

Wisdom

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[0:00] Now, if you didn't get one of the posters, if you want one, I've got a couple left. They were supposed to be done last week, but Mark couldn't get them to print. He didn't have the big paper.

We're in James, so you want to open up your book, your Bible, to chapter 1 of James. Mark actually preached the first verse, so I'm going to start with 2.

Chapter 1, verse 2. And here, I've got to tell you this. This may end up being sermon light. I don't know. But what happens is, if you look at, I had verses 1 through 12, and although the subject matter flows, although it's not necessarily obvious from the beginning to the end of that section, it actually has two sections in it.

And, and I debated, did I want to preach 65 minutes? No. And do the whole thing? Or did I just want to concentrate on one part?

Because this would easily be several sermons. Even what I chose could be a lot longer. We'll go into it in a lot more detail. But we'll just stick with verses 2 through 8 right now. All right, so let's read that.

[1:16] Chapter 1, James chapter 1, verses 2 through 8. And it says, My brothers and sisters, consider it nothing but joy when you fall into all sorts of trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

And let endurance have its perfect effect, so that you will be perfect and complete, not deficient in anything. But if anyone is deficient in wisdom, he should ask God, who will give to all generously and without reprimand, and will be given to him.

But he must ask in faith without doubting. For the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed around by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord, since he is a double-minded individual, unstable in all his ways.

Now to start out, I want to take a survey. So I want you to raise your hand if you answer this question positively or affirmatively. So raise your hand if you find trials a joy, rather than, maybe you don't find them a joy, but how many of you rejoice when you fall into trials?

There's one! Sava, he says, You see, him, his trials are causing his mama trouble, right? Yeah, you know, that's not something that most of us look forward to.

[2:46] In fact, I actually heard from one person, unspecified, last week we were talking about it, and he says, I don't like trials. Remember that? I said the same thing, I don't like trials either.

But James says that we don't have to like them, but we have to count them as joy. That's hard, I think. Now that word count or consider is actually an accounting term.

It's used several places in the Bible. It's account. It means to reckon or to account. In other words, you're to take this trial and you're to put it in one of your two columns.

Remember when you do bookkeeping, you have debits and credits. And so he's saying, now most of us would put a trial in which column? Debit.

We say, this is bad, this is my debt. But he says, no, no, no, no. Put it in the credit. This is a good thing for you. And most of us go, oh, you don't, no, no.

[3:44] James, you got it wrong. But actually that's what it means. It goes in the credit. It's an asset, he says, to find joy in something that is difficult for us to go through.

Now Paul uses the same word in Philippians 3, verses 7 and 8. He uses it in a little bit different context, but he uses the same word so you get an idea how it works.

It says, there it says, but I, whatever I gained, but whatever gain I had. Now remember, whatever gain I had, whatever he got, the stuff that he had.

And he's talking about having been a Pharisee and righteous by, because he's a Jew from circumcised on the eighth day and all these things, this religious stuff that he did before Christ.

He says, this was all gain to me at that time. I did everything to be perfectly righteous before God. But whatever gain I had, I count as loss for the sake of Christ.

[4 : 45] Indeed, I count everything as loss because it's a surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Now the new, that's in the ESV, the new English says, but these assets, I have come to regard as liabilities because of Christ.

More than that, I now regard all things as liabilities compared to the far greater value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. And it just struck me, remember when Jesus talked about the pearl of great price?

He found a pearl of great price in a field. What did he do? The guy in the parable. He sold everything. He said, everything I have is worthless compared to this one pearl.

And that pearl is the truth about Jesus Christ. Just think about that. How do you consider your assets and liabilities?

You know, I actually did this before we started, if I didn't do this in a church context, and I said, I want you to list your assets and I want you to list your liabilities, we'd all go, I got a house, I got a car, I got this, I got that, I got this.

[5 : 54] And you might even add in there, I got a family, I got a good wife or a good husband or a tolerable husband, you know, and children, you know. And then on this side, you put down there, I have a mortgage, I owe them my car, you know, I have a bad job, I have a good job.

