

## Knowledge or Wisdom?

James Half brother of Jesus. Faith post resurrection. Urgency to action. Leading church in Jerusalem under severe persecution.

James 1:2–8 (ESV) 2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

We have spent 4 weeks looking at this one passage. Choosing Joy....realizing it is a test to reveal the depth of your faith...Persevering through the trial to build stamina and spiritual muscles. The promise of being Spiritually perfect and complete one day....Spiritually ripped because you have been in God's Gym....Lacking nothing.

If you remember, we spoke last time about the importance of letting trials play out until God is finished with them...not just when we are finished.

We know Satan will offer shortcuts that tempt us to take control rather than surrendering to God.

Immature Believers have not learned to persevere and trust God to work out all things in His timing and for His purposes.

There are great rewards for us if we can just persevere through trials.

One disciple that knows a few things about persevering through trials in the Apostle Peter....my favorite. Peter denied Jesus when Jesus needed him most. He made a vow to Jesus to never deny Him and then did it...not once but three times.

When Jesus died on the cross...Peter thought all hope of reconciliation was lost. He didn't know if he would ever get to tell Jesus how sorry he was that he had failed Him.

So when Peter talks about persevering through trials, I think his words drip power from his experiences in trials.

Look at what Peter writes in his first letter. You can tell from this that Peter, James and all the apostles were constantly focusing on persecution.

First Peter reminds all believers that there will be a day when we are perfect, complete and lacking nothing.

1 Peter 1:3–5 (ESV) 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Peter reminds all of us of where we are going and what is waiting for us. One of the keys to persevering is to remember that the trials here are necessary to get us home. But then look at what God tells us through Peter.

1 Peter 1:6 (ESV) 6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,

Notice how Peter's words resonate with those of James. They both learned this from Jesus and are both now guided by the Holy Spirit as they write.

You are grieved by various trials....they are real and they grieve us...we are impacted by what happens on earth...we are not in denial. Trials are and can be devastating to us emotionally. Peter tells us that even in trials that grieve us, we can rejoice because we know the treasure stored up for us when this life and these trials are over.

But Peter also reminds us that no matter what trial we are going through on earth, it is only for a little while.

1 Peter 1:7 (ESV) 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Also Peter like James reminds us that we are being tested in these trials. We are primarily tested Spiritually. Trials reveal the genuineness of our faith.

Peter tells us that our faith...tested, tried and proven genuine is more precious than anything we can store up for ourselves....in this case gold. Just as gold is tested, refined and validated by heat...by fire...so are we.

Trials test us by fire. The Holy Spirit often symbolized by fire...uses the trials in our lives to reveal to us and others the purity and quality of our faith.

Our faith, tested by worldly trials, proven genuine over time...will one day allow us to praise Jesus and give Him glory and honor when He is finally lifted up and every tongue confesses He is Lord.

Peter, like James tells us that we will have various trials, that they test our faith, and they we are refined by them....proven to have genuine faith. Without trials here on earth, we don't know the depth of our faith.

In order to purify gold, you must keep it in the heat until the impurities are revealed....If you don't stay in the fire long enough....you will think you have gold when all you have is fools gold. That which is tested is worthless.

Our faith is the same. Many believers never see God's faithfulness because they never stay in the fire long enough. Our faith is based on that which is not seen. God told us in Hebrews...

Hebrews 11:1 (ESV) 1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Faith is being convinced and having the conviction that God is present, active and in our midst. You don't discover that until you are so deep into a trial...into the fire...that you only have your faith left to hold you up. Trials allow us to test our very foundation. Peter reminds us in the next verse.

1 Peter 1:8 (ESV) 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Trials are truly gifts from God used to shake us up out of our deception so that our faith can be tested and refined each time. Right now our faith is based on what we have not seen, but rather have experienced. You only know that because of the trials in your life.

So, both Peter and James teach us that persevering through trials is what builds our faith and reveals our foundation. Remembering where we are going and who we truly trust allow us to find and choose Joy in the midst of trials.

So, how do we persevere in trials when everything in us makes us want to get out? To take the shortcut. Let me give you an example. Sadly probably the most common example of exiting a trial that I see as a Pastor.

Right now I know 5 Christian couples, both of whom profess belief in Christ, who are contemplating divorce and in 20 years of ministry have counseled it seems, dozens. **PHOTO 1** From a scripture perspective, divorce is never an option for Christian couples. They can separate but divorce is not an option. Why? Because they made a covenant together with God. But, regardless, divorce is Satan's ultimate shortcut.

As marriages are strained, and they all are at times, both spouses have a choice. They can persevere in the trial and allow God to grow their marriage and make it stronger..which by the way He promises and guarantees that He will do. ..or one or both can decide that it is easier or more convenient to just get a divorce and start over. Sadly Christian friends actually encourage this sin.

