

James 1:5-8

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[0:00] Go ahead and turn with me to the book of James. So James chapter one, we're going to be looking at just four verses this morning.

Last week we started our study of this book and we have made it now to verses five through eight. I was somewhat joking with some people earlier today that I feel like I'm stealing part of Zach's sermon from last week and probably part of Clay's from next week.

And but it thematically all flows together. Right. We should remember that this was intended to be read all together. And so you'll see some theme carry over for sure from last week and I'm sure into next week as well.

So to remember some of this context where we have been and where we will be going, we're really just looking at specifically verses five through eight this morning. But I would like to read beginning in verse one all the way down to verse 12.

So verse one down to verse 12. So let's start there. James, the servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ to the twelve tribes and the dispersion.

[1:05] 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.

For the sun rises with 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.

[2:16] Amen. So let's remind ourselves a little bit of what Zach preached to us last week. So thinking a little bit about verses two through four specifically, Zach reminded us that trials are always ultimately for our good.

The Lord puts trials in our lives to test us and that that testing produces steadfastness. And that steadfastness, when it's at its full effect, right, we just read, will make you perfect.

It's leading to our sanctification. TJ last week in the Lord's Supper read for us Romans 8 in its entirety. And I'd like to remind us of verses 28 through 30 there where it said, And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good.

For those who are called according to his purpose. For those who be foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those who be predestined, he also called.

And those who be called, he also justified. And those who be justified, he also glorified. Right? We see so clearly there and in our passage that we spent some time in last week, right, that all things are working together for our good.

[3:21] And that good is being conformed to the image of Christ, right? Becoming more and more and more like our good, like our God, right? That is the good that we're talking about this morning.

To ultimately become perfect at the day of our Lord. And so how do we get there? What is the way to sanctification? How does the Lord work things in our lives to move us to being more and more like him?

It's through testing, right? It's through these trials. It's through being, our faith being just proven and tried. And through that, we become more and more steadfast. Zach did a wonderful job last week of just describing how difficult it can be to just persevere joyfully through a really tough trial, through a really tough circumstance.

But he also highlighted that it's clear that our Lord is working something in us throughout those. That steadfastness, that sanctification, right? Note that transition in between verse 2 and verse 3. We are to count it all joy when we meet trials of various kinds for or because of, right? We know that the testing will work the steadfastness, right? That's why we can take joy, right?

[4 : 30] During these trials, we're commanded to have joy because we have some perspective. We understand that the Lord is working something through our trials. We know what our Lord is ultimately doing for us through those.

It's that through those trials, through those hard circumstances, right? They're for our good. And that good is becoming more and more like our Lord, right? That's our very ultimate, very best good that the Lord is working.

So no matter how difficult our trials are, no matter how hard our circumstances are, we're called to have joy because we know that the Lord is ultimately working all of those into us becoming more and more like him.

So for any of y'all that may not know me super well, I'm a high school math teacher in Forsyth. In education, we often hear this push, I think, so often that it gets boring and old sometimes, that testing should always be for learning.

It should not be of learning. So the idea of like assessment for learning, not assessment of learning. And what they're trying to get at is that testing should ultimately have a purpose, right?

[5 : 34] It shouldn't be just something that we just give and then that's the end. They're pushing back the idea of, all right, here's the test, and then we never think about that again. They're trying to get to the point of, okay, if we see that there are issues on a test, then we know exactly what the students need more help with, right?

That's how tests should work. And I'm not sure the school system knows it, but they're copying what our Lord does. Our Lord does this perfectly. His testing of our faith is so much more important than any academic test we could ever have.

And his test is perfectly designed to bring about things in us that we still need to work on, right?

Maybe a particular tough coworker is making you realize how you've tried to not be angry, but you still have so much anger in your heart that you need to battle out by the Lord's grace.

Maybe an injury or sickness is making you realize how you've tried to be way too self-sufficient, and the Lord is taking your pride away to give it more full reliance on him. Maybe you fail a certain class four times in a row.

That may or may not be me. In order for the Lord to show you that you've got to slow down, right?

That you're not a superhuman and you are desperately in need of his grace. Maybe you're going through a season where all of your friends seem to be in different spots, and the Lord's teaching you that friendships are great and all, but ultimately he is our only full source of strength.

