

God's Grace Enables

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Preacher: Daniel Ralph

- [0 : 00] So this morning, we are in James chapter 1. James can be found after the book of Hebrews, which is neither an easy book perhaps to find.
- But if you make it through all the T's, Thessalonians, Titus, you'll eventually get to Hebrews. Keep going, and you'll eventually get to James. I'm going to read the first eight verses, and our focus, of course, will be on the main section within those eight after the greeting.
- So let's read from verse 1 through to 8. Now hear 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 a God, who gives generously to all, without reproach, and it will be given him.
- [1 : 24] 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. For he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.
- Well, may God bless his word to us this morning. Amen. Amen.
- Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
- Amen. Amen. Amen.
- [2 : 22] As we come then to this short section within James, I want to point out that over the years of me being here, we have studied the book of James in a few different ways.
- We've done a complete Bible study series on James, which took us several weeks to complete. We then did a whole sermon series on James, which took us, again, several weeks to complete.
- And this is no test of your memory this morning. The fact that I feel that I need to repeat it again, that I'm having a go in any way of you not being able to remember what I taught.
- I'm sure you remember it perfectly. So I'm not intending this morning to sort of begin a new series, but I am intending this morning at least to draw out of the passage that we read together this morning the idea of the fact that God's grace enables the Christian.
- I can't do that in the Christian life. It really ought to be moved into the category of perhaps I don't want to do that.
- [3 : 44] And the reason for that is because God's grace enables the believer to do things that they could not do when they were not a believer. The other thing to notice here, and I have to point this out as a clear definition, that by trial, the trial is the very circumstance that is testing your faith.
- For instance, you know, in this church recently, we've lost a lot of brothers who've gone to be with the Lord and sisters. You know, over the years we have.

And it's with great sadness, but they're not trials. How you deal with them may be a trial. But one moving from the church visible to the church eternal, that's not a trial.

That's an important distinction to make. It's a bit like if you're going to speak about anything, love, peace, communion.

You have to define your terms so that everybody knows what they're talking about. James defines a trial as something which is testing your faith.

[4 : 59] Now, it could be that those things could be testing your faith, but those things themselves are not actually the trial. It's how you're dealing with them that becomes the trial.

Now, God's enabling grace here in James is wisdom. Asking God for wisdom. God's wisdom will enable you to be able to handle the trial.

If you don't ask for that wisdom, then it could be that you're finding the trial much harder to deal with simply because you've not asked for the very thing that can enable you through the trial.

The same can be said of all the other means of grace. You know, that God in prayer is enabled to do things for you that you cannot do for yourself. That God is able to give you peace, which is not a feeling.

Peace is where you submit to the rule of Christ. That's the definition of peace. Let the peace of God rule in your hearts. That's the ruling of peace.

[6 : 00] And there are, of course, many other benefits that we begin to enjoy only by belonging to the one who can bestow all of these benefits on believers. They have to come from somewhere.

If we don't have them within our own life and we need them, they have to come from somewhere. Now, many people will try and get the very things that they need from the world.

And there's not too many bookshops in the UK that don't have a shelf that says self-help. You know, and every now and then, just for a curiosity and a giggle, I'll perhaps wander down that aisle and read a few while Susan's doing something else.

And once I felt so bad because I read a whole book and I had to buy it because I read it in the shop while Susan was shopping weekly. This was back in the day before we had children.

And I felt so guilty that I'd read a whole book without paying for it. I then had to pay for it and I never read it since. But that will teach me. The idea then of people looking for something outside of themselves to bring in to enable them is not a strange idea.

[7 : 10] Everyone does it. The distinction here is that the Christian knows that true enabling grace comes from God. The true strength comes from the one who is strong.

True wisdom comes from the one who is wise. True peace comes from the one who has peace. And so if we want those benefits, it has to come from the place where those benefits are found.

It's a fairly straightforward point. But many, many Christians in that very point still have to be told, ask for wisdom. Now, I want to point out that if you're being told to ask for wisdom, it's because you're not.

