

NO DOUBT

James 1:5-8

INTRODUCTION

Our passage is **James 1:5-8**

→ Recall the context from **James 1:2-4** (trials)

William Cowper wrote a poem about the working of God in trials:

*God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.*

*Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill,
He treasures up his bright designs,
And works his sov'reign will.*

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread,
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.*

Life is full of challenges, trials and disappointments. Life is not easy though - we have failures. God leads us through them. He the Father provides a lifeline to His children. God has opened up the door to the throne room of Grace. We don't need a priest. We can approach our Father directly through prayer.

Illustration: Dr. Julius Segal worked with the Iran hostages, Vietnam POWs, and other survivors. He wrote a book entitled *Winning Life's Toughest Battles* in which he shared his observations of those who had overcome terrible trauma in their lives.

His first chapter is devoted to the importance of having friends, a circle of comrades with whom to communicate (lifelines of communication). He wrote, “*Few individuals can cope with trauma alone. Even the most powerful figures in the world need contact with others in the face of crisis.*”

He related the experience of Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale, heroic survivor of 2,714 days as a POW in Vietnam:

*In every episode of captivity in recent American history, POWs and hostages have been sustained by ingeniously improvised **lifelines** of communication. In Vietnam, a clever tap code, in which the number and sequence of taps spelled out letters of the alphabet, became the prisoners’ chief means of communication, their **lifeline**. It was this code that sustained Jim Stockdale.*

On one occasion, the North Vietnamese handcuffed Stockdale’s hands behind his back, locked his legs in heavy irons, and dragged him from his dark prison cell to sit in an unshaded courtyard so other prisoners could see what happened to anybody who refused to cooperate.

Stockdale remained in that position for three days. Since he had not been in the sun for a long time, he soon felt weak, but the guards would not let him sleep. He was beaten repeatedly. After one beating, Stockdale heard a towel snapping out in a prison code the letters: GBUJS. It was a message he would never forget: “God bless you, Jim Stockdale.

James 1:5-8

Proposition: Three lessons in these 4 verses:

- 1. The God who Gives**
- 2. The Prayer that Works**
- 3. The Man who Wavers**

First lesson...

1. The God Who Gives

Point – God’s lifeline for you is prayer.

- You will fall short of endurance.
- You will fall short of counting in all joy.

Remember the Source of wisdom. As God’s children we go to God. He is a generous God/Giver.

Proof – **James 1:5** – “**But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.**”

1:5 – “**But if any of you lacks wisdom**”

- ties in with **verse 4** – “**complete, lacking in nothing**”
- we are falling short
- we need to turn to the wisdom of God

“**wisdom**” – **James 3:13-18** – practical application of knowledge

“**if**” – 1st class condition –you will have a need – “when”

James is tactful. He doesn’t say “You all lack wisdom.” He says “if any of you” and uses grammar to subtly remind us that we will have the need for wisdom.

- James knows that trials can overwhelm the godly.
- It is not easy to continually rejoice in future blessings while enduring present trials

Proverbs 4:5-6 – “**Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding! Do not forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will guard you; Love her, and she will watch over you.**”

God has given us protection at the human level – police officers, government, parents for children, husbands for wives...but God’s Wisdom is your ultimate Guardian, your Protector.

Illustration:

- Solomon – 1 Kings 3:9-12, 16-28
- Stephen – Acts 6:3, 10

One command, stated twice – **“Let him ask”**

- Command #1 - **Who** to ask.....v. 5
- Command #2 - **How** to ask.....v. 6

Command #1: Who to ask

→ **“let him ask of God” (1:5a)**

Again, God’s lifeline for you is prayer.

- You will fall short of endurance.
- You will fall short of counting in all joy.

God recognizes this and commands you to seize the lifeline!

- This is an imperative – a command, not a suggestion.
- Go to Him in prayer.

“let him ask” – present imperative – keep on asking – continual habitual

- This should be a habitual characteristic of a Christian
- As we grow spiritually, it will become more natural – more of a knee-jerk reaction – to ask God for wisdom

1:5b – “who gives to all men generously”

“all men” - not every single human being but all types of believers

“generously” – this word found only here in the New Testament.

- Its root is the word ‘single’
- that root word is used in the context of having a single eye, or being single-minded.
- In other words, God is absolutely undivided and unwavering in His intention to simply give wisdom to whoever asks for it.
- Our cup will be running over due to His generosity

“**without reproach**” – He does not give grudgingly or to humiliate. God does not give with wrong motives.