However you want to do that, but you wouldn't have, you wouldn't have said, I'm a Christian, that's my prime asset. That's the pearl of great price that I have. That's my asset. All the rest of it are just liabilities.

They're things that are holding me back. Now I'm going to look at this side more than this side because there's only two of you over there. Think about that. That's how, that's how James is saying we need to do about trials and difficulties and troubles that come across us.

We need to go, yeah, this is an asset. Why is it an asset? Well, he's going to tell us. Now when, you know, I get up and something goes bad, I don't usually go, oh, yes sir, this is great, Lord, we're going to have a great opportunity to work through this one.

I'm going, oh my goodness, how am I going to make it, right? But there's a, there's a, a logic to what he's saying. Now that brings us to the word trials that he used in several of these verses.

[7 : 08] And, it can refer to difficulties from without. Or, it can refer to inner trials that we have. They're usually inner moral tests.

So, in the section that I'm supposed to be doing up through verse 12, James is using the word trial to mean things outside of you that are coming in and affecting you. Next, whoever preaches after me is going to be talking about the inner trials.

And that's going to be more of a temptation. How you deal with the trials of temptation that come from within. And then the other thing he says is when you fall into all sorts of trials, and that's literally how the Greek goes, when you fall into it.

It's like we're bebopping down the street minding our own business and all of a sudden we fall through a manhole that's had the cover removed. And the next thing we know, what happened? How did I get here?

It's the same, Paul uses the same word to fall into something when he talks about his shipwrecks. They were coming up from him, he'd been arrested and they were taking him to Rome and they had a shipwreck off of the coast of Malta.

[8 : 16] And the storm's going on, the wind's blowing hard, and the crew is trying desperately to get the ship into a small bay and land it on the beach. But they fall into a reef because the wind is blowing.

And the ship is wrecked and they're all in danger of drowning. And that's the same word. Something that happens you don't plan on. You don't go, oh, there's a reef, let's go crash the ship on it.

That doesn't make sense unless you really are desperate. And just like Paul, we find our lives full of hidden reefs and rocks.

And most of the time we don't plan on falling into trials. They just come upon us. We blunder into them. And when that happens, James tells us to embrace this trial with joy.

And you say, how can I do that? And the answer is because there's no trial, there's no calamity, there's no pressure, there's no sorrow, there's no small rub outside of God's grace.

[9 : 20] Remember what it says? All things work for the good of those who believe in our cult. That has to include, it isn't, you don't get to select which ones work for your good.

You know what I'm saying? You know, that breakfast was great, that worked for my good. Or it may not have, it may be that you're going to get fat because you eat like that. Or it could be that that food was bad for you and you're going to get sick.

And you think, well, this is mine, look at how it's good, this is for my good. No. You might look at the new house you bought or a new car you bought or a new job you have or a new spouse you get and say, this is for my good and turn out that you made the wrong choice.

And it's going to be disastrous for you for some reason. You're going to lose your job, your house is going to get blown away or swept away in a river or that spouse you think was so wonderful is going to be a demon and you're stuck with them.

I mean, that's just the way it is. But all things work for good for those that are called according to God's purpose. Now, God doesn't usually give us trials.

[10 : 26] Now, I think there are times when people do, God does bring trials. I think Jonah sort of had that. You know, he made some bad decisions and God basically didn't cause the trial.

Him sitting in the hot sun sweltering and doing, getting swallowed by a big fish. Those were all things, results of his choices. But God used those to get Jonah squared away to do what he had called him to do.

God permits trials to come upon us. Then he uses them for his purposes, usually to refine and purify our faith, usually to bring our walk more in line with his word.

As James states in verse 3 and 4, it says, you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. We sang a song and we sang in there saying the word steadfast.

That's the same idea. Our walk with him will be steadfast. We'll have endurance. We'll stick in to the end in this race that we're in. And let endurance have its perfect effect.

