

God gives what we lack in our trials

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Preacher: Peter Kenny

[0 : 00] So chapter 1, verse 1 of James. James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.

Greetings. 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.

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.

[1 : 07] Please do keep it open in front of you as we spend time looking at it together. A number of years ago, a friend of mine was going to run the marathon.

And so he put in all the training. He ate all the pasta. He did all the little things that you need to do if you're getting ready to run a marathon. He was about 19 miles in to the marathon, which is approximately five times further than I've ever run in my life.

But his legs just quit. His body just shut down and he just could not go any further. He just did not have it within himself to keep going.

He was lacking what he needed to finish the race. And afterwards, in years to come, he ran marathons and so on and is a good runner to this day.

But on that day, he just didn't have what he needed. He was lacking. And I don't know if you've run marathons, but I'm sure you can empathize with him that sensation of not having what you need to get through, to keep going, to finish the race.

[2 : 16] And as James writes this letter, and as we hear from it this morning, he's thinking about us lacking. He's thinking about this idea of not having what we need.

So in verse 4, at the end of the verse, for example, he speaks about not lacking anything. In verse 5, he says, if any of you lacks wisdom.

And so James has in his mind this deficit, this lack, this need in the hearts and the lives of the people that he's writing to.

And he's thinking about this idea of lack, especially in the face of trials, especially when we're experiencing things in our lives which we don't want to experience, essentially.

He mentions trials in verse 3, or in verse 2, whenever you face trials of many kinds. And it's often when we face trials, isn't it, that we realize what we lack, that we realize what we need.

[3 : 27] He's writing to people who are facing trials. So in verse 1, we see that James is writing to the 12 tribes scattered among the nations. And as he uses that language, the 12 tribes scattered among the nations, it reminds us of language in the Old Testament.

So the 12 tribes of Israel. But the people who James is writing to are not just descended from Abraham. The people who James is writing to have put their faith in Jesus.

We see that at the start of chapter 2, believers. In verse 1 of chapter 2, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. And so what James has in mind is this idea of lacking, of needing something in the face of trials.

And he's saying that to Christians. He's saying that to people who have faith in Jesus, who trust Jesus. These Christians are scattered among the nations, he says in verse 1.

And it's likely that they are scattered, scattered as a result of persecution. It's likely that they are scattered because of the persecution that we see and read about in the book of Acts.

[4 : 46] And so they've been moved from one place to another. They're facing all the challenges, the trials that go with that. Including finding it hard to make ends meet.

And so on. And we can relate to what James is saying here. Because James says that it is in the face of many kinds of trials that we feel our lack.

That we feel our want. That we feel our need. Many kinds of trials. And so what James does for us is he gives us wisdom.

We need wisdom. He gives us wisdom to know what to do. He gives us wisdom to know what to do in the face of these trials. He tells us two things.

He tells us how to think. And he tells us what to ask. He tells us how to think. And he tells us what to ask. So how are we to think when we face trials?

[5 : 46] In verse 2 James says, well, consider it pure joy. My brothers and sisters.

Whenever you face trials of many kinds. How are we to think James? Well, here you go. Consider it pure joy. My brothers and sisters.

When you face trials of many kinds. And as you hear that. You may be thinking, well, I'm happy enough with the first half of it. Consider it pure joy.

And I'm happy enough with the second half of it that you acknowledge, James, that we will face trials. But I'm struggling, James, that you're putting those two things right beside each other.

Right in the same sentence. That those two things are like two train tracks that should be kept apart. And James, you're pushing them so close to each other.

[6 : 44] It kind of feels like the train is going to be derailed, James, if we put these things like this as you have stated them. Consider it pure joy when you face trials, James.

And if you're facing trials at this moment, if you're facing a circumstance in your life that you don't want to be going through, it's even harder to stomach, it seems, what James is telling us to do here.

Consider it pure joy. And you wonder, who does James think he is to be speaking like this? Well, who is James?

James is half-brother of Jesus. James is the leader of the Jerusalem church that we read about in Acts.

James is an apostle, as Paul describes in Galatians. So, you're thinking, okay, I'm going to give him a fair hearing.

[7 : 49] But it's interesting that James doesn't highlight those aspects of who he is. James describes himself as, in verse 1, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isn't it remarkable that James sees his role first as a servant of God, rather than first as a leader in the church?

And he sees his relationship to Jesus first as a spiritual relationship, rather than, well, I'm related to him by biology, by blood.

James describes his half-brother as the Lord, the Messiah, the chosen king. And James has the humility to call himself a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And now you're thinking, okay, I can listen to this guy. I can listen to what he has to say. He has humility. And so it's easier to hear what he's going to say.

[9 : 03] And what he's saying is to count it joy when we face trials. And we're thankful that he acknowledges that we face trials as followers of Jesus.