Okay, I would argue that most of the New Testament is written to tell you to do the things that you know that you ought to do but are not doing. But nevertheless, you need to be told to do them.

Now that we are Christians, now that we are God's people, God is looking for certain things to be produced in our life. God desires certain things to come out of our life.

[8 : 17] He wants to see certain things happen. And he will enable us so that those things, so that our lives do produce those qualities. And so the Christian life is not one where we sort of wander our way through till we eventually meet God.

No, God gives us his grace so that our lives produce the very qualities that he wants to see. God is looking for a certain set of skills in a believer's life.

The whole book of Proverbs is to teach the young child growing up in the home whose parents are Christians, not only to repent of their sins and believe, which, of course, the parents ought to be doing as well, but how to live life skillfully.

And we think that that's not actually part of the Christian life. Now, wisdom is given by God to teach the believer how to live that life that they have been given skillfully, properly, so that that life would produce the type of qualities that God actually wants to see.

So God enables the Christian believer because he's expecting certain things to turn up in their life over the period of them being a Christian. That's things are meant to come from your life.

[9 : 38] Now, James, focusing on wisdom, knows that Christians also need to be able to show they're working out. That is, it's not just right for you to be able to say the right answer.

You've got to know why that's the right answer. Okay? I will never forget Mrs. Horton, my geography teacher, who realized that all my answers look just like the answers of the person that I was sat next to.

I put it down to just coincidence, but she, being smart, and she was a very smart lady, sat me off and she gave me an equivalent type of test, but not the same questions.

And the reason she did that is because she wanted to see if I was able to show my working out. She realized that the issue was not me not being able to put down the right answer, I could do it, but whether or not I could demonstrate why that was the right answer.

Now, true Christian growth is not you being able to get multiple choice your way through it. Okay?

[10 : 49] There are no, this is, you're able to show your working out. You're able to demonstrate why you believe what you believe and why you do what you do. And the reason why that's so important is because it gives reason to your life.

Without it, you have no reasoning. I'm just doing what somebody else says. Now, that may be good if the person telling you is telling you all the right things, but you would never know that.

You would never know if they're telling you all the right things. It's a bit like someone sitting down saying, I was listening to someone and they said that. And you think, great. And why do you believe that to be true?

And they don't know what to say. And one of the reasons they don't know what to say is because they're simply copying what someone else has said without ever understanding whether it's true or not.

Now, it could be true, but it could also be wrong. James wants the believer to understand that their life has reason. It has purpose.

[11 : 51] But in order to know what the reason is and the purpose, you have to be able to know them. Not just repeat them. Now, some of us believe in the Christian faith, and this is with great sadness, that God has not given the Christian spiritual tools for change.

He's only given them grace to get by. Some believers believe, and it's a real shame that they do, that God has not given them the skills or the tools that they need to be able to make things better or to make things different.

He's only given them grace to make it through the day. You can't expect anything more than to get through day by day with God's grace and help until the day the Lord Jesus Christ returns.

That's it. That's not true. God's grace enables change. It enables difference to happen. And those who believe that God hasn't given us any tools, not only does it affect their discipleship of themselves, but it affects them being unable to disciple anyone else.

They don't know what to do for them because there's no grace enabling here. So you can't actually do anything for anybody else because you're too afraid to say anything.

[13 : 12] And so what happens is that people tend to think that we can only care for circumstances. We cannot do anything to create change. So the whole of Christian ministry ends up caring for consequences.

Now, I'm not against caring for consequences, but I'm much more in favor of finding out what caused those consequences and making the change where the changes need to be made.

Okay? That's a pretty basic form of wisdom, and that is where James wants you to be. So if you lack wisdom, go and ask God for it because it is the very enabling grace that will cause future change.

It is enabling grace. It doesn't just get you through the day dealing with consequence after consequence. It enables you to do it differently next time.

So here's a summary of what James is saying. He says, verse 2, that you're going to meet various trials, and when you do, you're to count it all joy. Now, the reason for counting it as joy is not because what has happened is joyful.