[11 : 33] So what's the perfect effect? That you may be perfect and complete, not deficient in anything. Now the word perfect means mature. That's the goal, that we'll have mature faith.

That our walk with the Lord will be mature. It'll be something that has some depth to it. That it has some substance to it because we've had experience with God and His grace through things that were not pleasant.

Trials become a form of discipline for us. The kind of discipline a soldier experiences in his training. Now I was a soldier. Stephen was a soldier.

And we know that basic training in particular was not fun. It was a trial. Every day you knew those drill sergeants were thinking some evil up for us.

That they were going to... I actually was trained at Fort Bragg. I mean, Fort Ord, California. It's right on the coast of Monterey. It doesn't exist anymore. And I knew there was sand because it was right on the ocean.

[12 : 40] But inland, there shouldn't have been sand. I mean, there were hills. But everywhere I marched there was sand. And I thought, these, sorry, you know what's, haul this sand in here just to make me walk through it.

Because it's hard to march in sand. But we know, every soldier knows, that this hard training is for their best. Why? Because sloppy training means sloppy fighting which means ultimately defeat.

We train the way we're going to fight. The fight is going to be hard so we need to train hard. We have to have the discipline to do our duty no matter what happens.

And it has to be the same with Christians. We need to learn discipline before the Lord. We need to know how to live the life of faith in this fallen world.

And then hang in there no matter what. No matter what. Back in Augustine's time, way back, and I think it's coming to our times soon.

[13 : 46] Sooner than we want. The pressure of the empire that Caesar would say, you know, Christians or the governor, he often was just regional. Christians are evil. We need to destroy them.

If you're a Christian, you're going to be executed. And they'd haul people in before him and say, you know, bow down and confess Caesar or Lord or you die. And there were those that were going, Caesar's not Lord.

Jesus is Lord. And they'd be executed. And other people would come in and say, gee, I don't want to die. I can always confess it as sin. I'm going to say Caesar's Lord. And when I get out of here, I'll take care of it with the Lord.

And they'd come in and say, yeah, Caesar's Lord. And they'd let him go. And it became a problem in the church. They'd go, can we let these people back in the church who have denied Christ because by declaring Caesar's Lord, they had denied Jesus was Lord.

What do we do with these people? And much of the church said they cannot come back. They chose to leave the church and be apostate. They can't come back.

[14:51] Well, how in the world, I mean, think about that. What would you do? What would you do if your life hung by one sentence?

We were talking, we did Daniel 6 today, which is Daniel in the lion's den. All Daniel had to do was keep his windows closed and pray and pray that nobody would ever know what he was doing when he was against the law.

But instead, he opened these windows and did what he was supposed to do three times that day and they caught him. And he didn't go into the king and say, this isn't fair, your law's all messed up. Don't you understand? This is, I can pray whenever I want to but to whomever I want to. Despite what you say, okay, you're not God. Instead, he went. He went.

They put him in the den. Lions fully expecting that he'd be eaten. Daniel didn't complain. See, he understood that his faithfulness to God was more important than his own life.

[15:56] The three young men before him when Daniel and his friends were taking care of him, they were thrown in the furnace. Why? Because they said, we will not bow down to you or your statue or your gods.

And if God can save us but if he doesn't, we won't deny him. Think about that. Maybe someday one of us will have to make that decision.

I think also, you see, trials refine, purify, test our strength of our faith and it gives us confidence in God and His Word.

C.S. Lewis had a wife that died tragically and he was very attached to her and he wrote a book called something about suffering. Grief Observed. Grief Observed.

And he really dealt with this. How can bad things happen to people you love and how do you deal with these difficulties, these trials, these troubles that come on you that are so earth-shattering, harmful to your well-being?

[17:05] And he said, how can God allow this kind of stuff to happen to you? And he came to the realization that without suffering from trials and difficulties, you'll never know the value and the depth and the purity of your faith.

If you don't suffer through trials, you don't go through difficult times and you have to make decisions who and what you're going to do and who you're going to follow, you'll never know, you'll never know if your faith is up here or in here.

