

Faith and Wisdom

James 1:1-11

SS Lesson for 08/02/2020

Devotional Scripture: Proverbs 2:1-6

OUTLINE

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Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

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In case you hadn't heard, this is the Information Age. Everything, or so it seems, can be accessed online. From medical records to legal opinions, from academic scholarship to celebrity gossip—all is available with a simple search on your computer or phone. Countless libraries' worth of information is now publicly accessible through the internet. But while we are glutted with information, it is right to ask exactly what we are doing with all of it. In spite of all the generalized and specialized information at our fingertips, are we any wiser as a society? This month's study—five lessons drawn from the letter of James—helps us evaluate that question.

There may be as many as five men by the name of James in the New Testament, so we take care not to mix them up (see Mark 1:19; 3:18; 6:3; 15:40; Luke 6:16). Tradition has taken the author of the book of James to refer to James who was the half-brother of Jesus (Galatians 1:19). Jesus and James grew up in a large family (see Mark 6:3). Along with the other brothers of Jesus, James did not believe in Jesus during Jesus' lifetime (John 7:3-5). But when the Day of Pentecost arrived after Jesus' resurrection, they had come around (Acts 1:14). Paul indicates that James himself had been a witness of the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 15:3-7). The chronology is not entirely clear, but perhaps by the mid-40s in the first century, James had become a leader in the Jerusalem church. His exact role is not specified, but Paul associates him with the apostles on at least one occasion (Galatians 1:19). Paul also lists James among the “pillars” of the church (2:9); James was a leader in a group that included apostles and elders (Acts 15). The significance of this is heightened when we consider the centrality of Jerusalem in the thinking of the earliest Christians, who were of Jewish background. The Jerusalem church was more than just one congregation among many; it was the mother church. What happened there mattered to the entire church (example: Acts 15:4, 22-29). We see James's impact on the first-century church in the account of what is called the Jerusalem Council as he gave the final, decisive word on the matter at hand (15:13-21). That was about AD 51. We have corroborating evidence outside the New Testament as well. According to the Jewish historian Josephus (AD 37-100), Caesar, upon hearing the death of Festus, sent Albinus into Judea, as procurator. . . . Albinus was but upon the road; so [the high priest Ananus] assembled the sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned (Antiquities of the Jews, book 20, chapter 9). That martyrdom occurred in AD 62.

Key Verse: James 1:5

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

1:1. The letter begins with a conventional opening: the name of the writer, the people to whom the letter is addressed, and a word of greeting. James was content with a simple introduction. The writer introduced himself modestly. He did not indicate his status in the church or that he was the Lord's brother. The lack of title suggests that he was well known and had the authority to send a letter of this kind. James was actually Jacob (*Jakōbos*). It is not certain why the English translators chose “James” rather than “Jacob.” “James,”

“Jake,” and “Jacob” all come from the same root. Bible translations in other languages tend to utilize the transliterated name from the actual Hebrew “Jacob” (*ya ʾaqōb*). Could it be that King James desired to see his name in the English translation he authorized? **James**, or Jacob, described himself simply as **a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ**. James considered himself a bond-slave (*doulos*). He was the property of God and of the One he could have called his “Brother,” the Lord Jesus Christ. Obviously James recognized the deity of Christ by placing Him coequal with God. Furthermore, James used His full name, “the Lord Jesus Christ.” “Jesus” means “Savior” and “Christ” is the Greek for “Messiah,” the “Anointed.” The eternal “Lord” became the Savior, “Jesus,” and rose again as everlasting Sovereign, “Christ.” The Lord of lords is King of kings (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16). The letter is addressed **to the 12 tribes scattered among the nations**. James was writing to the Jews dispersed from their homeland. The technical term “scattered” (*diaspora*) occurs in only two other places in the New Testament (John 7:35; 1 Peter 1:1). It refers to the Jews who were scattered among the Gentiles as their ancestors had been in the days of the Captivity. Though the 12 tribes of Israel are scattered, they are never lost. They are again listed at the close of biblical history in the Book of Revelation: Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin (Rev. 7:5-8; cf. 21:12). The idiom, **Greetings**, common in thousands of ancient papyri letters, does not stand alone in any other New Testament letter. This is the Greek salutation much like the English “Hello” or “Welcome.” (See 2 John 10-11.) It is interesting that James did not add the Jewish salutation “Peace” (*šālôm*). Paul usually included both the Greek and Hebrew greetings, which are translated “grace and peace.” James undoubtedly sought to maintain a crisp style and the simple elegance of good Greek even though he wrote to fellow Jews. Furthermore, the play on words between “greetings” (*chairein*) in James 1:1 and “joy” (*charan*) in verse 2 is thus more evident. In order to attain Christian maturity and holy conduct it is essential to have a firm foundation. The believer must be able to stand with confidence. He dare not be pushed down by trials. He must not be pulled over by temptation. “Push, pull-stick, stick” must be his motto. How can such stamina be achieved? A believer can stand by pursuing, perceiving, and practicing the Word of God. Trials from without and temptations from within are no match for a Christian who stands in the truth from above.