Sometimes this word can refer to inward temptation, this word trials. But the way James is using it is as an outward circumstance, something going on externally in their lives, like being scattered among the nations, like not having enough to make ends meet.

He's acknowledging the trials that they're facing. And he's not limiting it to just those experiences, but all kinds of trials, trials of various kinds.

When our life is not easy, what James is acknowledging here is as followers of Jesus, we don't get wrapped up in cotton wool and wait for Jesus to return or wait for heaven to come.

When I was young in my faith, I knew a very godly man by the name of Anthony, who was in his 50s and he was a hard worker. He was a humble servant of many.

[10 : 21] And he loved the Lord Jesus. And Anthony started to feel unwell and was eventually diagnosed with a brain tumour.

And they did everything they could to try and heal Anthony, to bring about healing. But as time went on, it became apparent that Anthony wasn't going to be made well again.

And I remember visiting him when he was not able to get out of bed anymore. And he loved the Lord.

He followed the Lord. And yet Anthony passed away. And for me, young in my faith, I realised in that moment that we're not protected from trials in the sense of never experiencing hard times and challenges as followers of Jesus.

We're not protected from sickness or from unemployment or from disappointment or from the house being too busy or the house being too quiet.

[11 : 29] We're not protected from bereavement and grief in the sense of never experiencing these things. we face trials as part of life in a fallen world.

And sometimes we face trials as a result of following Jesus. And so James wants to acknowledge that. They are trials. They're not joys.

And yet then he says, consider it pure joy when you face trials. Consider it pure joy. And he's careful with his language so he doesn't say, he doesn't say, only consider it pure joy.

So he's not now negating what he has said. He's not now saying, just think about it as joy. It is a trial. It is a trial. But James is saying that we consider it as joy.

Because it's not only a trial. He's saying, don't look at the bowl of fruit and say that it's all apples or all oranges. There's both in there at the same time.

[12 : 48] Even in the midst of the trial. We can consider it as joy. Because it's not only a trial. And what James is doing here is he's not telling us that in the face of a trial or in the midst of real hardship that we walk around with a smile on our face ignoring the fact that we are really, really struggling.

but he is saying it's possible to have pure joy. That is, genuine joy. Sincere joy. Real joy. Not fake joy.

But real joy. Even in the midst of trials. How can we find joy like this, James? We're scattered. We're persecuted.

We're powerless. Well, James tells us how we can consider trials pure joy.

He tells us in verse 3, you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. The testing of your faith produces perseverance.

[14 : 01] James says you know this, Christians, followers of Jesus. You know this to be true. The testing of your faith produces perseverance. These are real Christians with real faith, facing real trials, knowing that this trial, these trials, trials of many kinds, produces perseverance.

It produces something in us. And what we realize is the only way we can learn perseverance is by having something to persevere through.

What happens when we are faced with trials of many kinds or any kind? We realize, I don't have what it takes. I am not self-sufficient.

I don't have the capacity or the resources. I need to get through this. And so I need, again, to trust Jesus.

I'm out of my depth. I can't handle this. But I look to Him. And as we look to Him in the midst of the trial, it enables us to persevere, to keep going.

[15 : 15] And before we know it, what the trial has produced in us as a result of looking to Jesus in it is perseverance. And the only way to learn that, the only way to grow in that is by going through the trial, looking to Jesus.

I have 24 gears on my bike. So there's three cogs at the front, eight at the back. And I usually tend towards the easier end of the spectrum when it comes to the cogs on my bike.

Now, if I cycle in the easiest gear all the time, what's going to happen? I'm not going to get any stronger. I'm not going to get any fitter. But when I push up through the gears, as a result of that trial, and it can be a trial on some of the hills in Cork, I actually grow in perseverance.

The next time I come to the same hill in the same gear, I'm actually able to handle it better as a result of having been through it the first time. And what James wants us to know this morning is that trials produce perseverance in us.

Trials produce this characteristic that we keep looking to Jesus. And not only do they produce perseverance, but these trials, this perseverance has an end product in mind.

[16 : 50] And we see that end product in verse 4. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

The ultimate goal of this perseverance, this steadfastness, this continuing to look to Jesus through the trials where we feel out of our depth, the ultimate goal of that is wholeness, completeness, maturity, perfection.

In other words, the ultimate goal of it is being like Jesus. And James is saying to us that it is through these trials which produce perseverance, which lead towards perfection and completeness and maturity.

It's through these trials that God is at work to bring about these characteristics and this goal in us. We want to be like Jesus and James is saying to us it's actually in the midst of trials.

This is one of the key ways in which God produces completeness in us. When you think about Jesus in Hebrews it says that Jesus, what did he do?

[18 : 08] He endured the cross. For the joy set before him he endured the cross and it's the same word in the original language. He kept persevering through the cross for the joy set before him.