This faith will not save you. This faith will. Think of Job.

We studied Job in our Sunday's book. Whoa! You don't want to talk about it bad. Everything that could go wrong went wrong for Job. And he couldn't figure it out for the life of it.

For 40 chapters, he couldn't figure it out. And God shows up and He talks to him and tells him who he is and what he's done. And Job says something finally in response.

[18:14] He says, I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye has seen you. Through all that Job experienced, all the trouble and trials he went through, when he had known about God, he had been faithful to serve God, to worship God, to do what God told him to do, to live a good life and all that.

He says, but I'm just hearing. I just heard. I was doing what I heard. I understood you from what I understood. what people told me. He says, but now I've seen you with my own eyes and my suffering.

I've seen you're there all the time. You care about me. You love me. You provide for me. You're walking with me. Even when my life is at the end, when I'm despairing for even another breath, you're still my God and you still care for me.

How did he know that? Only because of all the things he suffered. undergoing trials proves your faith to be genuine.

And if you go through it right, you'll come out stronger in your faith. It's like weight lifting. How many of you have lifted weights?

[19:29] How do you get muscle to develop? Well, you lift weight that's hard. if you go in the gym and you get these little one pound weights and you do that five or six times and you go home and

the next day you do the same thing, you're going to go, after two months, you're going to go, well, nothing happened.

Well, the answer is you didn't do anything, literally. You didn't do anything worthwhile. There was no struggle or difficulty in that. Now, I see there's a young man, he's a deputy sheriff, he goes in there and he starts out where I end.

And he's doing this and then he puts two more on, he's doing this and he's got six 45 pound plates on that and he's going, he's struggling but he's doing it.

Can you tell what the difference, can you guess what the difference is between him and me? No, well, I got a little bit of a gut, he doesn't and I have a little hardly any chest though, he's a massive guy.

That's the way it is. Your body won't grow unless it's challenged with difficulty. Your faith won't grow unless it's challenged in troubles and difficulties.

[20 : 43] You want to become mature and strong in the faith? Then you've got to go through trials and difficulties to exercise your faith. Now, verse of James 5 through 8 in chapter 1.

But if anyone is deficient in wisdom, he should ask God. Who gives to all generously and without reprimand. And it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without doubting.

For the one who doubts is like the wave of the sea, blown and tossed about by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord since he is a double-minded individual, unstable in all his ways.

See, what we usually lack when we fall into difficulties is wisdom. We don't know how to handle it. We don't know which way to go. We don't know what we should do with it. Do we just sit there and endure it?

What do we do? How do we handle it? What do we say? How do we respond? God? And James says that what you need to do is ask God for wisdom.

[21 : 50] He'll give it to you. He'll give you the wisdom you need to work through all those times and all those situations and he gives it to you generously. He doesn't demean you saying you don't know.

He said, no, I'll give it to you. You need it, I'll give it to you. And he doesn't give philosophical or theoretical wisdom. Have you ever gone to someone and asked them for advice and they start talking philosophy?

Or say, well, theoretically, you could do this or you could do that. I don't need theory and I don't need philosophy, I need solutions. What do I do? God doesn't do that.

He gives us his God-given understanding that allows us to avoid the paths of wickedness and rebellion and selfishness to get ourselves through the difficulty, to get to the other side of the pit, to live a righteous life faithfully to him, to successfully navigate the trial.

But there's a big but there. And there's a condition that but is, but we have to ask in faith, not doubting. Wait a minute, wait a minute.

[23 : 06] you remember the guy comes to Jesus and he wants healing, I think, from his son and he says, Jesus says, do you believe?

Do you believe I can do this? Do you believe? And the man says, yes, I believe. Help my unbelief. You remember that? You say, well, Jesus answered his prayer. How could he answer his prayer if the man was, it sounds like he's doubting, doesn't he?

I believe, but I'm not really sure. But there's a difference because what the word, what he's doing, he's looking at the situation and he's looking at Jesus and he says, I believe you can do it.

