

# James 1:1–18

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[ 0 : 00 ] Again, the scripture text is James 1, verses 1 through 18. Please stand for the reading of God's word. James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the dispersion.

Greetings. Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.

He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass, he will pass away.

[ 1 : 18 ] For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass. Its flower falls and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

Let no one say when he is tempted, I am being tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

Then desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation and no shadow due to change.

[ 2 : 21 ] Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. You can be seated. Robert Robinson was a gentleman who lived in the mid to late 18th century.

So, while our country was taking flight on her revolutionary wings, Robinson was skirting in and out of the English countryside and eventually took residence in Cambridge.

He was a minister, and he wrote a hymn that for churchgoers is rather familiar, entitled, Come Thou Fount.

Come Thou Fount of every blessing. Tune my heart to sing Thy praise. It has an especially poignant line, prone to wander.

[ 3 : 47 ] Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. He wrote the hymn in 1757.

And it is an open question whether or not his own life succumbed to that poignant line.

I mention that because he was converted to Calvinistic Methodism five years before writing the hymn when he actually heard George Whitefield preach.

Yet by 1790, when he was buried, it was Joseph Priestley who conducted the service. I don't know how much you know about Priestley.

He winds his way into the life of somebody like Thomas Jefferson in our own country. He was a political theorist, but also a pastor, a Unitarian.

[ 4 : 47 ] And he is the one who conducts Robinson's funeral. I mention that by way of introduction because the writer of this letter called James here, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, verse 1, is concerned with our propensity to wander.

Take a look at the very closing verses of the book. We will be here all spring. But the closing line gives somewhat perhaps an interpretive key to the concern of the writer.

The letter walks off with these words. Verse 19, My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Now, while it's way too early in the series, we're just being introduced to it today, to say with certainty that that closing line could provide an interpretive key for the whole, at least we could say it by way of tentative beginnings.

James, concerned, for our propensity to wander. And he writes that our soul would be saved from death and that our sins would be covered.

[ 6 : 48 ] In fact, if that might be true, I've wondered this week if it is a subtle hint to understanding the way the letter opens, not only the end, but look at the beginning.

The latter half of verse 1, a strange phrase indicating to whom the letter is written.

It says, to the twelve tribes in the dispersion. Now, there were twelve tribes in Israel and the reader must already begin to wonder, does he have something ethnic in mind here?

Is James writing to a predominantly Jewish audience that for some reason was displaced from Jerusalem and it's ethnic in intention?

Or, is it emblematic? Is it a way of speaking about the church? I mean, we do have Galatians where Paul calls the church the Israel of God.

[ 8 : 00 ] Or, Peter in his first epistle addresses it to the elect exiles, and of which he means Christians.

Well, I'm not entirely convinced, but if the beginning and end of the letter might be connected, and I think they might be, then the entire tonal quality of the letter we're studying this spring is under the banner of one who wants to keep us from wandering.

The twelve tribes of the dispersion conjure up for me the image of Israel and their years in the wilderness and a whole season of life wherein God's people were being tested in regard to the fidelity of their faith and their hope of entrance into a promised land.

In fact, take a look at verse 16 of chapter 1. This little phrase, do not be deceived. Deceived is the same rooted word that we have at the close of the letter regarding the one who wanders or their wandering.

The wandering one is the deceived one. The one who has been deceived is wandering. And so, really, from beginning to end, the great concern of James is to keep us from wandering in these years of dispersion.

[ 9 : 47 ] I know a thing or two about wandering. I suspect you do too.

It's the imperceptible steps that one isn't really aware of that pulled out over weeks, months, years, patterned, and you end up waking up one morning and asking yourself, how did I get here?

How did this happen? What went on? Who am I?

What do I really believe anymore? And when one explores our propensity and, I guess I would say, our proneness to wandering, it never happens overnight.

It's a long, extended course that, if we're fortunate, there comes a moment of clarity.

[ 11 : 18 ] Like the end of the letter, a moment when you're pulled back from your wandering and your soul is saved from death and your sins are covered.

You know anything about wandering? It seems to me that what James does then in our text is he knows that there are things that cause wandering.

There are things that are related to your faith that he has to address and encourage you in and show you a way through if you're to be kept from wandering.

Three things. Take a look. Verses 2-4, the difficulties of life. Verses 5-8, direction for life.

Verses 9-11, the role that being financially advantaged or disadvantaged can play in life.

[ 12 : 31 ] All three directly connected by way of subtle causation to wandering or not.

So here it is. Verses 2-4, he encourages the reader out of a concern knowing that the difficulties of life can often be the path away from salvation.