And when we are faced with trials that are lesser than the cross but are significant and serious and substantial and we keep looking to Jesus James is assuring us that the end goal that God has in mind for us is Christlikeness, completeness, fullness and this is why he can say consider it a joyful thing.

Consider it a joy when you face trials not because they're enjoyable but because you can see what God is doing can't you? Growing perseverance in you growing Christlikeness in you moving you closer and closer to being more like him.

James wants us to consider it joy when we face trials of many kinds because God works through them to produce perseverance in us and to make us more like Christ and that's what we want though we may not choose the way in which that happens.

we had work done in our roof recently and the guy doing the work he was doing it evenings and weekends and we had this vision of what we want the ceiling to look like here's the finished work here's the complete work what he would do would be to come up one evening and do a little bit of work and go away he'd come up the next evening do a little bit more and go away he'd come up the next evening and do a little bit more and go away and it was remarkable in how methodical he was now there was only one evening that he went away when it was actually finished and yet each time he came you could see how he was getting closer and closer closer to the finished complete work and what James wants us to realize is that each time we face trials and we look to Jesus and he enables us to persevere God is getting us closer to being like him and that is a joyful thing it is a trial but more than that it is an opportunity to become more like

[20 : 54] Jesus as we look to him and that is a joyful thing and so that is how James wants us to think about the various trials that we face the second thing that we are to do is to ask God for what we lack to ask God for what we lack James tells us this in verse five if any of you lacks wisdom if any of you lacks wisdom you should ask God you see James realizes that it is in the midst of trials that we are sometimes most confused most disoriented what will I do what decision do I make there's an author called Zach S.

and he's helpful very helpful in terms of understanding wisdom when we're making a decision we want to be thinking is it a wise thing to do do I have wise people speaking into this is this wise timing is this the wise way of doing the wise thing is this wisdom way why do I want to do this why do I want to choose this way and of course we need that wisdom in the midst of trials if you're anything like me you will find it harder to make wise decisions when you're in the midst of a trial so when one of the boys broke his arm recently you never know with kids are they okay or are they not okay and so I'm thinking I mean he seems to be kind of okay but we're not quite sure and so we have a choice to make now do we bring him to the hospital or do we give him paracetamol and hope he's okay and if we bring him to the hospital it could be seven hours in the hospital and they tell us he's okay or if we don't bring him to the hospital he could have a broken arm and in that moment you're thinking what do

I do and it would mean cancelling plans rearranging plans and so on and so forth of course we brought him to the hospital but in that moment having the clarity and the wisdom we cried out to God for wisdom we don't know what to do in the face of that trial but of course when James talks about wisdom he's thinking about more than just making good decisions in the face of trials if you flip over the page of your Bible to James chapter 3 James chapter 3 in verse 17 James tells us what he means by wisdom so he tells us what he means by wisdom in James chapter 3 verse 17 here's what wisdom is it's more than decision making he says the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure then peace loving considerate submissive full of mercy and good fruit impartial and sincere peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness now we'll spend time in

James chapter 3 in a few weeks time but we need to keep in mind how James defines wisdom as he tells us in chapter 1 to ask for wisdom in the face of trials because we're to ask for more than just the right decision to make we are to ask for what we lack in terms of our character we're to ask for this peace loving considerate submissive full of mercy good fruit impartial sincere wisdom character in the face of trials because it's in those moments isn't it when we can be anything but peace loving it's in those moments when we can be anything but considerate you want me to be considerate don't you realize what I'm facing it's in those moments when we can be irritable with others or angry with

God it's in the moment when redundancies are announced at work where selfish ambition can start to stir up in our hearts it's in the times when we are faced with ill health as a real trial that we can lack peace in our relationship with God and with others James tells us in chapter one we can ask God for what we lack we can ask God for this wisdom from above and he assures us of God's response verse five if any of you lacks wisdom you should ask God look at how God responds he gives generously he gives generously if you've ever been to one of those fancy restaurants where you can't understand most of what's on the menu and you order something and they bring out a plate and there's a small bit of food in the middle and you're looking at and you're thinking is that the main course

[26 : 44] I'd hate to see the! that isn't how God portions out his wisdom to us he gives generously he gives the way Ichiban restaurant in Jackson Mississippi gives Ichiban roughly translated means number one Ichiban is a all you can eat restaurant so you fill your plate you take it back to your table you clear the plate you bring your plate back up you fill the plate you take it back to your table you clear the plate and you do that as many times guess what when you have done your best to eat Ichiban out of house and home their plates and their ladles and their pots and pans are still full of food and James wants us to realize that we come asking God for wisdom he isn't measly in how he portions it out to us he gives it generously to us and he gives it generously to all to anybody who asks there isn't a sign on the front of

