

Faith and Wisdom

A Present-Day Illustration

Monique stood looking at the closed bedroom door of her 15-year-old daughter, JaLisa. She could not hear any noise coming from the room. It was 11 A.M. on a Saturday.

“I have been praying,” Monique had said to her sister a few weeks ago.

“Have you asked God for wisdom on how to deal with JaLisa?” Monique’s sister had asked. It had stopped Monique in her very busy tracks.

For the past few weeks, Monique had done just that. The mother thought that she had sensed a softening in her daughter. This morning, Monique decided to take JaLisa to the mall.

“Shopping? Really?” said a bored looking JaLisa.

“I’ll hang out in the food court. You do you, and then we can meet up for lunch and head down to the movie theater. We can both watch the same movie or watch separate ones. Let’s just get out of the house!”

Sitting in the food court, Monique got a few texts from JaLisa showing various merchandise. Monique responded in emoji’s, either smiling or thumbs up or frowning and thumbs down.

Driving home, the two talked briefly about the movie they saw together.

“Mom, I’m sorry,” said JaLisa. “Mia and I had a falling out, and it seemed like no one had any time for me, not even you. Now I know differently.”

1. *Why do challenges normally accompany character growth?*

2. *Why is fear a common part of these challenges? Explain your answer.*

3. *What spiritual insights have you gained when your faith in Christ has been tested?*

LESSON FOCUS: Ask and believe that God will give you wisdom in trying circumstances.

The Testing of Our Faith

James 1:1-4, KJV

1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting

James 1:1-4, NIV

¹James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations:

Greetings.

²Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

The letter of James was intended for Jewish believers (those from “the twelve tribes,” vs. 1) scattered throughout the nations of the Mediterranean world. This James is most likely the brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55) who became the head of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13-19).

James wasted no time getting to the point in this address to his fellow Christians. Fourteen times the apostle called his readers his “brothers and sisters” (vs. 2). By using this term, this powerful leader of the church in Jerusalem put himself on the same plane with his Christian readers. Though he chided them many times, he did so in a spirit of brotherly love.

James first addressed the matter of trials. In contrast to our natural tendency during such times, James encourages us to “consider it pure joy” when we face a wide variety of difficulties that come to test our faith (vs. 2, NIV). This does not mean we pretend to enjoy our afflictions or behave as though they do not matter to us. We rejoice because of their purpose and what they can accomplish in our lives.

Trials not only test our faith, they also reveal its validity. As the apostle Peter says about the difficult times that come our way, “These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though

refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Pet. 1:7). Our response to the afflictions in our lives displays the reality of our relationship with the Savior and leads to our praise of Him.

Affliction does not produce our trust in the Lord, but rather shows it to be real and enables it to grow. The positive outcome of faithfully enduring these storms is that of “perseverance” (vs. 3). This is the muscle of our faith; it’s the spiritual strength we develop as the result of the testing of our faith. It’s the endurance and tenacity that grows in us during the testing.

The word for “perseverance” is also translated “steadfastness” in some translations. This captures the sense of how our endurance in times of stress leads to greater maturity in our walk with the Lord and prepares us for future trials.

4. *What does it mean to consider our trials as “pure joy”?*

5. *What does the testing of our faith accomplish?*

Our Need for Wisdom

James 1:5-8, KJV

5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

7 For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

8 A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

James 1:5-8, NIV

⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. ⁶But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. ⁸Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

In the midst of our trials, we need God’s wisdom to see through the darkness. His insight enables us to make sound

decisions and provides the needed perspective so we can respond with joy to our afflictions rather than despair.

But how do we obtain such wisdom? James tells us to ask the Lord for His guidance. When we do, we have God's promise that He will "generously" provide us with such wisdom without demeaning us for our lack of it (vs. 5). He graciously provides the understanding we require for our dilemma.

In doing so, the Lord most often uses Scripture to give us the insight we need. God's Word provides the way for the Holy Spirit both to teach and guide us when we do not know which way to go. Nothing prevents this flow of wisdom to our hearts unless we waiver in our faith when asking the Lord for it.

In verse 6, James warns that we "must believe and not doubt" when we ask for wisdom. He portrays the one who hesitates in trusting God as "double-minded" (vs. 8), one who cannot decide between trusting and doubting Him.

Like the waves of the sea, this person shifts between confidence in his plea for wisdom and doubting the Lord's promise to provide it. One moment this person exudes faith, but in the next, distrust in God's provision of understanding.

James says this skeptic "should not expect to receive anything from the Lord" (vs. 7). If our focus rests solely on the sea raging about us as in the case of those who doubt, we should not expect that God will guide us through His Holy Spirit.