All too often trials prompt groanings and complaints. This kind of response does not contribute to Christian maturity. It only makes matters worse. Trials are not to be seen as tribulations but testings. A test is given to see if a student can pass, not pass out. James gave sound advice on how to score high on every test. One who brings the right attitude to the trial, who understands the advantage of the trial, and who knows where to obtain assistance in the trial will certainly end up on God’s honor roll.

1:2. To persecuted Jewish believers scattered among pagan peoples, James gave the surprising advice, **Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds**. Trials should be faced with an attitude of joy. Trials should not be seen as a punishment, a curse, or a calamity but something that must prompt rejoicing. Furthermore they should produce “pure joy” (lit., “all joy”; i.e., joy that is full or unmixed), not just “some joy” coupled with much grief. Though James’ command was direct and forceful, he did not preach at his audience. He identified with them. He addressed them warmly as “my brothers.” This mode of address is characteristic of the epistle. He used this familiar form no less than 15 times. James’ direct commands are coupled with deep compassion. It is important to note that James did *not* say that a believer should be joyous *for* the trials but *in* the trials. The verb translated “face” might more literally be expressed as “fall into,” *peiripesēte*, much as the poor man “fell among robbers” (Luke 10:30). The “trials of many kinds” (*peirasmois... poikilois*) were also referred to by Peter, who used the same Greek words, though in reverse order (1 Peter 1:6). When surrounded by these trials, one should respond with joy. Most people count it all joy when they *escape* trials. James said to count it all joy in the midst of trials (cf. 1 Peter 1:6, 8). It is clear that the reference here is to external trials, or tests of stamina (*peirasmois*) whereas later in the same chapter (James 1:13) the verb form (*peirazomai*) of that noun is used to speak of inner temptations, or solicitations to sin. Obviously the question arises: How can a person find joy in trials?

1:3. Christians can face trials with joy because there are rich advantages from these testings. Trials, rightly taken, produce the sterling quality of endurance. This is no new revelation. It is a simple reminder. James wrote, **because you know**, literally “knowing through experience” (*ginōskontes*). Everyone has experienced both the pain of problems and the ensuing profit of persistence. There is no gain in endurance without some investment in trials. It is the true part or approved portion of faith that produces perseverance. **The testing** refers more to “approval” than to “proving.” The word (*dokimion*) appears only here and in 1 Peter 1:7. **Faith** is like gold; it stands in the test of fire. Without this approved standard of faith, trials would not yield perseverance. There would only be ashes. True faith, like pure gold, endures, no matter how hot the fire. True faith therefore **develops**, or more literally “works” (*katergazetai*), **perseverance** or

staying power. The noun “perseverance” (*hypomonēn*; cf. the verbal form in James 1:12) means steadfastness or endurance in the face of difficulties (cf. 5:11).