But you know, I'm just walking on faith because I don't have anything substantial or no facts to hold in my hands and say, yes, this is going to happen. What James is talking about is a two double-minded person.

The word in Greek means two minds, literally two brains. You know, some of us think of a two-faced person, the Janus, one looking this way, one looking that way. It's not that at all. It's two different minds.

[24 : 14] One mind says, yeah, I believe, and the other one says, well, I'm not so sure. And you have to listen to one or the other because they're in conflict. You have to decide, who am I going to listen to?

Which part of my brain am I going to follow? I think it actually breaks down into this. We have the mind of Christ. That's what Philippians says.

We have the mind of Christ. So that one mind is Christ-like. It's filled with God's wisdom. The other mind is the mind of the flesh, the old man, the sinful man. And so literally it's sort of like the angel and the devil.

all you know is who's going to rule this situation? Are you going to follow Christ or are you going to follow the world? Are you going to follow Christ or are you going to follow the flesh?

Are you going to be like the new man in Christ or are you going to be the old man of sin and death? And when you have to make a decision and when you say I need wisdom but you've already decided you're not going to do it God's way, He's not going to help you.

[25 : 17] You've made your choice. He's going to let you go the way you want to go and you're going to suffer the consequences of that bad decision.

But if you say Lord I really want to do it your way even though I know that that's going to be harder because I'm going to have to stand up to the things that are trying to oppress me, give me wisdom on how to do that, then He will.

He'll say here's what you need to do. Go. Remember also He said don't worry about what to say, I'll give you words. He's saying the same thing, don't worry about what you're going to do, just go and trust that I'm going to lead you the way you're supposed to go.

But you have to make the decision. You cannot do both. If you compromise, you're going to lose. You've got to choose His way.

when you get all done, down at the very bottom, verse 12, it says, happy is the one who endures testing because when he has proven to be genuine, he will receive the crown of life that God promised to those who love it.

[26 : 43] When you get all through the whole thing, genuine is what you want to end up being. What does that mean? Genuine what? Genuinely a follower of Christ.

One who has put his life in his hands and is living by faith. Genuine. A true, ardent, believing Christian in all that that means.

Not one that speaks the right words, but one that lives the right words. And he will receive the crown of life. See, James understands lives as full of troubles.

We live in a fallen world. That's what this is all about. The first people made the wrong choices and they got thorns and thistles. In difficulties and trials, sicknesses and death, we live in that mess.

We human beings are the best at making trouble for other people. We're much better at making trouble for other people than we are at fixing things. humans. You look at human history, if an alien came and watched our whole history, how would they summarize the history of human beings?

[27 : 54] Constantly killing one another, either in war or other ways. We're the most cruel animal on the face of the earth. And why? Because we chose to go our own way and do our own thing.

But God said, if you live in line with my truth for my purposes, I'll give you real life. I'll change you, make you new creatures.

You're going to have troubles in this world. But Christ said, I'll never leave you or forsake you.

James tells us God will give us wisdom. He tells us that we're single-mindedly following Christ, reckoning all else to be worthless.

And that's our problem. Because all else really has a lot appeal to us, attractive. And we stick to the upward path toward the heavenly Jerusalem like Hebrew says, that we're on that road to the heavenly Jerusalem.

God will give us wisdom. He'll give us the understanding how to move forward through the thickets and the briars that we encounter, and even fall into every day.

[29 : 09] And one day we'll receive a crown of life. let's pray. Lord, I just thank you for your word. I thank you for the truth of your word. I just ask that we, I don't know that I explained it well, but Lord, I just hope and pray that we'll grasp what you're trying to tell us.

And when it comes to trials, difficulties, and troubles, and just tough situations, that we'll choose to do it your way, even if it's expensive to us, Lord. For we know that the crown of life outdoes anything that we might gain in this world, and to be with you forever and eternity on the new earth is far beyond anything that we can ever gain here.

Help us, Lord. Help us in our unbelief. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.