He corrects it. Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds. For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness and let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Notice how those verses show the effect of trials and difficulties on faith. the trial comes but we wilt under the testing joy is robbed discouragement sets in and we're unsteady in every respect. When we think of these various kinds of trials and the impact it could have on your faith, well, the list is as long as the word various.

[14:18] But I think that this letter actually will see by the end of chapter 5 this language is bracketed about faith and steadfastness and it picks up on people like Job who was steadfast or Elijah who kept going and it uses them as individuals of those who actually got through these trials and what were the trials of people like Job or Elijah and what was the nature of that role in testing?

Job had the worst of all days one day. It was the loss of family.

It was the loss of his financial position. It was the loss of his friends. The trials he encountered were of such full orb'd variety that it encompassed his entire being.

In other words they were Job's sufferings. your sufferings where your life right now is not meeting your expectation of life and God can rob you of joy.

Which is why he says I don't want you to wander and I need a complete reorientation of your mind on what God is doing with your life.

[16:06] Count it all joy when you encounter these things. Why? Because God is doing something through this fire that will produce in your faith something that is steadfast.

I mean think about what the opposite of steadfast is. It's something that's ever shifting. It's unfixed. Think of the sun on a 55 degree day in Chicago when we're all believing the lie that it's 80.

And you sit like a cat in the backyard to soak it up but the cloud cover comes and when the cloud cover comes it's cold and it's this ever shifting changing view and he says look the difficulties of life can have a negative impact on your faith.

I acknowledge that. And you need a reorientation on the downside of everything God is walking into your life right now. because it's actually there under his guidance through his will to put rod in your back steadfastness in your soul that would have a full effect don't you love that verse 4 that your faith would be full faithful a fullness a faith that encounters anything and he's yet standing complete the word perfect the same as the word full lacking in nothing that's what he's doing right now in your life and you'll go one of two directions on the trials and difficulties of life the difficulties of life will either rob you of joy unsteady your soul and move you away from a pathway of life in other words your faith will flag your feet will wander you'll wake up one day and say who is

[18:23] God and what do I have to do with him or or you'll let it have its full effect sickness is another trial of!

5 your health I don't want you to wander but the difficulties of life can do that so this morning let us reorient our mind need the second is there in verses 5 through 8 direction for life it introduces the word wisdom your need for wisdom wisdom now when we think of wisdom unfortunately we think of the mind in isolation and the intellect but the Hebrew understanding of wisdom wasn't limited to this compartmentalized idea of how you think in your intellect wisdom properly understood was simply the application of the proper application of knowledge so wisdom dealt with your walk in life in other words it was more relational how do you navigate the relationships in life than how do you think that's why proverbs which is wisdom literature is so practical because wisdom literature is saying to you how do you treat other people how do you garner up enough patience to stay at work so that you can provide for yourself how do you find a wife the end of proverbs all these things are relational in orientation wisdom is relational so what he's saying here is there is a need for direction in life that is as full orb'd as all the relationships you are in and you go home and you're wondering what do

I need to do about this relationship or what am I to be doing about these circumstances and those things can have a negative effect on you according to the text it throws you into a whole range of doubt I don't know how to respond to my boss I don't know how to respond to my spouse if I have one I don't know how to respond to my parents I don't know what to do when this business encounter is completely off the rails I don't know how to handle my boss or those who work for me you see all these relational things they erupt what they erupt in quarrels in division in anger in in this distorted sense and what he says is when you're looking for direction which can undermine your strength in what God is doing and provide doubt what you need to do is not be tossed around ask God God what am

I to do with this and that's really a good question how many of us really do that or how many of us carry on the conversations that we need to have in the secrecy of our own mind concerning all the

issues that are in my life what he says is look you need direction for life and all that relational angst can spin you away from faith so that you're just you become an explosive person which moves you away from quietude and faith which pulls you away from the gospel which leads you to a point where you're saying where is God in my life and you're wandering so what's the antidote not only does our mind need to be reordered count your difficulties as joy knowing what it's affecting but your very life needs to be oriented you and I need to become a person of prayer simply ask God some of you have huge issues to deal with by the by the end of this week ask God dear God what am I to do lead me guide me give me the words in the very moment and it says he will notice he'll do it without reproach see we want to reproach everyone in all those situations God says no I won't even reproach you just just ask me and I'll I'll give it to you do you ask if we're not praying and asking concerning the ways we need direction and wisdom then it will indeed unsteady us to a point that's very unhealthy and will be according to verse eight unstable unstable so talk to God not merely yourself talk to