1:4. Perseverance is only the beginning of benefits. There are more advantages to trials. **Perseverance must finish its work.** Just as tested and true faith works to produce perseverance, so perseverance must be allowed to continue its perfect or finished work to produce the ultimate by-products of maturity and spiritual fulfillment. This, of course, is the lofty goal that serves as this epistle’s unifying theme. James’ main point was to show how to achieve spiritual maturity. Two words describe the goal: **mature and complete.** “Mature” (*teleioi*), often translated “perfect” or “finished,” is coupled with “complete” (*holoklēroi*, from *holos*, “whole,” and *klēros*, “part”) to give the idea of perfected all over or fully developed in every part. Trials can be faced with joy because, infused with faith, perseverance results, and if perseverance goes full-term it will develop a thoroughly mature Christian who lacks nothing. He will indeed be all God wants him to be. James’ argument may seem logical, but it is still difficult to see how trials can be welcomed with an attitude of joy. Where does one turn for help to understand this paradox?

1:5. To those who feel confused and frustrated by the high goal of “not lacking anything,” James wrote, **If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God.** Assistance is readily available from “the giving God” (*tou didontos theou*). To those who lack wisdom, this valuable resource is available for the asking. James assumed his readers would feel the need for wisdom (*sophias*), not just knowledge. God will not only provide wisdom, but will do so generously, not grudgingly.

1:6-8. However, God’s provision has some prerequisites. To receive God’s wisdom in trials, the believer must be wise in asking. First, he must ask in faith. **He must believe and not doubt** (*diakrinomenos*, the word for “doubt,” suggests vacillating). He dare not come to God **like a wave of the sea, blown [horizontally] and tossed [vertically] by the wind.** God is not pleased with **a double-minded** (lit., “two-souled,” *dipsychos*; cf. 4:8) **man** who is **unstable in all he does**, like an unsteady, staggering drunk. The answer from God depends on assurance in God.

1:9-11. Furthermore one who asks for wisdom needs to evidence hope. Whatever his social or economic position, the believer must see eternal advantages. **The brother in humble circumstances** can be glad in his **high** standing spiritually, and **the one who is rich** can be glad for his human frailty (knowing that he has “eternal glory” in Christ, 2 Cor. 4:17). Social prominence passes away, wealth withers away **like a wild flower** in the hot **sun**, and fame will **fade**. Hope in the eternal is evidence of believing faith.

1:12. Finally, the one who asks for wisdom must be steadfast and infused with love. God blesses someone **who perseveres under trial.** In this verse James returned to the theme with which he opened this passage in verses 2-3; both refer to “trials,” “testing,” and “perseverance.” The Christian who steadfastly endures (*hypomenei*) trials (*peirasmon*) and **has stood the test** (*dokimos genomenos*; cf. *dokimion* in v. 3)... **will receive the crown of life.** This “crown” consists of life, that is, the crown *is* life (cf. Rev. 2:10). “The life which is promised is probably life here and now, life in its fullness, life in its completeness” (cf. James 1:4) (Curtis Vaughan, *James: Bible Study Commentary*, p. 28). (Other crowns are referred to in 1 Thes. 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Peter 5:4.) **God** promises such life **to those who love Him.** Love for God enables believers who undergo trials to rest confidently in Him. Their steadfastness reveals their love. (Some, however, say the crown refers not to full life now but to eternal life, for all true believers do in fact love God; 1 John 4:8.) Asking for wisdom with faith (James 1:6-8), hope (vv. 9-11), and love (v. 12) brings not only the blessing of wisdom but also the blessing of winning.

To have the right attitude in trials, one must see the advantage of trials, but if it is difficult to see the advantages, one can ask for aid and, if one asks correctly, God will give him the right attitude in trials. He can rejoice in trials (v. 2) and be **blessed** (v. 12) by enduring them

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Wisdom in Trials (James 1:1-4)

1 James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.

2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,

3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Trials are not temptations (1-2)

Trials are to purify (Job 23:10)

10 But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.

Trials are to influence obedience (Ps 119:67)

67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.

Trials are to aid in achieving eternal glory (2 Cor 4:17)

17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

Trials are to be expected in this life (1 Peter 4:12)

12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.

Testing of faith to strengthen (3)

Testing refines (Ps 66:10)

10 For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver.

Testing proves faith genuine (1 Peter 1:7)

7 These have come so that your faith-of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Testing aids in receiving God's inheritance (Heb 11:8)

8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

Testing to know what's in the heart (Deut 8:2)

2 Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.