I am stunned at how often other believers in Christ encourage a follower of Jesus to get a divorce. If you are in the position of counseling someone who is a believer, divorce is never a scriptural option for them It is always a sin. It is incredibly bad spiritual advice and they will be held accountable for it at some point. The trial of a strained Christian marriage reveals very quickly the foundation of both believers. Some are rapidly exiting the trial and revealing that their faith has little foundation. They have given up on God's ability to restore or change their marriage or their spouse. They know what God requires of them and they don't care.

They think their problem is with their spouse but it is really with God. They either don't believe He can change their situation or that He will not change it fast enough. People don't run out of love, they run out of forgiveness and they run to selfishness.

They don't want to persevere and thus the world, and sadly some Christians, urge them to just get divorced. They don't realize that this trial is showing a huge problem in the very foundation of their faith. They will never see the incredible restorative power of God in their marriage because they lack the faith to persevere.

For some, a temporary separation allows each of them to get alone with God and work out the imperfections of their faith. **PHOTO 2** If God can turn each spouse to stop focusing on each other and each of them focus on Him, He will restore their marriage. Sometimes the emotions are so raw that a temporary separation is therapeutic. The goal however is not divorce or permanent separation but rather trusting that God will keep His promises and restore their marriage if they persevere. For believers, divorce is not giving up on their spouse, it is giving up on God. God promises that if we persevere through trials we will be complete and lacking nothing and that applies to our marriages as well. In Scripture God tells us that He hates divorce and it is within His will that strained marriages are restored and stronger.

Matthew 19:4–7 (ESV) 4 He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, 5 and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? 6 So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

I have never seen a Christian marriage fall apart when both spouses seek God's Will and persevere through the trial. Not only that, but their marriage and their relationship with God is stronger and better because of the trial.

The reason is that marriages include Jesus. Married couples who are truly surrendered and following Him will never divorce. You cannot be following Jesus and filing for divorce.

God always restores and purifies those marriages that remain in and are tested by the fire of trials. Married couples grow spiritual muscles through trials and together, if they persevere, they see the wonderful restorative power of God played out in their very lives. God will do what seems impossible if both spouses refuse to exit the process and trust Him enough to do so.

As an example, I chose divorce because it is so prevalent in our society and divorce rates incredibly are no different in Christian marriages than in other marriages. However, we could pick any number of trials as examples. Lacking the faith to trust God enough to overcome your addictions, to meet your financial needs, to give you the ability to forgive, too overcome lust, to overcome your anger, or to let go of your desire for revenge. We have an unlimited number of trials where God is asking us to just trust Him to remove these impurities.

The first step of that trust is obeying Him. Choosing to think like God instead of like fallen man. Or in other words, surrendering to the Holy Spirit.

God knew that this would be hard and totally against our sinful nature. So James in the very next verse shows us something that is life transforming in trials.

James has just said in the prior verse...that we must persevere in trials so that we can be complete and lacking nothing....what do you think he will say next? Perhaps he will say so persevere and be complete. But instead he says something that at first seems random.

James 1:5-8 (ESV) 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting

Why does James seem to transition to wisdom when he has been talking about persevering? Because anyone thinking about exiting a trial and not persevering lacks wisdom.

In fact a wise person would never fail to let a trial move to completion. Wisdom is what empowers you to persevere when your flesh says to flee.

But we must be very clear here....most don't understand what Wisdom is. It is not knowledge or intelligence. You can intellectually understand exactly why you are in the trial and exactly why you want out....but that will not keep you in the trial. Wisdom is something oh so much deeper.

Knowledge is information. Wisdom is application. Knowledge is comprehending facts. Wisdom is using those facts to manage life. Knowledge deals in the theoretical...Wisdom is that which is practical.

Wisdom is WWJD applied. Knowledge may help you think you understand the situation...but wisdom is understanding and surrendering to what God is doing in your situation.

The best advice for any situation in your life is not what do I know to do? Rather it is what is the wise thing to do? Not what is legal, now what is expected, not what can I get away with, not what do I want to do....but rather what is the wise thing to do.

Based on Whose you are.....where your home really is...the person you want to become and the place you want to go.....What is the wise thing to do?

You belong to Christ....You are a child of God...Your home is in heaven...You are being transformed into the likeness of Jesus....You will soon be going home to Him. Based on that truth...what is the wise thing to do?

Wisdom is knowing what Jesus would do and doing it.

But James here uses wisdom, not in a philosophical or mystical sense. With James wisdom is the right use of one's opportunities in holy living. It is living like Christ in accord with the will of God. It is not wasting the strain of trials but rather using them for the full benefit that God offers us.