[6 : 56] Whatever it may be, whatever trial, whatever circumstance it is, the Lord is ultimately working any and every trial in our life for our good and for his glory. Now, I say all this, I spend that amount of time on that, because I believe the context is very, very, very important for us to have a proper understanding of what verses five through eight are talking about.

If you take five through eight without reading the context before and after, it might not immediately at face value seem to have a whole lot to do with trials or persevering joyfully through trials.

But right before these verses, it's all about having joy throughout trials. And that idea is continued and in some ways wrapped up in verse 12 when James writes, 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.

So in light of all that context, it seems that we should see this wisdom that is talked about in these verses as primarily relating back to persevering joyfully through trials, right? That's the wisdom that we're talking about.

So with that in mind, let's read five through eight again, and I'll jump into a little bit of the structure that we're going to go for this morning. So five through eight. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

[8 : 13] 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's a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. All right, so here's how I'm going to structure our study of that text this morning. Four points. Number one is the wisdom needed.

That's the wisdom needed. Number two will be the wisdom given. The wisdom given. Number three will be the proper way to ask.

The proper way to ask. And number four will be the character of those who ask improperly. The character of those who ask improperly. So let's go ahead and get right into it with the wisdom needed.

We all need wisdom. Every single one of us. From the youngest of us to the very oldest, all of us need wisdom. A couple chapters later in the book of James, I think we can get some insight in understanding into what this wisdom talked about here really is.

[9 : 12] James 3 verse 13 says, Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct, let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. Jumping down to verse 17 of chapter 3, it reads, What I want us to note from those is how practical this wisdom really is, right?

Verse 13, This wisdom is not some weird, magical, conceptual ideal.

It's super practical. John MacArthur sums up this type of wisdom as the understanding and practical skill that are necessary to live life to God's glory.

It's the understanding and practical skill that are necessary to live life to God's glory. This seems to be the type of wisdom we're talking about here in verse 5. So I'll go back to my earlier statement.

We all need wisdom, right? None of us are fully sanctified. None of us are brought to completion just yet, right? And we must remember even anything good that we're doing after we're saved, when we have the Spirit dwelling in us, is being done by the Spirit, right?

[10 : 35] So it's all the Lord's work. And so we all daily need the Lord's intervention. We all need wisdom. We all need that understanding as well as that practical skill, right, that are necessary to live life to our Lord's glory.

We don't live life to the glory of our Lord on our own. That is not our nature apart from the Lord. We must have His grace. And in this context, how are we honoring Him?

How are we living in wisdom, right? By going through trials well, by pressing through whatever we may be going through with joy, right? Knowing that the Lord is ultimately working it for our sanctification.

And then James writes, If any of you lack wisdom, so lack this ability and know-how to live life to God's glory through trials, just ask the Lord for help.

As I said earlier, we all need it. We all need more ability and know-how to press through trials. I would encourage us all right now to think back through our last week. Think about the hardest part of it.

[11 : 39] And think about whether your mindset turned to anger, or to grumbling or complaining, to disputing, to jealousy, to lust, to anxiety.

Whatever it may be, when you are hit with a trial, when you're hit with something in a moment that's a tough thing, it can be so tempting to act out in a way that is the total opposite of having joy in our Lord.

The different ways that we particularly respond in our heart can be different, but we all need the Lord's grace to respond properly. We all need wisdom to truly count it joy and keep our mind focused on the eternal perspective.

We must all remember the idea of 2 Corinthians 4, verses 16 through 18, where it says, So we do not lose heart, though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

[12 : 53] We all need this wisdom, this understanding, this ability, this know-how to remain joyfully steadfast under trial. We must have an eternal perspective, right, that is helping give us that joy, give us that know-how to press through, to persevere through those trials, because we know what the Lord is doing.

Right? We have some perspective to see that He's working it for our good. Let's get back into the later part of verse 5, which will get us to our second point. That's the wisdom given. The wisdom given.