Enhances patience (3)

Patience to receive what has been promised (Heb 10:36)

36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

Patiently waiting on God (Ps 40:1)

1 I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry.

Patience through God's Word (Rom 15:4)

4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

Patience that should be pursued (1 Tim 6:11)

11 But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.

Character development (4)

Character development as a goal (Phil 3:12-14)

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Character development through God's Word (2 Tim 3:16-17)

16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Character development through God's establishment (1 Peter 5:10)

10 But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.

Character development through waiting on God (James 5:7-8)

Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain.⁸ You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

Seeking Wisdom (James 1:5-8)

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;

8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Need and promise of wisdom (5)

Wisdom that comes from the fear of the Lord (Prov 3:7-8)

7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and depart from evil. 8 It will be health to your flesh, And strength to your bones.

Wisdom to be obedient to God's Word (Ps 119:34)

34 Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; Indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart.

Wisdom that comes from God (Prov 2:6-7)

6 For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding; 7 He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly;

Wisdom that keeps and preserves (Prov 4:5-7)

5 Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. 6 Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; Love her, and she will keep you. 7 Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding.

Wisdom that delivers (Prov 28:26)

26 He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, But whoever walks wisely will be delivered.

Conditions for receiving wisdom (6)

Receiving wisdom through belief (Matt 21:22)

22 And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

Receiving wisdom through prayer (1 Tim 2:8)

8 I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting;

Receiving wisdom through faith (Heb 11:6)

6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Receiving wisdom through steadfastness (Heb 10:23)

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

Receiving wisdom through asking with the right motives (James 4:3)

3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

Role of doubt in faith (7-8)

Faith without doubt causes things to be moved (Matt 21:21-22)

21 So Jesus answered and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done. 22 And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

Whatever is not from faith is sin (Rom 14:22-23)

22 Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.

Doubt causes condemnation (John 3:18)

18 "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Unbelief and doubt means that we are not one of Jesus' sheep (John 10:26)

26 But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you.

Doubt causes unbelief (John 20:24-29)

Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Wisdom in Handling Wealth (James 1:9-11)

9 Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation,

10 but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away.

11 For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.

Handle with humility (9-10)

Humility that puts hope in God versus wealth (1 Tim 6:17)

17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

Humility that considers others better than ourselves (Phil 2:3)

3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

Humility that comes from being one of God's chosen people (Col 3:12)

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Humility that should be shown toward all men (Titus 3:2)

2 to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.

Handle as temporary (11)

Handle as temporary because wealth will perish (Ps 49:12)

12 But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish.

Handle as temporary because wealth cannot be taken beyond death (Eccl 5:15)

15 Naked a man comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hand.

Handle as temporary because wealth cannot be depended on (Luke 12:20)

20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

Handle as temporary because wealth is earthly and will pass away (1 Cor 7:31)

31 those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

Handle as temporary because wealth will not last forever (James 5:1-2)

1 Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. 2 Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

The Recipients of this Epistle (James 1:1b)

To the twelve tribes dispersed abroad. Greetings!

One final word of introduction is necessary, pertaining to the recipients of this epistle. James addresses this work to **“the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad.”** By this I understand that he is writing primarily to Jewish Christians who have been dispersed from Jerusalem. In Acts 2:9-11, we read of all the distant places Jews had come from to observe the Feast of Pentecost. These folks had already been dispersed abroad, before the death of our Lord. When we come to Acts 8:1, we read of the persecution that resulted from the stoning of Stephen, and we are told **“they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.”**

Surely when Jewish converts to Christ dispersed to far away places there were many questions that these new believers needed to have answered. We need to view this epistle as having been written during a very critical transitional period in the history of the church. This is at a time when Old Testament Jewish saints have come to faith in the Messiah, aware that they are living in a new dispensation, and that they are now participants in the New Covenant. How are Jewish Christians to relate their faith in Jesus Christ to their Jewish heritage? These things James begins to deal with from a Jewish perspective. Paul will also explore these matters from a more gentile-oriented point of view.

Correcting Jewish Misconceptions Regarding Adversity

James chapter 1 deals with the way the Christian should handle adversity. His teaching should be understood against the backdrop of some false assumptions held by many Jews, including our Lord’s disciples. Based upon God’s covenant promises with Israel (Deuteronomy 28-31), individual Jews were inclined to expect God to invariably bless them materially in response to pious living. Conversely, they expected that those who did evil were to experience divine discipline in various forms. In short, they expected God to bless them for doing good and to punish others for their sin.