- the pagan sees God with a clenched fist
- the believer sees God with an open hand

He does not give with one hand while smacking with the other.

John Calvin’s Commentaries:

James 1:5 – [Summarize] *“Those who are the most liberal among men, when any one asks often to be helped, mention their formal acts of kindness, and thus excuse themselves for the future. Hence, a mortal man, however open-handed he may be, we are ashamed to weary by asking too often. But James reminds us, that there is nothing like this in God; for he is ready ever to add new blessings to former ones, without any end or limitation.”*

God doesn’t say, “I gave you wisdom three months ago. What have you done with that?”

- God gives generously!
- God doesn’t just welcome us to ask for wisdom but He is glorified in it because He asks it of us.

Application: Take great comfort – God welcomes your heart cry for wisdom to endure through challenges, trials and disappointments. God gives you a lifeline for your times of greatest trial, greatest weakness

Isaiah 43:1-3a → Promise from God

- God is speaking directly to Israel but it applies to you

Transⁿ – There are spiritual demands on the one who asks – from how God gives to how we should ask

First lesson... **The God Who Gives**

Second lesson....

2. The Prayer That Works

Point – Ask in faith – this is belief vs. doubt

- That is powerful prayer
- That is prayer that works

Proof – **1:6a** – “**But let him ask in faith without any doubting,**”

Recall: One command, stated twice ...

Command #2 – How to ask (**1:6a**)

“**in faith**” - throughout the New Testament there are boundaries to our faith, to our fellowship and to our prayer

Matt 21:22 – “**all things you ask in prayer believing, you shall receive**”

- there is no acceptable prayer outside of faith

John 9; Isaiah 1

- God’s ears are closed to prayers not “in faith”
“Faith unlocks the divine storehouse. Unbelief bars its doors.”

– Vaughn

“**without any doubting**” – a basic conflict in loyalties

- concept of a divided mind – torn in two directions

- conflict – middle voice – from oneself – mind filled with confusions and skepticism

Doubt is the enemy of faith.

- Doubt is willful disobedience to God, the hallmark of unbelief.
- Faith and doubt cannot coexist.
- Doubt places the character of God in question
- this is not intellectual doubt, **this is disloyalty**

Cardinal Richelieu is best known of “The Three Musketeers” infamy. The real Cardinal Richelieu once said – *“A virtuous and well-disposed person is like good metal. The more he is fired, the more he is refined. The more he is opposed, the more he is approved. Wrongs may well try him and touch him, but they cannot imprint on him any false stamp.”*

Thomas Watson – *“Whatever trouble in this life a child of God meets with, it is all the hell he shall ever have.”* We are promised heaven. And so we can endure as those whose faith is real:

- without conflict
- without confusion
- with loyalty

Illustration: Paul talking about Abraham in **Romans 4:**
“with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,”

God that Gives, Prayer That Works.....
 Third lesson...

3. The Man Who Wavers

Point – “spiritual schizophrenia” - Paul is spelling out characteristic habit, thinking and behavior of someone who is outside the faith, who is double-minded

Proof – 1:6b-8 – “for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind ⁷For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸*being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

James makes his teaching vivid by use of illustrations to bring out his points

This illustration of the sea and wind is the first of many James employs

“the surf of the sea” - not a stormy sea, but the normal sea surging up and down of the ocean – unpredictable

“tossed by the wind” - driven by the wind which blows this way and that way

- both result in a restless surging body of water

The instability of the sea pictures the instability of the faith of a doubter.

Brother **Jude (13)** uses similar picture – “wild waves of the sea”

This describes someone characterized by doubt

- Difference between someone lying (wavering, falling short) and someone being a liar (characterized by lying)

In our frailty, in our battle against the flesh, we all waver a little but a believer is ultimately characterized by:

- ✓ Faith
- ✓ Belief
- ✓ Trust
- ✓ NOT doubt

The divided person has no fixed beliefs and direction – has no anchor of the soul (**Heb 6:19**) – he is the prey to every shifting wind of doctrine and contrary storm of opposition and persecution

Ephesians 4:14 “As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;”

James 1:7 – “For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord,”

“**that man**” – emphatic usage – a distancing by James

- James distances himself from “**that man**”

“**let not that man expect**” – emphatic negative

- James finds it contemptible that a man with wavering faith would dare to expect his prayer to be answered

Prayer accompanied by doubt is like faith without works – there may be human expectations but they amount to nothing

1:8 – “*being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*”

Further description of his **character** and his **conduct**

- No verb in original places - emphasis on the adjectives

Character of the doubter:

“**double-minded,**” - literally means “two-minded” “two-souled”

- used here for the first time (and in **4:8**) in Greek literature – James may have coined the term

- this “double-mindedness” is the antithesis of the perfection and completeness of **1:4** and God’s “single-minded generosity” whole-hearted character in **1:5**

Psalm 12:2 – “They speak falsehood to one another; With flattering lips and with a double heart they speak.”

