



“Wisdom for Facing Trials”

Review

This is the third episode in our journey through James. James wrote this letter of instruction to those he warmly called his dear brothers. He wrote this letter to validate genuine faith. How does real faith in Jesus behave when encountering life in a broken world? He issued over 50 “life instructions (LI)” supported by numerous “divine insights (DI)” to enable us to follow those instructions. James’ letter serves as a mirror to determine the health of our faith. As we pause in front of this mirror, it either confirms or corrects our faith. Each week we will stand in front of the mirror of God’s word to evaluate our responses to life circumstances and determine whether they show true trust in God or not. James centers on the behavior that confirms spiritual maturity. James highlights the behavior that stems from a sincere desire to **express** a salvation already received by faith apart from personal behavior, **NOT** behavior driven by a desire to **secure** salvation. Trials serve as a primary test to confirm the reality of our faith.

James addresses faith’s response to trials in verse 2-18.

I. Faith’s response to trials 1:2-18

A. Life Instruction #1 with Insight

1. Instruction: Consider it all joy when encountering trials

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

Trials refer to difficult situations in life that challenge. James called them “various” trials. The variety of life difficulties is vast. The intensity of these trials ranges from slight to severe. They are inevitable. James instructs us to respond not if, but when we encounter them. No one escapes difficult times.

The term “**encounter**” means to fall into, be surrounded by, be encompassed by, be enveloped by. These tests are not necessarily due to anything we did or didn’t do. So, what are we to do when a trial blindsides us out of nowhere? James calls for what seems to be an irrational response. It is the response of one fully trusting God no matter what.

“count it all joy”

Calculate the benefits of encountering various trials to be an occasion for joy. It seems irrational to consider a trial an occasion for joy. Usually we rejoice GETTING OUT of trials. James instructs to also rejoice GOING IN. Such a response requires genuine trust in God. James provided a perspective adjuster or divine insight enabling joy in trials.

2. Divine Insight – Knowing testing produces endurance

“knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.”

The “knowing” enables the rejoicing. We may think we have strong faith, but how we respond to trials may reveal otherwise. Knowing that trials produce endurance challenges us to view trials differently. The term translated “endurance” comes from two terms meaning to “remain under”.

Endurance is the ability to continue pursuing and doing what we know is right before God, despite my feelings, or fatigue and despite any impulse to escape, grumble, or crumble under the test.

We willingly **remain under** the trial allowed by God to refine our faith. Scripture calls for another response to any temptation to do what is wrong. God calls us to **resist** any temptation intended by Satan to destroy our faith. Attitude change comes from perspective change. Understanding the positive benefit enables us to joyfully face the negative trial. Trusting God in trials enables endurance of the trial. Rather than collapse, run, fall apart, lash out, give up, blame God and others, we intentionally endure by focusing on a positive outcome. Endurance however is not the final objective. James issued another life instruction and divine insight.

B. Life instruction #2 with insights

1. Instruction: Continue enduring

And let endurance have its perfect result

First, consider encountering various trials joy. Next, continue enduring those trials until they produce the final product. He then specified the final product.

2. Insight: endurance produces maturity and stability

SO THAT you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

James shared a pathway to becoming perfect and complete, lacking in NOTHING. Combining the first two instructions and insights we get this.

Joyfully continue choosing to trust in God whenever we encounter trials.

Knowing that every trial facilitates endurance.

Knowing that continued endurance produces spiritual maturity and stability

The desired result of continued endurance is spiritual maturity.

James described the end goal as being “perfect”, “complete”, “lacking in nothing.”

Function at peak capacity and development, become fully grown.

Become sound or whole.

Have everything you need (contentment).

When we bail out or crash and burn, or fail to respond with an attitude of joy, we fail to achieve the intended objective. Failure to endure trials blocks the development of the spiritual muscles necessary for future encounters with unexpected trials.

Turbulent winds cause the eagle to fly higher.

Turbulent winds cause the eagle to gain a larger view (better perspective).

Turbulent winds lift the eagle above petty harassment and distractions.

Turbulent winds allow the eagle to expend less effort.

Turbulent winds allow the eagle to stay up longer.

Turbulent winds enable the eagle to fly faster. 80-100 mph vs 50mph.

These life encounters cause us to trust God alone.

It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes. Psalm 119:71

Joni Erikson Tada, well acquainted with what it means to suffer, put it very well.

"When God brings suffering into your life as A Christian, be it mild or drastic, He is forcing you to decide on issues you have been avoiding. He is pressing you to ask yourself some questions."

God allows suffering to encourage us to explore some areas in our life just as He allowed Israel to come under oppression to bring them to deeper trust in Him. Life can become extremely complicated. Properly responding to life's trials can sometimes feel impossible. Knowing how to respond to the variety of trials we encounter in life eludes us. James's next instruction provides direction in such cases.