[14 : 23] Okay? It doesn't mean that what has happened is necessarily joyful. When you as a Christian have something happen to you, and it could be the loss of a loved one, it could be the loss of a limb, it could be something that's not joyful at all, the joy in it is how that trial is going to affect you spiritually.

How that's going to... What do you then do with God? Do you turn to him and say, why do you allow this to happen? Why is this turned out this way? I mean, what is your response to God when that happens?

And the issue is, if it's not one of joy, then here comes the trial. The trial is much more trialing. Now, so I want to make a distinction between counting something joy that is not necessarily joyful.

Okay? It may not... It's not a joyful situation, but understand that what God is doing with you through it is something that you should be joyful about.

If you are to become complete, God is enabling grace so that you become complete. God is giving you his grace so that you become complete.

[15 : 38] He enables the believer, verse 4. You will let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

God gives you his grace because this is what he wants to see come out of your life. God is giving his grace to you so that this may come from you.

God is testing our faith so that our lives will produce what he wants to see. And if any of you lack wisdom, and if any of you lack the wisdom to ask for wisdom, you're being told here by James to ask for it, verse 6.

And so there's an added complication, isn't there? Some of us know that we have enough wisdom to ask for wisdom, and some of us don't know that we don't have any wisdom, and therefore we need to ask for it.

Okay? The very first stage of learning is the stage where nobody learns, and that is, I don't know that I don't know. It's only when you know that you don't know that you begin to learn.

[16 : 45] Now I know I don't know, I'll go and ask someone. But the very first stage that people are at is, I don't know that I don't know. Now when Christians don't know that they don't know, what do they do?

Well, they don't do anything. They don't know that, right? Because they don't know. So James is assuming you don't know that you don't know, and so he's telling you, go and ask for wisdom.

This is what you ought to be doing. The person who doubts that God will actually give it to them won't actually get it given to them. If you doubt that God won't give it to you, you're right.

God won't give it to you. But if you believe in faith that God will give it to you, then he will give it to you. Okay? That's how it works. If you doubt that God won't, then he won't. And if you believe that he will, then he will.

God is not like us. Okay? God will keep to his word. God will give it to you.

[18 : 12] I know them, and they follow me. Okay? My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. The image that Jesus is portraying is the image of a shepherd all the way through Scripture.

And as you've probably heard a hundred times before, shepherds would often walk in front, and the sheep would follow. And the sheep would follow because the shepherd would speak.

And the sheep would follow the shepherd who is in front of them. Now, it is true that Jesus goes and looks for lost sheep. And if you are lost, then Jesus will come looking for you.

Jesus is the Savior who seeks and saves the lost. But those who are saved, okay? Those who are saved, Jesus doesn't come to seek and to save you.

He's already done that. Now the responsibility is Jesus' way out front, and you might just need to consider how far you're leaving yourself behind.

[19 : 10] My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me. The image is a powerful one and a convicting one. Jesus is the great shepherd, but he walks ahead of us.

And we follow by listening to what he says. Now, the difference between a test and a temptation, which we don't really have too much time to go into, but the basic definition is that something could be tempting and something could be testing.

If I, for instance, see my eldest child out on the street corner with a load of people when there's alcohol sort of passing around the sort of circle, and Susan nudges me and says, go ahead and get him.

I'm just going to leave him. But he's being tempted. He's being tempted by them, but I'm testing him. Okay? He's being tempted by them, but I'm testing him.

So the same situation could be a place of temptation, but from whose point of view is it a temptation? Well, the one who's tempting is tempting, and the one who's leaving him out there is testing to see whether or not he will succumb to the temptation or come in.

[20 : 29] Okay? God is testing you. He does not tempt. The situation you may be in may be a tempting one, one of temptation. But God leaving you out there is to see whether or not you're going to turn to him in wisdom.

Okay? That's the test. Okay? So God doesn't tempt, even though the situation you're in could be one of temptation. The test is to see whether or not what will happen.

And, of course, depending on how long you let the test go, you know, especially among parents, children have to be tested. Okay? They have to be tested, you know, the mobile phones that they have, the Internet that they have.