Let's reread verse 5 again. It says, If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

So any of us, any of these believers that James is writing to here, and any of us, if we just ask God for wisdom, the Lord will give it to us, right? And it will be given to us without reproach, it says. Last week, Zach alluded to the idea that James, in many ways, may be a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount. It's really interesting if you start researching that. And I'd encourage you to, if that's something that interests you.

[14:03] But I mention that now, because I bet a lot of our minds are going to a similar place when we read verse 5. And it's a spot in the Sermon on the Mount. If y'all will, turn with me to Matthew 7.

Matthew 7. So if you thought of another text, as we began reading our text this morning, this is probably it.

Matthew 7, picking up in verse 7. It says, Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives.

And the one who seeks, finds. And to the one who knocks, it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asked him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asked for a fish, will give him a serpent? It. If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father who's in heaven give good things to those who ask him? So our text in James in verse five and here in Matthew, we see some super clear teaching, right? If something is good for us, the Lord will give it. And if we're given something from the Lord, it's a good thing, right? At this point, I think it's important again, first remember what good really is, right? Good is the will of the Lord for us, our sanctification becoming more and more like him. So wisdom here in James one five is going to be good for us. So the Lord will give it to us, right?

[15:39] He's working for our sanctification. Just a reminder from last week in the theme that's carrying through these verses, right? The trials are always for our good. So many times it may not seem like it at the time, right? But the Lord is working in our hearts to purify, to sanctify. Our father is a perfect father who gives good gifts at exactly the time that we need them. Having a kiddo of my own now, my emotions so often feel like I would do absolutely anything that would be good for him. And in some ways, I don't think those emotions are that far from the truth, but I know exactly where I fall here in Matthew seven. I am not the perfect father in heaven. I'm the father who's considered evil in light of our Lord and parents in the room. I think we can all relate. We want to do the very best for our children and whatever we're doing, but our heavenly father is so much greater than us.

There's no comparison between us at all. And he will always give us what is the very best for us. In our context and James here this morning, the Lord will give us wisdom, the know-how and the ability to persevere joyfully through trials. We just need to come to him and ask.

And notice that it says the Lord gives it without reproach. He knows that we can do nothing on our own. He knows that we need his grace all the time, but he doesn't hold that against us, right? He wants us to come to him. So it says he gives generously. He wants us to come. He's not disappointed that we need his help. He knows we need his help and therefore is glad to give generously when we come to him. So we should go to him. All right, let's get down into verse six through eight.

That will get us to point number three, which is the proper way to ask the proper way to ask. Let's reread verse six to begin with. 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. So let him ask in faith with no doubting. Then we have a four statement. This is for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. In other words, the one who doubts is all over the place, tossed around by the sea, going to and fro. Think about a wave, right? Not really getting anywhere, but just going back and forth, back and forth, tossed by the tide, right? Tossed by the wind. We'll get into that more for a minute, but for now, note that we've been commanded to ask in faith. And this faith is to have no doubting.

I want to think about what we're really doing when we ask the Lord for something, but do not have confidence that the Lord will fulfill what he said he would do. To think about the times when we go to the Lord asking for wisdom, but are wavering in our belief that either he can give it to us or that he will give it to us. It's a pretty rough spot. Turn with me to Galatians three. This is a slightly different

context, but I think it will help demonstrate part of what James is getting at here. So Galatians three. So the context here in Galatians, right? Paul is arguing for their souls, that they need to come back to the heart of the gospel. It seems that they had people coming in preaching different gospels that were encouraging some works of the law to aid in sanctification or to be part of salvation in the first place. And Paul was calling them back to the heart of the gospel and that being Christ crucified. So let's look at Galatians three. I'd like to read the first five verses here. It says, Oh foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that

[19 : 33] Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this. Did you receive the spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish having begun by the spirit? Are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain? If indeed it was in vain, does he who supplies the spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law or by hearing with faith? So I just want to think about the position Paul was in.

