're tested, we must confidently turn to God, trusting Him, and not ourselves.

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The apostles also considered it joy and an honor to suffer for Jesus. After being arrested and then freed, Acts 5:41 tells us:

“The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”

Paul said this numerous times. Some might count it an honor to suffer in the name of Jesus, just as He suffered for us, but understand that this is suffering because of our faith.

James tells us to count it all joy *“whenever you face trials of many kinds.”*

That phrase *“whenever you face”* or *“when you meet”* is interesting in Greek because it means *“when you fall into the midst of difficulties”* or *“when you happen upon those tests and adversity,”* which is what trials are.

They’re tests and adversity. You didn’t go looking for them, you just fell into them.

We can count it all joy when we’re in those moments, because, as it says in verse 3: *“you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance”* or steadfastness.

Understand that the testing here is different than what we might be thinking about. I can remember taking tests in college. The questions didn’t look anything like what had been discussed about in class.

But that’s not what God is doing here. You see, the word *“testing”* literally means *‘what is found approved and genuine after testing.’* In other words, God’s goal in the testing is to see you succeed.

It's like He's giving you a problem and telling you part of the answer in advance, because God doesn't want us to give up or fail. He wants us to pass the test because it produces "*perseverance*."

Perseverance. That's an Old Testament word that prevalent in the psalms. It's often interchanged with endurance/patience/steadfastness.

But the goal is not just a grimacing perseverance, but a cheerful or helpful perseverance, where we continue with a sense of constancy and that's what He's getting into in verse 4.

James 1:4, "*Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*"

Now that perseverance, that patience and enduring, when done with hope and expectancy, when its had its full effect, it leads us to perfection and completeness.

You see, when you're steadfast, you are unwavering, determined to complete the task at hand. You're not going to give up. That's what James wants us to see in the midst of problems.

The word "*mature*" or "*perfect*," in some versions of the Bible, doesn't necessarily mean perfect in the Greek.

It means we've matured and moved through the necessary stages toward the end-goal, that is, we've developed more and more in our spiritual journey.

We'll have fully finished the race and, as a spiritual person, we'll be complete in all respects.

So, James is telling us we can count it all joy when we're tested, because God's expectancy for us is that we'll pass the test, which leads to greater maturity and completeness. It gives us a greater testimony in the world.

You see, this is all supposed to flow together. Our lives aren't a matter of fragments that we somehow try to piece together to make sense. They're all part of one, and they all work together for the glory of God.

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James 1:5-8, *"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. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do."*

The final lesson from James today is that we must ask God for wisdom. In other words, rely on God for help.

We need to know how to handle the adversity and trials we're going to face. The Bible, especially the book of Proverbs, is filled with reminders to seek wisdom.

We're instructed in Proverbs 16:16, *"How much better to get wisdom than gold, to get insight rather than silver!"*

Wisdom will last longer than gold and it's something which changes who we are. James tells us that God wants to give to us generously. He wants to give abundantly, if we're willing to ask and receive.

But that's not always easy. It seems pretty logical. I'd rather have God's wisdom over mine. That's a no-brainer, but we struggle with letting go of the control we want.

If we can't let go of our desire to control everything, then all of the wisdom from God won't matter, because we'll not see it or experience it.

This is why James tells us not to pray half-heartedly. Don't pray like someone who's doubting, because when we doubt, we're actually at odds with ourselves.

Yet, we ask anyway. Not really believing, but it's kind of *"an excuse me, God, if you're not too busy, I'd kind of, sort of, if you have the time but if not that's ok,"* attitude.

Have you ever asked God for something with prayers like that? Have you asked for something, but even when praying, you were already doubting? That'll never get you anywhere.

A double-minded Christian wants to do it their way, yet they still want God to do it His way. They want some of God and some of themselves. That's what the meaning of *"double-minded"* is in Greek.

A double minded person is like a person who has two souls divided within themselves. When you pray asking for two separate answers to your prayer, you're being double-minded.

That's why James compares the doubter to a wave that's being tossed back and forth in the sea.

The doubter is someone who changes their mind constantly, they ask for one thing and then a different thing. There's no constancy in their requests.

Since we have victory in Christ, since we know that we'll be victorious, since we know God is for us, then when you pray, pray with a sense of victory.

Pray believing in the name and power of Jesus. That's what James is getting at. Don't be double-minded, pray believing and trusting that God will answer that prayer.

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Conclusion

One of the most important aspects of becoming an authentic Christian is developing spiritual endurance.

The question is NOT, "*Will we face trials?*," the question is, "*How will we handle the trials that come our way?*" Will you run for cover and turn your back on God and give up? or will you endure?

God promises that the end result is worth it. The trials may be difficult to endure, but the trials aren't God's purpose for your life, the end result, your becoming like Christ, is His purpose for you.

If we value comfort more than character, then trials will upset us. If we value the material more than the spiritual, we won't be able to consider it joy.

If we live only for the present and disregard the future, then trials will make us bitter and not better.

These words from James are all about leading us to God. Be joy-filled when bad things happen to you, because if you're willing, they'll lead you to become more Christ-like.

Working through adversity will produce a steady and firm faith. If you embrace God's wisdom and not the world's, and you ask God, believing that He has the answers, you'll grow in becoming more and more of the person God wants you to be.

You won't lack anything you need, and the world will see and experience Christ through you.