We see this mindset revealed by Job’s friends in the Book of Job. In truth, Job was being tested with adversity because of his piety, and not because of sin (Job 1:1-12). Job’s friends persisted in trying to force him to confess that his suffering was the result of some sin he had committed. If he but forsook his sin, they insisted, then God would again bless him. Asaph, the author of Psalms 73, had the same assumptions about prosperity and poverty, and he was frustrated and angry with God because the wicked appeared to prosper while the pious did not (Psalms 73:1-14). Even our Lord’s disciples bought into this thinking. When they came upon the man who was born blind, they revealed their wrong assumptions when they asked the Master, **“Rabbi, who committed the sin that caused him to be born blind, this man or his parents?”** (John 9:2b). James is going to give a very different perspective on the Christian’s attitude toward adversity.

James’ Teaching on Adversity (James 1:2-4)

2 My brothers and sisters, consider it nothing but joy when you fall into all sorts of trials, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect effect, so that you will be perfect and complete, not deficient in anything.

*First, I would have you note that James is telling us to expect adversity as the rule, rather than the exception. He does not say, “Consider it nothing but joy if you fall into all sorts of trials,” but rather **“when you fall into all sorts of trials.”** Peter likewise informs us that suffering should not surprise us (see 1 Peter 4, especially verses 12ff.). Adversity need not be sought; it will surely come our way. He says that we will **“fall into”** all sorts or trials, not that we must **“jump into”** these trials.*

*Second, James informs us that these trials will come in many different forms – **“all sorts of trials”** (verse 2). In my lifetime, I have experienced and observed many different forms of adversity. I have seen those who suffered financially. I have seen those who were very comfortable financially agonize over some physical malady within the family that no amount of money can solve. I have seen parents agonize over their children, and children agonize over their parents. Trials may come from one’s boss, or from one’s employees. Trials come in various shapes and sizes, but they all are a form of adversity.*

Third, James instructs us that when we encounter these trials, we are to wholeheartedly rejoice in them, knowing that God has sent them into our lives as a part of His sanctifying process. These trials, James writes, are a testing of our faith. Adversity tests the strength of our faith:

If you show yourself slack in the day of trouble,
your strength is small! (Proverbs 24:10)

Adversity is like a stress test, pushing us up to and beyond our limits, so that we will recognize our dependence upon God, and call on Him for help in the time of trouble. Adversity is designed to produce endurance in our lives. And this endurance perfects us, so that we will become complete, lacking nothing.

James forces us to look at ourselves – and at the process of sanctification – in an entirely different light. So many people think of themselves as basically okay, except for their sin. They admit that they need Jesus to forgive their sins, but they feel that the rest of their life does not need any radical change. Some would even go so far as to assume that they are just a great big bundle of human potentiality. They may need God for salvation, but in some way they foolishly suppose that God really needs them. “If only God would save a man like _____, just think of what he (or she) could do for His kingdom.” The truth is that we have nothing to offer God, and that we need everything from Him. When we think that we are sufficient in and of ourselves, we deceive ourselves. God brings adversity into our lives to show us our deficiencies, and as we see these deficiencies, we realize that we must cry out to God to supply what we lack. The entire Christian life is a process of recognizing our deficiencies, and seeking His grace to supply our needs. The process of sanctification is never completed in this life, but when we are complete, we will lack nothing, because He has amply provided for our every deficiency. *To resist and detest adversity is to resist the sanctifying and perfecting work of God in our lives. To rejoice is to embrace His perfecting work in us.*

A Deficiency Common to All Suffering Saints: Wisdom (James 1:5-8)

5 But if^o anyone is deficient in wisdom, he should ask God, who gives to all generously and without reprimand, and it will be given to him. 6 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. 7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord, 8 since he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

