

Wisdom to Mature

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).

Scripture: James 1:2-12

Song: “When Trials Come”

Amy Carmichael, best known as a missionary to India, understood suffering. Neuralgia—painful nerve damage that was often debilitating—kept her in bed for weeks or months at a time. When an eventual fall kept her bedridden for the rest of her life, Amy continued to serve, acting as a spiritual mother to many orphans and writing prolifically about missions and faith. Her lifetime of trust in God provided the wisdom she needed to bear suffering well.

In today’s passage, James knew his readers would face difficulties, and he wanted them to be well-prepared. He wanted them to be able to experience joy in the midst of their trials, knowing these ordeals would result in maturity. But for maturity to come, these believers would need one essential thing: wisdom. Wisdom would allow them to see things from a spiritual perspective and to continue in faith, allowing trials to do their purifying work.

In difficult times, it’s easy to toss opportunities for patience and endurance out the window and to wallow in grief or frustration. But let’s choose, instead, to follow James’ instruction and ask God for the wisdom we need to persevere.

Father, I ask You for wisdom to endure patiently in difficulty and hard times. In Jesus’ name, amen.

March 4–10. **Ruth Anne Burrell** lives in the Kansas City area, where she enjoys finding new coffee shops, trying out new recipes, and dreaming up new stories to tell.

True Goodness

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows (James 1:17).

Scripture: James 1:13-18

Song: “How Great Thou Art”

Television ads for restaurants are all about inducing craving. The way the camera focuses on the melting cheese or smooth chocolate is designed to make viewers crave what the advertiser offers. Interestingly, one extremely effective solution to these cravings is very simple: eating proper meals and drinking plenty of water. When our bodies are well-hydrated and filled with proper nutrients, we become far less likely to crave something we don't really need or that isn't good for us.

In today's passage, after James clarifies that temptation is not from God but is a result of our own desires, he tells his readers what *does* come from God: every good and perfect gift. The language in verse 17—*good, perfect, heavenly lights, and does not change*—provides a sharp contrast to words used to describe temptation in the previous verses—*evil, enticed, sin, death*. The truth of God's goodness is one of the most powerful weapons believers can use to combat the false “good” that temptation offers.

Reflecting on God's goodness can help us reject the enticements of temptation. No matter how good a temptation may look to us, it can never compare to the true light and goodness of our Father above. Let's take up this weapon, looking always to God in the battle for our minds.

Father, I want to reject what temptation offers and to keep Your true goodness before me today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Even the Darkness

If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me . . . ,” even the darkness will not be dark to you (Psalm 139:11-12).

Scripture: Psalm 139:1-12

Song: “You Never Let Go”

Since adopting my dog, Hugo, I’ve gotten to know his quirks. I know he loves to be scratched behind the ears. I know he rarely barks but will “talk” due to his Husky heritage. I know he’s afraid of baths and birthday candles. I know he struggles not to jump when he’s excited and not to get too close to people’s plates when he smells chicken. These idiosyncrasies, though they might be annoying to some, only make me love Hugo more . . . because he’s mine.

Psalm 139 reveals that the Lord had searched David thoroughly: God knew David’s actions, his thoughts, and his words. We know from other Scripture that David’s actions and words were sometimes far from holy, that he sinned greatly, and that the Lord knew all of it. Yet the Lord’s intimate knowledge of David’s flaws didn’t cause Him to reject David. God’s faithful love remained steadfast.

When I examine my own heart, I sometimes wonder how God can know me so well and still love me. But Scripture passages such as this one remind me that God remains with me even when I’m tempted to hide in the darkness. Even when we mess up, God won’t reject us. Let’s draw near to Him today and receive His forgiveness, help, and healing.

Father, I confess my messes to You, right now, and trust in Your love and forgiveness. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Way Everlasting

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Psalm 139:23-24).

Scripture: Psalm 139:13-18, 23-24

Song: “He Leadeth Me”

When sea turtles hatch, they head immediately for the water. Leatherback sea turtles are big travelers and may journey as many as 10,000 miles through the ocean each year. Yet they always return to the beach where they were born to have their young. Scientists are unsure exactly how sea turtles find their way to their original beaches, but they suspect ocean currents, water chemistry, and even the earth’s magnetic field may play a role. However it happens, sea turtles know their way home.