He was encouraging the Galatians to come back to the gospel. He writes in verse two, did you receive the spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Obvious rhetorical question here, right? They accepted the gospel by faith. They were going to answer that question in that way by accepting the salvation. Our Lord had offered by trusting in his death for our sins and his resurrection for our life. He knows that they're going to answer the question that way by faith alone. Right? So then he asked a follow-up in verse three, having begun by the spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? He's trying to show them a little bit of ridiculousness in the way they were believing, right? The ridiculousness of the false gospels that they're believing or are tempted to believe at least. If you're saved, given the great grace of our Lord simply by exactly that grace and undeserved kindness. But now after that, you're going about trying to perfect yourselves by works of the law without looking to that same grace that we were saved by, working out our salvation totally of our own accord. That seems absurd, right? Going about trying to earn righteousness through works of the law when the initial grace was a sweet gift from our Lord. He's certainly not saying that we don't work in battle for our sanctification, but he is saying that how we do that is through the spirit's work in our hearts, not the law. I think we get all of that, but how does that relate to our text this morning? Well, Zach pointed out last week when James makes his intro that he says he was writing to the 12 tribes in the dispersion, which seems to in many ways be referring to God's people, God's true people, the church, right? So James is writing to God's people just scattered around and ultimately now also to us. This morning I'm working with the assumption, and I think it's a fair assumption, that my primary audience this morning is the church, those who have professed faith in our Lord.

So let's talk about what that means and how that affects our text this morning. If we're a believer here this morning, we're claiming a number of things. All believers have claimed the gospel. We believe that there's an eternal, holy, just God that out of his goodness and overwhelming love and kindness, he wanted to show his glory and he created us, created us as image bearers to be little mirrors reflecting his glory over all the earth, right? But we rebelled. Adam and Eve fell by disobeying God. We have inherited their sinful nature and we have sinned ourselves. And because our God is holy, just, and righteous, we all deserve God's wrath because of our sin. And we all believe that.

But because of God's graciousness, his love, his kindness towards us, he sent Christ, our Lord himself, the Son of God, who condescended, came to the earth to become a man, came here to fulfill the law, live the perfect life that we could never live. But then he died the death that we deserve, the sinner's death for all of our sins because of our sin, right? And his blood shed, him being the perfect sinless son of God, deserving no death because he was perfect, right? He took our sin on himself and our sin is punished in him. Three days later, he rose from the dead, proving all of his claims, triumphing over death for us. And he has defeated both sin and death in that. All we must do is turn from our sin and put faith in our Lord. We all believe that, right? We're claiming that this morning. Now, James is writing to people who also believe that. Think about verse six now, but let him ask in faith with no doubting. This is a very similar type of idea in a slightly different way that Paul was arguing from Galatians. How can those who James is writing to, as well as us today, trust the Lord for salvation, believe that he's worked a miracle in our hearts through calling us when we were dead in our sins, had no life of our own to become new creatures. He went through all the trials for himself that we deserve for our sin, right? Came to the earth. He did all that work. How can we believe that that God would save us? But he's not going to give us the wisdom that we

need to persevere during trials. Think about that. That seems ridiculous. It's so ridiculous that James and his audience here and us today would trust our Lord for the salvation of our souls, but not for the wisdom needed for sanctification. But don't we do that? Don't we do that all the time? We continue to grumble about a tough situation at work or complain about a co-worker instead of calling on the Lord for wisdom and grace and how to press through the situation with the mindset that honors him. We continue to try to battle particular sins on our own rather than seeking the Lord and going to him about them.

[25 : 05] We continue to become angry when we don't get to spend the time the way we want to spend time when work feels heavy and family life seems burdensome. Rather than going to the Lord for the understanding and know-how and the ability to consider others' interests above our own and to seek to serve rather than to be served. When we choose to not run to the Lord for help, for wisdom during trials, we're flat out denying the wisdom that he's offered to us. Or when we're not sure that the Lord will actually give us the strength to press through. Or when we ask with doubting, right, we're just denying the wisdom. We claim that we trust in the Lord for our salvation, but so often we don't trust him that he would actually give us the wisdom that we need to press joyfully through trials.

And that brings us to our fourth point. The character of those who ask improperly. Let's read verses six through eight in their entirety there. It says, 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's a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. So James begins these verses, right, with explaining the proper way to ask what we were just into. But then he's turning and turning to discuss what one is like that asks in the wrong way, or in this case, asks with some doubting. And it's pretty harsh. He says that the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. And then goes on saying that that person shouldn't expect to receive anything from the Lord. He's a double-minded man that's truly unstable in all his ways. That to me does not sound like the description of a believer.