As I have indicated by the footnote in verse 5, the “**if**” is not really “iffy.” James assumes that everyone is deficient in wisdom. If there is ever a time when our lack of wisdom is apparent, it is when we are in the midst of adversity. We need wisdom to rightly assess our situation and to determine our response to it. At times like this, we need divine wisdom, which we do not possess within ourselves. It is the kind of wisdom which God possesses, and which He promises to give to those who ask for it. Many of our teenagers wear a bracelet that reads: WWJD. This stands for, “What would Jesus do?” Isn’t that the question we all need to ask? Isn’t what Jesus would do in our circumstances the wise thing we should do? James goes on to encourage us to pray for wisdom by assuring us not only that God will answer our prayer for wisdom, but that He will do so without shaming or humiliating us. This is because He is glorified when we confess our dependency and His sufficiency. God delights in the fact that we express our dependence on Him.

James sets down only one condition and that is that we pray in faith, without wavering. It is never wrong to pray for wisdom, and there is never a time when God will not grant us that wisdom – except when we ask with an inner wavering. This wavering is a vacillation between one thing and another. I’m not sure that I really like the word “**doubts**” here. Is James suggesting that this person doubts God will answer his prayer? Perhaps, but frankly I doubt it. In verse 9, James tells us that this wavering fellow is “**double-minded,**” literally “two-souled.” This term is found only twice in the New Testament, and both times it is in the Book of James. Notice the second instance of this term in James 4:8, in context:

6 But he gives greater grace. Therefore it says, “**God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.**” 7 So submit to God. But resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and make your hearts pure, you **double-minded.** 9 Grieve, mourn, and weep. Turn your laughter into mourning and your joy into despair. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you (James 4:6-10, underscoring mine).

In chapter 4, James is talking about pride and humility. God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble (verse 6). The saints are encouraged to submit to God and to resist the devil (verse 7). They are to humble themselves before the Lord, who will exalt them (verse 10). They are to grieve, mourn, and weep. To be double-minded in chapter 4 was to waver between submitting to God or to the devil. It would appear that it was to waver between humility and pride (pride being a very devil-like characteristic). Thus, it would seem that the

choice was between drawing near to God in adversity, or arrogantly going one's own way, which is also Satan's way. I therefore understand that what James is saying is that we had better not ask for wisdom from God unless we are also willing to follow the wisdom He provides. God will not **"cast His pearls before swine;"** He will not reveal wisdom to those who are not committed to follow it.

By inference, then, we can see that faith manifests itself in stability, steadiness in the midst of life's storms. But a deficiency of faith manifests itself in instability. The one who lacks faith bounces hither and yon, blown about by the winds of adversity, as well as the winds of false doctrine (see also [Ephesians 4:14](#)). Faith rests assured that God is in control, and that adversity has come from His loving hand, to build us up in His strength. Faith rejoices in adversity, because it is for our good, and for His glory.

On Rags and Riches ([James 1:9-12](#))

9 Now the believer of humble means should take pride in his high position. 10 But the rich person's pride should be in his humiliation, because he will pass away like a wildflower in the meadow. 11 For the sun rises with its heat and dries up the meadow; the petal of the flower falls off and its beauty is lost forever. So also the rich person in the midst of his pursuits will wither away. 12 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 him.

In turning to wealth and poverty, James has not really changed subjects. In the Jewish mind, wealth was the measure of one's piety. The pious were expected to prosper, while the wicked were to suffer. This is why our Lord's story of the "Rich man and Lazarus" in [Luke 16:19-31](#) was so shocking to the Jews who heard it. James wants both the rich and the poor to see their circumstances from an eternal perspective. Note, however, that James indicates to us that there will be both rich saints and poor saints, and both of them are exhorted to respond to their circumstances in a godly manner. He does not accept the premise that the pious prosper and the wicked suffer.

It has never been very difficult for me to understand James' words to the poor man, instructing him to take pride in his high position. After all, Jesus said,

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" ([Luke 6:20](#)).

The story of Lazarus and the rich man tells it all. A few years of doing without is nothing, compared to an eternity of bliss.

But what of the rich man? How can James say that he is to take pride in his humiliation? What is his humiliation, and how can he take pride in it? James tells us, I believe:

10 But the rich person's pride should be in his humiliation, because he will pass away like a wildflower in the meadow. 11 For the sun rises with its heat and dries up the meadow; the petal of the flower falls off and its beauty is lost forever. So also the rich person in the midst of his pursuits will wither away.