So, you know, it's not wrong to test them. Okay? But you don't set up the temptation in order to test them. You don't become tempter and tester at the same time.

There's enough in the world to tempt young people and adults away from the Lord Jesus Christ. It is your job to be able to say, right, I'm just going to hold back a minute just to see what the area of weakness is.

[21 : 37] Okay? Just to see what the area of weakness is. All trials demonstrate to the person where they are weak. A trial opens up and says, this is where you're weak.

This is where you find it difficult. This is where you're finding it hard to get through. So every time, if it's not difficult, it's not a trial.

Trials by definition are difficult and they expose weak areas. If someone asked me to do sort of 100 press-ups, that would be an enormous trial.

Because I'd find it, I don't, it would demonstrate the weakness that I have to be able to complete it. Okay? But if someone said, you know, walk 10 steps, well, I think I can manage that.

It's not a trial because I have the necessary strength to complete it. So all trials will open up the areas of weaknesses that you have in your life. So if it feels like a trial, what you should be noticing is where you are weak.

[22 : 42] And where God is strengthening you if you only call out for his enabling grace. So God's enabling grace. The grace that God gives to us does enable us.

The grace mentioned here is the wisdom of God. And the one who doubts doesn't get the wisdom of God. If he doubts that he'll get it, he's right. He won't get it. But if he believes in faith, if he comes to God trusting God, then he will receive what he is asking for.

Now, when a believer enters into the trials that they do and they begin to notice this is where I'm weak, sometimes it's easier to go for comfort than it is to go for strengthening.

Okay? As I've used this illustration before, but I think it's an apt one. If you're dehydrated, then you'll drink more water because your body is lacking water.

Okay? If you're dehydrated, you'll drink more water because your body is lacking water. If you're hungry, then you'll eat food because your body is lacking food. It's lacking nutrition.

[23 : 53] But if you have a headache, you take a paracetamol. But what makes you think that you're lacking paracetamol? It seems that we, like Christians, we go so far in thinking, right, if I'm thirsty, I need water.

But then we get onto the Christian life and we're unable to spot what we actually need to solve the problem. And so we do the spiritual equivalent of taking a paracetamol. We always go for the wrong solution.

And so we mask the weakness rather than become strong through it, strong in it. And that's what James doesn't want us to do.

He doesn't want you to grab for the paracetamol when you should be asking God for wisdom. Okay? It's one thing to mask the weakness with a painkiller.

It's another thing to ask God for the very thing, the enabling grace that will strengthen you in that weakness. That's what James here is doing.

[24 : 56] So James wants to point out quite clearly that all trials turn up in areas of weakness. What you're noticing is where you're weak, perhaps spiritually, perhaps even physically, perhaps a combination of the two.

The natural and the spiritual always go together. And that's something that we ought to be clear on. Trials highlight the connection between the natural and the spiritual. David would say, as he lay on his bed, you know, that his bones were heavy within him.

The Lord had his hand upon him. He was speaking in very physical terms, even though the very condition of the difficulty that he had was a spiritual one. Okay? And Solomon, the same.

Others have that kind of experience. Now, God's grace, because of who God is, will enable you to change that.

Okay? And the reason it needs to change is so that the next time it happens, okay, you're not weak. Okay? You're able to cope with it because you've been strengthened in order to deal with it.

[26 : 02] Now, being strengthened is very, very different than being hardened. Okay? In other words, we've all been in relationships within churches, even personal relationships, where we harden to a situation.

And that, we get it, we get through. In other words, someone said someone once, and it really affected me deeply. But then after a while, I realized what type of person they was, and blah, blah, blah.

And I hardened myself to it, and now I'm no longer affected by what they think. Okay? You're not strong. You're just hard. You've hardened yourself to it.

And that there is not a good way to go, but I can understand why that happens. Okay? Because it's a means of protection. You're taking the paracetamol because it hurts.

Because it hurts, you go for the immediate painkiller. And hardening is an immediate painkiller. It works, but it isn't what you need.