James' Jewish audience recognized this as the understanding and practical skill that was necessary to live life to God's glory. It was not a wisdom of philosophical speculation, but the wisdom contained in the pure and peaceable absolutes of God's will revealed in His Word

Wisdom is knowing God's purposes in our trials and aligning our desire with His. It is accepting that our trials are something good for us and being willing to do whatever is necessary to learn what God is trying to teach us through them.

Wisdom includes not being surprised that trials come. But rather seeing them as part of God's will for His children.

1 Peter 4:12 (ESV) 12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

Is your marriage under strain? God is using that to grow your faith in Him. Are you in the midst of a health crisis or challenge? God is using that to grow your faith in Him. Are you struggling financially? God is using that to grow your faith in Him. Are you struggling with lust or addictions? God is using that to grow your faith in Him. Are you struggling trying to find it in you to forgive someone? God is using that to grow your faith in Him.

Peter reminds us that trials are not strange they are gifts. Trials are as part of our spiritual life as breathing is to our physical life. When trials come, they are not unusual, they are expected. They are necessary to grow spiritual muscles of faith.

What makes someone persevere in trials? Having God's perspective of what is happening and participating in the process spiritually...also known as Wisdom.

The first requirement for such belief is godly understanding. Especially when they are going through trials, believers need a special measure of understanding to help them through, and that need should drive them to ask of God to supply that understanding and wisdom. Strong, sound faith is not based on feelings but on knowledge and understanding of the promises of God's truth, which is spiritual wisdom. What is wisdom....it is living out this proverb.

Proverbs 3:5-8 (ESV) 5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. 7 Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. 8 It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.

James will later write about the difference between earthly knowledge and God's Spiritual wisdom.

James 3:13-18 (ESV) 13 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. 15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. 18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

God has an unlimited supply of wisdom for those who truly seek it....

Romans 11:33 (ESV) 33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

Why would God withhold the wisdom that we need if we truly need it? Well James tells us.

James 1:5-8 (ESV) for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

God's wisdom allow us to persevere through trials. Because we understand them to be moments of growth and teaching by God we desire to get every last drop of his Wisdom out of our trials.

When we seek to honor God and to obey Him in the midst of trials, our minds become single focused on growing our faith. Yet too often, we pray in the midst of trials not for God's wisdom and purpose but rather that God would stamp His approval on our knowledge and purpose. James teaches us that we must ask in faith....

We don't serve a God who randomly likes to see us struggle. If you are going through a trial God has allowed it and is using it. He is however not silent about why He has allowed it and what He wants to accomplish in you through it. God loves to share with us what He is doing in trials. He gives us wisdom as soon as we seek it...with one caveat.

If you don't believe God has a purpose in your trial...or if you believe your trial is all about you and not God...or if you approach God selfishly and arrogantly...you will never understand why a trial has occurred and it is likely the trial will continue until you are broken enough to ask Him with the right heart.

James says ask for wisdom but do so without doubting. This refers to having one's thinking divided within himself, not merely because of mental indecision but an inner moral conflict or distrust in God. It is praying to God in the midst of trials and saying essentially, tell me what you are doing and I will decide if I agree with you or not. James goes on to say that the person who doubts God's ability or willingness to provide this wisdom is like the billowing, restless sea, moving back and forth with its endless tides, never able to settle

Doubting God's wisdom is literally translated in the Greek as having one's mind or soul divided between God and the world. This man is a hypocrite, who occasionally believes in God but fails to trust Him when trials come, and thus receives nothing. He doesn't want God's wisdom or purposes unless they align with his own. Anytime you pray and your heart is not surrendered to God's will you will not receive what you are praying for. Because actually you are not asking God for anything that truly requires Him.

In the last verse that we are going to look at today, James seems to move from the very practical to the very ....well poetic. At first this verse seems kind of random. That is always an invitation in Scripture to dive deeper.

James 1:9–11 (ESV) 9 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, 10 and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. 11 For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

James moves from the concept of being Double Minded to the actual root cause. In the midst of trials there are two groups of people...Lowly brothers and those who consider themselves rich.

Brothers, aka believers, approach God submitted, surrendered, and stooped. Not deserving any more than we have already been given, but coming with a request from a heart seeking God's wisdom and ways.

Others approach God as rich. Having things figured out for themselves, Thinking they are in control, acting like they have God on their leash...Not really appreciating all that God has already done for them but demanding and expecting Him to do more. To give them what they have decided that they need. Demanding an explanation as to why God has burdened them with the inconvenience of a trial. In their hearts upset that God not only allowed this trial but hasn't fixed it for them. They have decided selfishly to exit the trial and want God to provide them with permission that He has already denied.