[ 24 : 22 ] God not merely your friend today talk to God he's there it will keep you from wandering the third is there in verses nine through eleven not only difficulties of life or direction for life but here the role that being financially advantaged or disadvantaged plays in life did you know that your financial position can cause you to wander whether you have nothing or everything that's what he says there in verse nine let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation and the rich in his humiliation because he knows that your place of advantage or disadvantage economically has an impact on your faith the one who's poor lowly he's got no assets to boast in and what does that do to his faith how come

I got no assets to boast in where are you how do I get this done how will this bill be paid and the lowly brother can be a very angry person in his or her relationship with God now in the communion service today in 1st Corinthians 7 we saw that when God made you a Christian nothing changes in regard to your socioeconomic status in fact he says to the one without don't be concerned about it and he says to the one with don't think you've got to go live without it he says just take where you are put it before God and don't let your disadvantaged economic position become a place that would cause you to wander from the faith and a trust in God or a belief that he's good or that he's generous or that he's kind he is good he is merciful he is kind he's been all those things to you in Christ therefore boast in your exaltation you are a child of God boast in that and that needs to be enough is

Jesus enough is he really enough when you get to heaven as one preacher said we all look forward to seeing family and friends and the rest of it what would your heaven be like if Jesus wasn't there would he matter boast in the exalted state that God who dwells in the heavens sent forth his son who is the heir of the universe to die for your sins that you might be his child boast you have everything in him but do we really hold that when we lose grip of that we wander we turn God into our enemy James doesn't want that and for the one who has well he calls him up pretty quick doesn't he hey you want something to boast about how about your humiliation you're going to die like a like a leaf like a flower on a 80 degree spring day in Chicago you're going to rise up one morning and be gone the next no spring done over scorching heat withered the rich man will fade away don't let your riches cause you to wander from a place of humility before God cause money can do that money can take you away from the path that leads to salvation it can entrap you in all kinds of snares we all want it and truth be told thank God most of us don't have as much as we think we need it can be a disadvantaged state to be advantaged well there they are look at the great promise that follows and notice how verses 12 through 15 are connected to 2 through 4 here's the promise of life for you blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him that's the encouragement

James wants you to have I know the difficulties of life are overwhelming you I know your need for direction for life is unsettling you I know that your state of advantage or disadvantage economically can lead you away but remember this blessed is the one who is steadfast under those trials for when you're done with it you get the crown of life in other words you will get life so hang in there says James don't wander it's a big future don't sacrifice the permanent on the altar of the immediate as my mother-in-law is so fond of saying don't you love how 13 then makes sense it's not just pulled out of context he's giving you the promise of life so don't be claiming that he's behind in a sense with evil intention all the things that are happening to you he has no evil intention toward you he

doesn't and realize that when evil intention does surface it comes from yourself and when it comes in yourself and it gives birth guess what its full effect is back to verse 4 what is the full effect of evil intention well it's death which is in contrast to life don't go your way unto death hang in there the promise promise of life awaits all who remain steadfast under the difficulties and the lack of direction and the disadvantages or advantages that are before you there's a great promise of life that's what he wants you to know and then he connects it at the end here verse 16 and the end you were actually brought forth for life

I mean how encouraging is this don't wander don't be deceived every good thing every perfect thing comes from above God doesn't change he's not a shifting thing of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruit his very purpose is that he brings you forth for life that's what he's doing in you your fruit the fruit on God's tree wow that word there in 17 I've never thought of it this way until this week every good gift and every perfect gift the word perfect is the same word that we have up in verse 4 for full and perfect which there is connected to trials we're looking for every good and perfect thing to come down from God that means stress free living what if the intention of the author here in 17 is to connect it to verse 4 it would mean then that all this stuff the difficulties the direction you need the disadvantages you face they are the perfect gifts of God for you that you would be the first fruits of him in a world amazing prone to wander

[ 32 : 47 ] Lord I feel it prone to leave the God I love the book of James he's concerned for us and he wants to accomplish in us a faith that is full our heavenly father as we hear these words I know that I speak to so many who need your spirit to encourage them today and I pray that the word would encourage them but also the Lord's table that we would be encouraged here that in this meal we have we have life that in his death we have life so I pray that each one who comes in faith would be strengthened in his death that they might live as first fruits we do not presume to come to this your table merciful

Lord trusting in our own righteousness but in your abundant mercies we're not worthy even to gather up the crumbs from under your table but you are the same Lord whose eternal nature is to have mercy grant us therefore gracious Lord so to eat the flesh of your dear son Jesus Christ and to drink his blood by faith that we may ever more dwell in him and he in us Amen