The rich man's humiliation is his earthly demise. When Paul wrote, **"For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain"** ([Philippians 1:21](#)), he was expressing a universal truth for every believer. I am reminded of our Lord's words in [Luke 16:11](#):

"If then you haven't been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will entrust you with the true riches."

"True riches" are not earthly riches, but heavenly riches. If **"true riches"** are heavenly riches, then it is our earthly demise that opens the door to true riches. It should not just be the poor who look forward to heaven then, but also the rich, because there is where our true riches await us at our arrival:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 that is, **into an inheritance imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. It is reserved in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are protected through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.** 6 This brings you great joy, although you may have to suffer for a short time in various trials. 7 Such trials show the proven character of your faith, which is much more valuable than gold—gold that is tested by fire, even though it is passing away—and will bring praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 8 You have not seen him, but you love him. You do not see him now but you believe in him, and so you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, 9 because you are attaining the goal of your faith—the salvation of your souls ([1 Peter 1:3-9](#), emphasis mine).

Doesn't this sound a great deal like the first verses of James? Our inheritance is not earthly, but heavenly. This is what the Old Testament saints had to learn as well:

13 These all died in faith without receiving the things promised, but they saw them in the distance and welcomed them and acknowledged that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth. 14 For those who speak in such a way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15 In fact, if they had been thinking of the land that they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 **But as it is, they aspire to a better land, that is, a heavenly one.** Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them (Hebrews 11:13-16, emphasis mine).

And so the rich man is to realize that his earthly wealth is paltry, in comparison with the heavenly wealth that awaits him. Since it is his earthly demise that takes him to heaven, the rich man exults in his death, his humiliation.

It's something like this. Suppose that there are two men. The first has a 16-foot wooden rowboat, with a 25-horsepower motor. The second has a rubber life raft, powered by oars. Both men are assured that when their boats wear out they will inherit a 120-foot luxury yacht. The man in the rubber raft obviously is eager for the day when he can leave his raft behind and possess his yacht. But so is the man with the wooden rowboat. As his 16-foot boat grows old, and begins to leak, its owner rejoices in the boat's demise, because he knows that the time for him to possess the luxury yacht is drawing near.

(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/1-accepting-adversity-james-11-27>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The opening lines of the book of James set us up for our study of the letter as a whole. In these lines we were introduced to three themes we will see again and again over the next few weeks. These themes are the reality of trials, the need for wisdom, and the reality of economic privation. The trials we face produce the need to ask God for wisdom and can involve economic considerations. Above all, James impresses on us our need for God's wisdom and our inability to live faithful lives apart from it. Only by seeking God wholeheartedly will we continue to be formed into the kind of people He desires us to be.

Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary

Expect Problems - The Book of James was likely written by Jesus' half-brother James, who wrote this letter to the new and now persecuted Christians in the Roman world. Some call James the Proverbs of the New Testament because it outlines several practical principles for living a wise Christian life, especially in the face of difficulty. James started by saying to expect adversities and struggles. They may come because of personal circumstances, sickness, injuries, or persecution from your commitment to Christianity, Jesus Himself said, "In the world ye will have tribulation" (John 16:33, KJV).

Rejoice: God Is in Control - However, James said you can experience joy amid troubles. How is that possible? James outlined several ways. Joy is produced when the individual is convinced of the sovereignty of God. The Holy Spirit can give confidence in an extremely challenging situation that God's truth and strength will be shown. When James says to "count it all joy," he is using a financial term. It means to evaluate, to set new goals and priorities. The spiritual aspect of one's life becomes more important than the creature comforts. Trials bring about endurance and patience. When we allow God to work in us, it develops our maturity in Christ.

Wisdom from Heaven - James also advised the suffering believer to ask for God's wisdom in the middle of problems. That wisdom begins with reverencing God, committing to following His instructions no matter what and seeing Him and Him alone as the source of true wisdom. We also must not listen with one ear at heaven's door and the other tuned to the world: nothing but confusion will result. It is better to be rich with the wealth of God's wisdom because it cannot be lost or taken away. God is always ready, available and ever-present when we request His wisdom.