[27 : 09] It isn't the solution here. So God's grace enables us by giving us strength. It doesn't necessarily take away the pain completely, but it means that we're able to deal with the situation.

If it's happened before and it happens again, by God's grace, okay, we don't harden our heart. Okay? By God's grace, we don't harden our heart.

But by God's grace, we're enabled to get through it. What then are the barriers? Because this is the issues that most of you might have. That this is all very well, but I just can't seem to get there because I have barriers in the way.

Well, James highlights a couple of these barriers. The first one, of course, is doubter. The person who doubts, expecting that he won't receive, will be right.

He won't receive. The person who doubts shouldn't expect to receive anything from the Lord, and neither should he take any comfort in the fact that he's right. Now, such a person will express their feelings in the following ways.

[28 : 13] He prays, but he says, you know, God won't answer my prayer. I won't pray because God won't answer my prayer. And then when God doesn't answer his prayer, he says, see, I told you so.

People, you just think you know everything. You just think you know everything. Of course, you're right. But you're right for all the very reasons that God said you'd be right.

Because you're doubting. Having faith in God is simply trusting God that he will do what he said he would do. That's as simple as it gets.

So those who think they know everything, those who are double-minded and unstable in all their ways, have quite a few issues to get through because they're all over the place.

Now, what needs to be pointed out here is that there are functional barriers. I'm going to explain what that means because it may be foreign to you. And that means that there could be other reasons, but they all serve the same purpose in the end.

[29 : 20] Ignorance to God's word, faithlessness to God's word, or outright disobedience to God's word all end with the same conclusion. Well, you might be sat here saying, I'm not ignorant.

And I'll be standing here thinking, no, I don't believe you are. But there must be a reason why God's enabling grace of wisdom isn't coming to you. Is it because you're faithless?

Is it because you're disobedient? And you might be sat here thinking, well, I'm not disobedient. Okay. Okay, is it because you're ignorant? Is it because you don't know?

The point that James wants to make here is, in many ways, it doesn't really matter whether you're ignorant to what God is saying, or you're faithless to what God is saying, or you're outright disobedience to what God is saying.

All three end in you not receiving God's enabling grace. Because the ignorant Christian doesn't know that they need to ask for it, so he doesn't get it.

[30 : 22] The faithless Christian doesn't ask for it because he doubts, so he doesn't get it. And the outright disobedient one, who knows that he ought to ask for it, but he's just not going to, doesn't get it either.

Okay? So, functionally, while there are three different people, and you want to go, I'm not like him, or I'm not like her, I'm not that type of person, that may be true.

It may be true that you're not disobedient, but you could be ignorant of what God has actually said. Now, whatever it is, you still end up in the same position.

None of them receive. So, that has to be overcome. You first have to identify where you are. Am I being faithless? Or am I not receiving because I don't know what to ask for?

Or am I being disobedient? And the reason I need to identify these three is so that I can repent of them and that I can ask. If I don't know that I need to ask, I won't ask.

[31 : 21] And if I don't ask, I don't get. Okay? If I'm faithless, and today I think I'm going to really do it, this is it. Today's going to be a change, and tomorrow you wake up and you're not.

Right? I've changed my mind. You don't actually know why you've changed your mind. And that faithlessness is kicked in, or the outright disobedient. I know God's telling me to, but I'm just not going to.

It doesn't matter who you are. Functionally, you're in the same position. That is, they all end up in the same place. The person not receiving the enabling grace they actually need.

So, it's right and fair to point out that you're not a disobedient Christian. But it may be that you need to identify that you are an ignorant one, or one ignorant of what God is actually asking you to do.

And the reason it's important to make that distinction is so that it can be corrected, either through learning or through repenting. Okay? It has to be corrected, because they are barriers to you receiving what God actually has to give you.

[32 : 34] If you lack the wisdom that you need, James clearly points out verse 6, ask God for it. If you don't know that you should ask God for it, James is telling you verse 6 to ask God for it.

So, even if you don't know, he's dealing with a person who doesn't know, now you do. So, here's a few considerations as we close. God wants Christians to repent so that they would learn.