That sounds like the description of an unbeliever. And it seems that it's either primarily describing an unbeliever or a believer who is acting like an unbeliever, like we just described a bit of.

They're being tossed by the wind, seems to go back and forth, is unsure about whether they want to turn to the Lord or not. They're not hot or cold, right, as the church is described in Revelation. We know the Lord's reaction to that, right? The Lord will spit them out of his mouth. Flip over a couple pages to James 4. James 4. Let's read verses 1 through 10 here as I believe it'll help us to understand a couple things about our current text. Picking up in verse 1 says, What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the scripture says, he earns jealousy over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us, but he gives more grace. Therefore, it says, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves, therefore, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched, and mourn, and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. So a couple things to note.

[28 : 59] Some reinforcement of what we said some earlier, right? The friendship with the world is enmity with God, leaning on our own understanding to get through a trial, or doubting God's willingness or ability to help us joyfully persevere through a trial. Show someone to be torn, to be stuck in between trusting in the Lord, or trusting in themselves, or looking to the world for worldly wisdom.

And that means they're leaning towards the world, right? Let's look again at that second part of verse six, down through verse eight. God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves, therefore, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. So these verses seem to be pretty clear that the double-minded word, those torn between the

world, torn between God, seems to be referring to unbelievers. And James is calling them to repent, to put full trust in the Lord, that they currently don't have a heart that is set fully on God, but is twisted, is calling them to repentance, to put their hope in God. So let's think back through our text in chapter one.

When we doubt as we are asking, we're proving ourselves to be double-minded. We have the faith that we want to go ask, but we're not sure that the Lord will actually provide. We may want to trust in the Lord when times are good, but then when times are bad, we lose that faith. We're not so sure that the Lord will or can really persevere us to be joyful through a trial. When we act like this, doubting the Lord's providence for us, we are acting like an unbeliever. It's hard. What does that say about our hearts? How crazy is it of us to trust in the Lord for salvation, but then not trust in him for the wisdom that we need to persevere through a trial? We're acting like unbelievers when we do that, when we show some disbelief still lurking in our hearts. We simply cannot be part of the way committed to our Lord. We can't say we trust the Lord for salvation, but then not trust him for sanctification. We can't say we trust the Lord for salvation, but then not trust him to help us persevere through a trial joyfully. We can't love the things of God and the things of the world. We can't toe that line. We must give ourselves wholly to the Lord. 1 John 2 verses 15 through 17 says, do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life is not from the Father, but from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires. But whoever does the will of the Lord, will of God abides forever. We know that if we try to continue in the things of the world, try and rely on our own self for strength or just not trusting that the Lord is willing or able to help us or simply trusting God when things are good and failing to when things get hard. We know we're being double-minded. As we just read, the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God will abide forever. I think

I've said this next thing about five times so far this sermon. I'm circling back to it again. What is the will of God for our lives? It is our sanctification. That is our ultimate good. And how is the Lord encouraging us toward that today in our text? By asking us to go to him for wisdom, by giving us wisdom generously, without thinking less of us. He knows we need him. But as a father gives good gifts to his children, our heavenly father gives so much greater gifts to us that make us more and more like him. So we all need wisdom to persevere joyfully through trials. And the Lord will give us that wisdom freely and generously. When we doubt God's willingness or ability to help us give us that wisdom, we're showing a little bit of unbelief still lurking in our hearts. That's so dangerous. Let's wrap it up with a little bit of application. Just two things. Number one, believe the Lord will do what he says he will do.

Believe the Lord will do what he says he will do. The Lord truly will give us wisdom. We just need to ask. We should make every effort to not be double-minded and truly believe he will give the wisdom to persevere under trial, just like he said he would right here in our text.

[33 : 39] Number two, truly go to the Lord when you need wisdom. Go to the Lord when you need wisdom. The Lord has asked us to come to him. He will give us exactly what we need, exactly when we need it.

Anything the Lord asks of us, he will give us the wisdom needed to go through it. Both the ability, both the understanding, both of those, right, to persevere joyfully through trial.

With that in mind, let's pray. Amen.