James says that trials are God's great equalizer. Jesus had taught this to him this way.

Matthew 5:45 (ESV) 45For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

When you find yourself in a trial... you are in good company. God ensures that trials fall onto everyone. Those who are spiritually surrendered will be exalted. Those who are spiritually poor but worldly rich will be destroyed in the fire of trials. That rich man will fade away in the midst of his pursuits. He is double minded.

God uses trials in all of our lives to keep us from being too focused on earthly things. God uses trials to get us to look up. To look above our circumstances and seek God. James says we literally fall into these things. That by going through trials we can identify with Christ and His sufferings.

Trials make all believers aware that they are all equally dependent upon God. Whether you are poor or rich, an infant in the faith or more mature, no matter what...we can all rejoice in trials knowing that God gives all of us the privilege of being redirected to Him.

Do you ever stop in the middle of your day, lay down on the sidewalk or street and gaze to the heaven with your thoughts completely on your need for God? Yeah me neither. And yet that is exactly how God



got my attention last week. One minute I am focused on all that is on my agenda, getting my tasks done, focused on me....and then I literally fell into a trial.

On minute conscious seemingly doing well...the next minute unconscious with people I don't now checking to see if I have a pulse. I woke up on my back, looking up to the heavens, acutely aware of my need for God. Every thing changed in a matter of seconds. I was so good at passing out that I did it twice. While waiting for the paramedics people kept asking me if I was ok because I was smiling.

Immediately upon regaining my thoughts, I said to myself "consider it joy when you fall in to various trials" I was smiling because I had literally done so. Fall and hit the deck twice. My first prayer was God you have my attention...grow me through this...you are in heaven doing as you please.

Funny how trials bring immediate clarity...if you allow them. I sat.. ok leaned awkwardly by my truck waiting for the paramedics. Just talking to God about our new plans for the day. I asked God to grow me through this and to use my new focus to share the gospel with others. While waiting for the paramedics, I began thinking of all that I am thankful for.

About nine hours later I returned to that same spot. Now upright and full of three liters of IV fluids. Grateful that I had heat exhaustion and dehydration that could be corrected. I made a list of all the ways God was watching out for me...passed out outside and not in my condo alone...in a place where paramedics, doctors and nurses could help me...Across from Julio the guy painting the condo across from where I passed out who was the only person around and actually glanced over to see it happen....immediately aware of the prayers and love of this church family and my family. Suddenly keenly interested in the function of my kidneys and the future need to avoid heat exhaustion.

A part of this trial which I was not expecting is that I hurt my back when I collapsed and hit it on the curb. So for 4 days, I sat on a couch alone barely able to move with nothing to do except talk to God and wait for this storm and the hurricane to hit Myrtle Beach. Hoping that afterwards I would feel good enough to drive home.

I had a great experience...I leaned about the verse....Be still and know that I am God. I waited for several days to let the hurricane move through. I thanked God for the pain in my back because it forced me to focus on Him. I didn't like it, but if my back had been fine, I probably would have tried to find a way to play golf the next day and may have damaged my kidneys and myself even more.

I have at times complained that I just wanted a few days to do nothing and to recharge spiritually. God answered that prayer for me...through a trial. He showed me the state of my faith in Him.

They told me in the ER that I had lost 60% of my renal function and was severely dehydrated with heat exhaustion or stroke. Only time with hydration would determine if this is a big problem or not. My first thought.....My God is in heaven and He does as He pleases...my second thought...not so spiritual... was all that and I still shot a 76.

I am still a work in progress but I am getting there. Fortunately all of my kidney function has returned....I am learning to persevere and appreciate the testing of my faith. ...trial by trial...

Sometimes the best way for God to turn your focus to him is to place you on your back looking up at the heavens unsure of your next breath.

You and I are going to experience trials. Not because God is unfair, but because He loves us too much to leave us imperfect. Now is the time in advance to decide how you are going to respond when the next trial comes.

The reason I was ready to respond to my most recent trial was that I had prayed about it that morning. I had asked God that when my next trial comes that I would recognize it and respond immediately in a manner that honors Him.

God has trials planned for your future. How you respond to them will determine the frequency and degree of discomfort that you experience. Why not decide right now to ask God to begin preparing your response? If you are married decide right now as a couple that divorce will never be a discussion. Prepare your self to ask the right questions when you fall into a trial.

Based on Whose you are....(You are a child of God and chose to always surrender to Jesus.).....where your home really is...(Your home is in heaven)....the person you want to become (Just like Christ)...The process of change ( all trials to completion) and the place you want to go....(Home to glory).... What is the wise thing to do?

And if you don't know....then ask God who gives wisdom to us freely if we ask without doubting. Let's Pray.