C. Life Instruction #3 with insights

1. Instruction: Ask God for wisdom

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God

James instructed them to continually ask God. The condition for asking God is lacking wisdom. If any of you lacks wisdom, and you do, ask God. “lack” = to be destitute, wanting, devoid, absence of. A banking term indicating we are “in the red”. We all lack wisdom. If you just don't know what to do in the midst of a trial, keep asking God for wisdom. Having a divine perspective enables us to properly respond to trials.

We have just seen that we can count encountering trials all joy **knowing** they produce endurance.

We can continue enduring **knowing** it eventually produces spiritual maturity.

If we need to know more concerning the trial, ask God for wisdom! Notice it didn't say to ask God to take it away. It tells us to ask for wisdom.

Paul covered the struggle to even know what to ask for.

The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. Romans 8:26

What does James mean by “wisdom.” Wisdom refers to the ability to apply knowledge and understanding to life. It is the ability to act and solve problems from a Divine perspective. Wisdom responds to life in accordance with the will of God. Knowledge accumulates facts and data. Wisdom relates the accumulated facts to life and action. Human wisdom applies knowledge to life from a human perspective. James differentiates the two later.

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. James 3:13-18

One describes actions or behavior in harmony with God’s ways.

The other describes behavior promoted by earthly, unspiritual and demonic sources.

Wisdom is the ability to understand and live according to God’s ways.

Human wisdom is the choice to live life according to human reasoning.

Paul taught God’s ways so that...

that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Colossians 2:2-3

If you want live according to wisdom, study Christ.

Wisdom for trials comes from Christ and His word.

Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. For by me your days will be multiplied, and years will be added to your life. Proverbs 9:9-11

if you seek wisdom like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; Proverbs 2:4-6

Trust and receiving divine direction go hand in hand.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones. Proverbs 3:5-8

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.” Matthew 7:24-27

Wisdom is inseparable from behavior.

James included two specific insights related to this prayer for wisdom. They answer the question of why we should continually ask God for wisdom.

2. Insights

a. **God gives generously without scolding to those asking**

The One giving generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. James 1:5

I love this declaration. The reason we should ask God for wisdom is because God delights in giving it. James used continuous action words here. Generously giving to all those continually asking

The Greek word for "liberally" is the word haplos which carries the idea of singleness of heart, of doing something unconditionally, without bargaining, without restraint, simply, openly, generously, and sincerely.

Along with generously supplying wisdom, God doesn't scold us for asking. Giving to all, reproaching none. Reprimanding, reproaching, scolding no one, ever. Generously supplying all, harshly reproaching none. Never skimping. Never scolding. Confidently ask God for wisdom knowing that those who trust God receive wisdom without skimping or scolding resulting in maturity and stability.

God's gift of wisdom allows us to understand how God is involved in life's daily events. Instead of serving as a hindrance, trials present a marvelous opportunity to become wise! Holman New Testament Commentary

The second reason we should confidently ask God for wisdom deals with the consequences of not trusting God when we encounter trials.

b. **God gives nothing to those doubting**

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. James 1:6-8

James addressed trust or faith fourteen times in these five short chapters. Confidently ask God for wisdom **knowing** that those who doubt receive nothing resulting in immaturity and instability. The doubting here indicates a wavering of our trust in God. This exposes a serious distrust in God Himself. James offered a recognizable illustration of those who doubt. The one failing to trust God gets tossed around like wind-tossed water. The winds determine the state of the sea. Waves are whipped around at the mercy of the wind.

Paul used a similar illustration.

...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Ephesians 4:13-14

If you don't intentionally live according to God's ways, you will be blown around by man's idea of where real life is found. Doubters lose the ability to decide the direction of their life. They don't know what to do because they have no anchor. They will not receive wisdom from the Lord. They are wishy-washy and unstable. They easily get sidetracked and fooled by perspectives based on human reasoning. Wavering faith produces reckless behavior. Without a reasoned confident trust in God, we become subject to the whims of our emotions. Behavior driven by feelings rather than faith breeds instability. The contrast here is clear. The one who confidently waits on God for direction receives wisdom and experiences stability.

The one who doubts God receives nothing and experiences instability.

Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. Hebrews 11:6

Scripture regularly admonishes against the double-minded.

James calls them two-souled.

Prey to the shifting winds of motive and desire, he (the doubter) wants wisdom from God one day and the wisdom of the world the next. Moo, D.J.,

James called the “two-souled” to repent later in the letter.

Numerous passages call us to love God with a whole heart, not a divided heart.

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Deut 6:5

Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, Psalm 119:2

This fortifies the intent of James to expose those who claim to be followers of Christ but whose lives demonstrate otherwise. Where do we go when we encounter trials? James instructs us to run to God for the wisdom, direction, perspective needed to continue enduring until we learn to become more like Jesus; perfect, complete, lacking in nothing.

James instructs us to count every encounter with trials all joy **knowing** they produce endurance.

Continue enduring **knowing** it produces spiritual maturity.

When we struggle with knowing what to do, confidently ask God for wisdom **knowing** he will not skim or scold and **knowing** that doubting God will result in immaturity and instability.

Does your faith pass the trials test?