As Psalm 139 continues, David marvels at God’s knowledge, describing how He knows even David’s point of origin in his mother’s womb. Then David once more requests that God search and know him, pleading for God to lead him “in the way everlasting” (v. 24). This is the culmination of letting God examine us: being led by Him in the way we need to go.

Thankfully, unlike sea turtles, we don’t have to rely on our own abilities to get us where we need to go. God knows where we have come from and where we are going. Because He knows us intimately, we can trust Him to lead us down the right path. And ultimately, His path—the way everlasting—will lead us home.

Father, please show me the path I should take. Lead me in the way everlasting. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Heaviest Burden

Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? (2 Corinthians 11:28-29).

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 11:22-33

Song: “He Knows”

When I worked at an inner-city educational ministry, it wasn't the long hours, low pay, or tough neighborhood that were hardest to deal with. It was the accounts I heard from the kids themselves. For example, there was the boy who came in with bruises from a fight with some neighborhood kids; there was a little girl who was afraid her mom would be deported; and then there were kids with behavior struggles who had started to believe they were “bad” kids. Stories like these were of more concern to me than my own struggles because I cared so deeply for these young ones.

After listing his own severe trials, Paul lists, at the end, the one that seems to weigh most heavily on his heart: the concern he feels for all the churches. Surely he was picturing specific individuals he had mentored and cared for as he wrote these words.

If you've ever been a spouse, parent, son, daughter, brother, sister, or friend to someone in crisis, you know this feeling as well. Yet, even in this pain, God is present and His grace is sufficient for us. We can bring these emotional burdens to Him and trust Him to care for those we are concerned about.

Father, You know the burdens that weigh heaviest on my heart. I entrust these loved ones to Your care. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Solution of Presence

Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Corinthians 12:8-9).

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Song: “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms”

Several years ago I traveled to China, and my first flight was delayed due to weather. I prayed to make my connecting flight—and then missed it by just a few minutes. The next available flight was a day later, so I found a nearby hotel, frustrated by the delay. The next day, I ended up seated in the same row as a Chinese American businessman. He generously chauffeured me through the Beijing airport, interpreting for me and directing me where to go. Looking back, I believe God answered my prayers not with the solution I’d hoped for, but with a person.

Because of Paul’s amazing visions, he was given a “thorn in his flesh” to keep him humble. Again and again, he pleaded for God to take the thorn away. But in the end, instead of acquiescing or giving Paul an explanation for his suffering, God responded with a promise of His presence. Even in Paul’s weakness, God’s grace was sufficient, and His power would be with him.

Sometimes God answers our prayers not with a solution but with a Person, the promise of His own presence in our suffering. No matter what problems we face—physical ailments, emotional sorrows, or “thorns in the flesh”—His grace is sufficient.

Father, thank You for being with me in my suffering. Help me to trust that Your answers to prayer are always best. In Jesus’ name, amen.

A Sign of Strength

He was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him in our dealing with you (2 Corinthians 13:4).

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 13:1-10

Song: "Jesus Paid It All"

Many animal defense mechanisms don't seem to make much sense. Opossums play dead, hairy frogs break their own bones, and sea cucumbers shoot out their own internal organs at attackers. Yet, the opossum's act can fool predators into leaving it alone, the frog's broken toe bones push through its skin to form claws, and the sea cucumber's regenerative organs are coated with poison. Each of these apparent weaknesses is actually the creature's strength.

Paul redefined the meaning of strength for the Corinthian believers. After spending several long passages "boasting" about his weakness, Paul draws a correlation to Christ. Christ was crucified in weakness, and when He died, even His closest followers thought it was the end of Him. But God turned that moment of what seemed to be Christ's greatest weakness into that of His greatest power through the Resurrection. Similarly, Christ's followers may appear weak to the world as they follow Christ's example of humility and love, but it's in that apparent weakness that God's power shines brightest.

We may sometimes be tempted to see ourselves as weak and failing by the world's standards, but what if our humble circumstances are the very place through which God's glory can shine the brightest?

Father, I trust that You are at work in and through my weakness to demonstrate Your goodness and greatness, not only to me but to others as well. In Jesus' name, amen.