6. *Why do we need wisdom in the midst of our trials? How does God provide it?*

7. *What does James say about God's willingness to give us such insight in our circumstances?*

The Perspective of Wisdom

James 1:9-11, KJV

9 Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:

10 But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall

James 1:9-11, NIV

⁹Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. ¹⁰But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a

KJV

pass away.

11 For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

NIV

wild flower. ¹¹For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed.

In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.

It might seem as though James changed subjects in verse 9; however, a closer look reveals he's still referring to our need for wisdom in the midst of trials.

He first addresses "believers in humble circumstances" (vs. 9) who are not only poor financially, but also weak and of little value in the eyes of those around them. But the Lord sees them much differently, a way in which they can even "take pride."

They are God's dear children and as such possess eternal life. Someday the Lord will raise them up with imperishable bodies with which they will forever enjoy the wonders of heaven.

James offers the opposite advice for rich Christians, those who do not need to work for a living. He tells them to "take pride in their humiliation" (vs. 10). This warning stems from the danger they face in regarding their earthly affluence as permanent. In reality, their wealth, including their pursuit of it, is no more lasting than a "wild flower" whose bud quickly disappears in the scorching heat.

James tells both poor and the rich believers to look at their lives through the perspective of eternity. The lowly Christian rejoices in the realization that their circumstances are temporary; they will someday enjoy the many and varied blessings of eternity. The rich, on the other hand, must also learn to recognize the fleeting nature of their status and to value eternal treasures above their fleeting prosperity.

Both the rich and the poor will stand before the Lord someday when faithfulness to the Lord will matter so much more than their current circumstances.

8. *How is the perspective of wisdom the same for both the lowly and the rich believer?*

The Darkest Valley

“The ultimate test of faith is not how loudly you praise God in happy times,” Christian pastor and author Rick Warren remarked, “but how deeply you trust Him in dark times.” In other words, it’s not difficult to be faithful to Christ when life is going well. When life is beset with adversities, however, that’s when our faith in Jesus either shines or fades in the darkness.

Fans of a sports team illustrate this reality. A loyal fan follows and supports whether their team is winning or losing, but a casual fan follows and cheers only when their team is winning. These kinds of fans are called “bandwagon” fans, and sadly, there are too many of these people who are dedicated to Christ only when their lives are “winning.”

For the faithful followers of Christ there is both purpose and blessing for the trials that challenge their faith in Jesus: God is transforming their character and their minds by making them more and more like Jesus. In this way, God blesses them with His wisdom in the process.

Moreover, the age of a Christian does not determine the spiritual maturity of that Christian. A slab of iron can lay in the field for decades, but unless it is forged in fire and pounded into shape, it has little value. Likewise, unless a believer in Christ faithfully perseveres through the crucible of life and is formed into the image of Christ, he or she will gain little wisdom from God.

Therefore, as James said to his audience, let us rejoice during our trials for, as King David said, the Lord is there with us even in the hardest moments of our lives: “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (Ps. 23:4).

9. *How do you avoid being a “bandwagon” Christian?*

10. *True or false: the longer a person is a Christian, the more likely that believer is becoming spiritually mature. Explain your answer.*

11. *When have you felt the Lord’s presence in a dark valley?*

All Glory to the Only Wise God

The Christians to whom James wrote were likely being persecuted for their new faith both by other Jews and the Roman government. While we might not be risking our lives as those Christians did, we still need to rely on the Lord to guide us, and at times carry us, through trying circumstances. Then, we praise Him for what He has done, saying along with the apostle Paul, “to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen” (Rom. 16:27).

► *Take this opportunity to acknowledge your need for God during an adversity you or someone close to you are having. Ask Him to increase your faith at this time and give you wisdom in decision making. Thank Him for His power to help you through it and praise Him for being with you in all circumstances.*

KEY VERSE

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

—James 1:5, KJV

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

—James 1:5, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of August 3 through August 9

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Leviticus 19:13-18—Have Impartial Relationships with One Another.
- Tues.** 2 Thessalonians 1:3-5, 11-12—Praised for Steadfast Faith in Persecution.
- Wed.** Luke 6:20-26—The Poor Blessed; the Rich Criticized.
- Thurs.** 1 Peter 3:13-18—Suffering for Doing the Right Thing.
- Fri.** 1 Corinthians 1:26-31—God Chooses the Foolish, Weak, and Lowly.
- Sat.** James 2:1-7—Treat the Rich and Poor Impartially.
- Sun.** James 1:19-27—The Wise Hear and Do Good.