God's restaurant saying not welcome there's a sign on the front of God's restaurant saying all welcome come in and eat as much as you need of this wisdom receive as much as you need of this wisdom and as James says that God is generous in how he gives there's also a nuance to that the nuance is that God is single minded in how he gives he's not double minded he's not thinking hesitantly about giving to us he's not thinking with mixed motives about giving to us so he's not thinking oh I'll give all that peace to them then I'll be able to get them later on when they do something else bad he's thinking single mindedly about how he gives to his children brother Jesus spoke about as James often will do what does Jesus say he says that our father loves to give good gifts to his children if we love to do that as evil people how much more does

God when we're faced with trials we are to ask God for this wisdom that we do not have this wisdom from heaven from God from above that we do not have not only does God give generously and single mindedly but he gives without finding fault James says in verse 5 when we come looking for what we lack when we come looking for patience because we're impatient God doesn't look at our impatience and hold it over our heads he gives without finding fault because in Christ we are fully forgiven when we come praying for gentleness because we're conscious again of the ungodly anger in our hearts God doesn't say but look at what's going on in your life he says I know you lack and I'll happily give he doesn't say I can't believe you're acting like this again

I can't believe you've messed up again he gives generously without finding faults! one isn't it?

From the moment you asked God for forgiveness from the moment you bowed before him and said God I've not loved you I've not loved others I need your mercy and he has given freely without finding fault and he continues to give freely without finding fault and James wants us to know that when we realize that this is what God is like and this is how God gives to us we can ask confidently verse 6 when you ask you must believe and not doubt just as God is single minded in giving we can be!

[30 : 59] single minded in asking! And yet as you read this I know what some of you are thinking is James now pulling the rug from under us he's built us up in this fabulous assurance of God's character now he's saying but God doesn't find fault but if your faith is faulty if your faith isn't strong enough if your faith isn't good enough nothing from God is that what James is saying not at all as one author puts it it's not that James is saying we must never have had a spiritual question or struggle to understand the ways of God or that we've never wrestled with parts of the Bible's teaching James is not saying we need to have worked ourselves up into a state of absolute belief before God will give us generously and single mindedly and without finding fault James tells us what he means by this in verse seven he says that person sorry verse six because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea blown and tossed by the wind and if you've looked out at the sea off the coast of Ireland especially the west coast you see these waves being blown and tossed by the wind and one minute they're here and one minute they're there and you don't know where they stand James is saying that is what somebody is like who doubts in this way in the way he describes in verse eight such a person is double minded and unstable in all they do this is somebody who has split loyalties so for example in verse 20 of this chapter it tells us human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires now if you come to that and read it and you say okay God I don't doubt I trust I have faith that human anger does not produce the righteousness of God but just in this area I need to be angry to get the results I want that's not single mindedly trusting God's ways that's saying sometimes

God you're right and sometimes my way is right that's double minded but if we come to God even if our faith is frail even if we're feeling weak in and of ourselves even if we're feeling our lack especially if we're feeling our lack and we trust God your ways are the best ways I want the wisdom that you can give and I trust you even in the face of these trials James says God gives generously without finding fault single mindedly God loves that kind of prayer God loves when we come to him seeking what we lack this is the God we've experienced in the gospel in the good news of Jesus what does

Paul tell us in Romans chapter 8 Romans 8 verse 32 he who did not spare his own son how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things all that we lack all that we need when we know again our own sin when we know again in the face of trials our own lack our own need we are reminded of this gracious God this gracious God who even in the trial that we face is producing Christ likeness in us making us more like Christ more complete more whole and will one day finish the good work that he has begun in us this gracious

God who gives generously to we who ask him for what we lack I want you to think for a moment what is it that you're facing at the moment that you wish you weren't what is it you are facing that you wish God would take it away God knows that this is a trial that this is hard that this is a challenge but he tells us clearly from his word here's how I want you to think of this that it's not just a trial but that it is joy because in it I'm producing Christ likeness in you as you keep looking to him the author and perfecter of your faith and here's what

[36 : 22] I want you to ask in it I want you to ask of me what you lack I want you to ask of me for wisdom for the character that you need and God graciously generously freely responds to that it changes our perspective in the trials that we face and so let's pray and ask for God to bring this home to our hearts and enable us to do what he has called us to do heavenly father we are thankful and grateful and praise you for your good character father we're amazed at your wisdom lord that in the midst of this fallen world that one day you will make perfect and whole and complete that even in the midst of the trials that we face you are fulfilling your purposes in us to make us more like your son help us to hold on to that lord to have that perspective to think your thoughts after you in the trials that we're facing and lord when we see the lack in ourselves when we see ourselves acting showing behaving in ways that are just not of you help us lord to ask help us to come to you again the one who doesn't find fault but gives graciously this wisdom from above this christ-like character that we need in the trials that so jar us father we praise you for hearing us help us to see your response to us in the days ahead amen