Hosea 10:2 – “Their heart is faithless (divided); Now they must bear their guilt. The LORD will break down their altars *And* destroy their *sacred* pillars.”

Homer in The Iliad– Achilles heart “*was divided in counsel*”

Clement – “*Wretched are the double-minded*”

Rabbinic comment – “*When you make your prayer to God, do not have two hearts, one for God and one for something else.*”

“*He is a walking civil war in which trust and distrust of God wage a continual battle against each other*”– Barclay

John Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress: “*Mr. Facing-Both-Ways*”

The more they see, the more they will hate; the more they understand, the more will they complain and object; the more they are convinced, will they the more murmur and rebel.

Now this does not mean that we expect God to answer prayers exactly the way we want Him to answer.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones – from his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount - “*Man is always trying to mix things up that cannot be mixed. Still worse is the fact that he persuades himself that he can do it successfully. He is quite sure this compromise is a possibility, and yet our Lord tells us it is not. If you want it stated philosophically, you have but to turn to Aristotle and his axiom to the effect that ‘there is no mean between two opposites’. Opposites are opposites, and*

you will never get a mean between them. Here is it is. There is no possible mixing of light and darkness. It is no longer light if you do, and it is no longer darkness ... But man in sin and in his supposed cleverness sees two things at one and the same time; and he glories in this double vision. Our Lord, however, tells us here that it cannot be done. We cannot love two opposite things at the same time. Love is exclusive; it is demanding, and always insists upon the absolute. It is either one or the other; it must be light or darkness. The eye is single or not single.”

This is God’s charge for us. This is what God wants us to understand.

Application: God is not a spiritual ATM – where we put in a prayer and out comes whatever we ask

So, as the character of the doubter is double-minded...

Conduct of the doubter:

“**Unstable**” – uncontrollable

“**all his ways**” → no part of the life is unstained by doubting in the heart

It would have been damning enough if James had stopped at the phrase “**double-minded**.” That is bad enough but James goes on to add, “**unstable in all his ways.**”

- they are utterly unpredictable in everything they do
- they have no foundation at all and so there is no knowing in what direction they are going to fall
- it is a state of spiritual schizophrenia

Jim Elliot wrote in his diary of his longing that his life would be characterized by “a single eye.”

Application: Desire single-mindedness and purity. Do not be carried away by every wind of doctrine. Do not be blown away by the troubles of life.

Faith (Single-Minded)

Looks to God
Loves God
Believes
Of the Spirit
Life
Wisdom from above
Eternal
Eyes on the cross

Doubt (Double-Minded)

Looks to self
Loves self
Doubts
Of the flesh
Death
Wisdom from below
Temporal
Eyes on the world

CONCLUSION

I want to close with a 19th century poem by Ella Wheeler Wilcox:

“I will not doubt, though all my ships at sea come drifting home with broken masts and sails. I shall believe the hand which never fails. From seeming evil worketh good to me. And though I weep because those sails are battered, still will I cry while my best hopes lie shattered. I trust in Thee.

“I will not doubt though all my prayers return unanswered from the still white realm above. I shall believe it is an all-wise love which has refused those things for which I yearn. And though at times I cannot keep from grieving, yet the pure ardor of my fixed believing undimmed shall burn.

“I will not doubt though sorrows fall like rain and troubles swarm like bees about a hive. I shall believe the heights for which I strive are only reached by anguish and by pain. And though I groan and tremble with my crosses, I yet shall see through my severest losses the greater gain.

“I will not doubt, well anchored in the faith like some staunch ship my soul braves every gale. So strong, its

courage that it will not fail to breast the mighty unknown sea of death. O may I cry when body parts with spirit. I do not doubt so listening worlds may hear it with my last breath.”

That’s the way to face life and that’s the way to face death, unwavering in every sense. How a man prays will determine how a man lives. God is good to all who call on him, he gives with an open hand. **Isaiah 43:1-3a**

George Whitfield – “All trials are for two purposes, that we may be better acquainted with our own wicked hearts and that we may be better acquainted with our own beloved Savior.”

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