All repentance is a form of learning. That's the way I was. This is the way that I am. That's the way I did. That's what I used to believe. This is what I now believe. That's how I used to live.

This is how I now live. All repentance is an act of learning. It's being different in the future than what you were in the past. Those who say that they want to do things their own way cannot be taken seriously by God or by anybody else.

James is teaching us where the real help comes from in a time of trial. And even before the trial comes, you ought to go to God and ask for wisdom. God will give you the enabling grace to get through it, but you must ask him in faith and not doubting.

[33 : 46] God is giving you the skills needed to live the life that he has actually given to you. Now, some people, as I said, don't believe that you should look to solve problems.

They only believe that you should look to deal with the care for the consequences. A common conflict between men and women, especially married men and women, is that the husband may be accused of never listening to his wife because he always wants to solve everything.

Can you not just listen? Why do you have to think you can solve everything? And so the man needs to understand that the wife needs to be listened to, okay, and paid attention to.

But the wife needs to understand that God created the man to solve. God created the man to solve things. So there's a meeting there. It's not actually a point of division.

It actually marries perfectly. God's enabling grace solves. But you need to listen and ask God for wisdom.

[34 : 50] Here's the exhortation, and as we close. When God's grace comes to us or we hear a message like this from James, it's a bit like being told halfway through doing something that we're doing it all wrong.

And no one likes to be told halfway through or even three-quarters of the way through, I hate to tell you, but you've actually done it all the way wrong.

I had an experience like this when I was back in the trade. I worked late. I finished at about quarter to nine at night. It was summertime. It was back in the day when you were still allowed to work on building sites after knockoff time.

And I wanted to get the roof completed, so I laid 67 ridge down. And my boss called me up the next day, and he says, I want to speak to you about the job you finished last night.

I said, what's wrong with that? He says, nothing's wrong with it. I said, well, have I laid the ridge incorrectly? No. They're straight. They're nice. You've got good mix, everything. So what's the problem?

[35 : 49] He says, they're all the wrong color. Nobody likes to be told, okay, that they've done it. Nobody likes to be told that they've done it wrong.

And especially when you didn't finish till quarter to nine at night. Then be told the following day, guess where you're going. Okay? Nobody likes to be told halfway through that they've got it wrong.

But if it is wrong, it's wrong. If it is wrong, it's wrong. And James's message comes to us almost into a Christian life.

Well, I've done it like this for so long. And we're not quite sure how to take James's comments because he's telling us halfway through. Nobody likes to hear that the way that you've always done it is not the way to always do it.

Now, it could be that the way you've always done it is actually the right way. And so encouragement to you. But don't be afraid of correction. Don't be afraid of being corrected by the word of God so that you may receive the enabling grace of God to do what God actually wants you to do.

[36 : 57] In short, God's grace enables believers to do what the Bible says. Okay? God's grace enables believers to do what the Bible says.

Here's the final thought. Final thought. The point of James, or one of James's main points is faith in works. Faith in works.

Christians do what it says in the Bible. That's as simple as that. Faith in works. Christians do what the Bible says. So as you leave this morning, as you go your way today and the rest of the week, that week is going to look in a couple of different ways.

But it could look entirely different if you call out to God for wisdom. Now, when that wisdom turns up, it will enable you in ways that previously you were not enabled.

It means that you're able to think about things differently. You're able to do things differently. That's how God's grace works. It gives you a set of resources, a set of skills that you don't have yourself.

[38 : 02] But when you have them, by God's grace, you're able to use them. And this is how Christians not only get through or get by, but are able to be strong in areas they never thought possible.

Okay? Christians are able to be strong in areas that they never thought possible. Not because they are strong, but because God's enabling grace makes them strong.

So remember this. God gives. And he gives generously to everybody. Gives generously to everybody who asks in faith. But the one who doesn't believe that, God doesn't give to.

So take it as both encouragement and a warning. That the way to approach God is understanding his character and coming to him in faith.

Amen. Amen.