

IV. James in Biblical Perspective  
*The Gospel Life According to James*  
“The Indispensable, Essential and Initial Lesson for the  
Gospel Life – Father Knows Best”  
Book of James  
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We are in the book of James. First I'd like for you to look at I Corinthians which I think will give us a good setting for the three verses in James 1:5-7. I Corinthians 1:18-25 says [18] *For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. [19] For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."* [20] *Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? [21] For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.* (The wisdom of the Gospel is how you are saved but the world thinks that is foolishness.) [22] *For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, [23] but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, [24] but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. [25] For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

May God bless the reading of His Word. The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may it be preached for you.

Now let's look at James 1. I'll make a couple of comments and then we'll dive into James 1:5-7. These three verses in James set in motion for me in my ministry, almost thirty years ago, two practices that continue to this day. I'll show these to you in a moment. Secondly, notice the title. Today we are looking at something that is indispensable for the Gospel life. We are looking at something that is absolutely essential for the Gospel life. After you have made a commitment to Christ what is the most essential think to live the Gospel life? If the Gospel life is one of trials what is the first and primary lesson that you learn in the Gospel life.

So we will be looking at the indispensable, essential and initial lesson for the Gospel life and then I put the phrase father knows best. Do you remember the show called Father Knows Best? Every Thursday night back in the late 1950s my family would sit down and watch this show. It had five people in the family. Jim was the father. Margaret was the mother. The oldest daughter was Betty and she was very wise as the oldest child generally is. The middle child was Bud who was in constant trouble and the youngest was Kathy who was looking for trouble and she was called Kitten by her dad. It was a thirty minute program and during the first twenty minutes someone was usually getting in trouble which was usually Bud or Kathy. At that time Mr. and Mrs. Anderson slept in two different beds and that kind of looks a little unusual. Then you have to get by the fact that it didn't matter where Jim was or what he was doing he always had a coat and tie on. Mom no matter what she was doing had a full coordinated outfit with pearls and ear rings.

If you can get by all of that there would be the trials of the day and by the end of the day mom would sit dad aside and pump him up a little bit and then he would sit down and give a life lesson to either Bud or Kathy. So at the end a life lesson would come out and it was just a wonderful program that was pretty predictable but pretty wise or insightful. So now you're probably thinking why that introduction? I'll tell you in just a moment.

First, I want to look at James 1. This is the book of wisdom written by the brother of Jesus after his conversion which was after the resurrection. If Martin Luther had grasped this I believe he wouldn't have had such a problem with the book of James. The book of James is not laying out for you how you're saved in the Gospel. It's not laying out for you how you're motivated by the Gospel. That is why twenty one times he is saying "My beloved brothers..." He is saying if you have a profession of faith and he doesn't lay out how you were saved or the mechanism of your salvation. He lays out the Gospel life if you're saved that you're supposed to be living.

In other words, he is bringing to fruition what these Old Testament wisdom writers were saying like Ecclesiastes with Solomon, Lamentations with Jeremiah and the Psalms and Proverbs with David. All of these Old Testament books of wisdom were anticipating the wisdom of the Gospel and James is giving you an outline of Gospel wisdom that you lead for the Gospel life. That is why this is the theme of the book of James. The Gospel life is a life of persistent ministry and joyful maturation in a sin-cursed world informed by the God-sent gift of "wisdom from above." A broken world that brings chaos God is sovereignly, superintending to give you a platform for persistent ministry and a process for joyful maturation. The only way this is done is for you to be informed by God with God-sent wisdom from above to replace what you started with which is demonic and chaos, wisdom from below.

That means you have a Gospel foundation, a Gospel motivation and you want to live a Gospel life in a sin-cursed world that has persistent ministry and joyful maturation, then you need Gospel wisdom. That is what the whole book of James is about. It is about the Gospel wisdom to stay in ministry, stay on message, stay in the mission and to keep growing even in the midst of this adversity filled world.

We started with the very first Gospel maxim. James 1:2-4 is where we started in the last study and from that we get the first of forty eight commandments that James gives. After looking at the first one we boiled it down to a Gospel maxim. James 1:2-4 says [2] *Count it all joy, my brothers...* In other words you're not living your life on the waves of worldly happiness but the joy of the Lord. So [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.* You know that what Satan brought as a temptation God gave you the wisdom to flee and God is using adversities and dynamics in the sin-cursed world to teach you something. So then you embrace it and face it with joy because God is testing you.

God knows how to give a test. A good test does two things. It shows you what you know and it shows you what you need to know. God is sovereignly using all these things to test your faith. The immediate result is steadfastness and endurance. It is hypermeno – super standing. When the tests come you super stand and you also take ground. You then have its full effect. You not only have the immediate effect of

standing your ground and enduring but you have the full effect which is you're being perfected, completed and lacking in nothing.

So what was Gospel maxim number one? The multi-faceted and inevitable trials of life are designed and sent by the sovereign grace of God to both prove and improve your Gospel life in Christ. So when the trials come, God shows you what you know. He proves your faith. You super stand. Then He improves your faith. He is perfecting you. He is completing you so that you're lacking in nothing. Now let's go to the next passage where we get the indispensable, essential, initial lesson that is learned in the trials of the Gospel life.

James 1:5-7 says *[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, 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.*

Here we get an astonishing premise, an astonishing promise and an astonishing provision for the Gospel life and what we need to live it. You can't pick up at James 1:5 without going back to James 1:2-4. As one writer said, they are verbally stitched together. James 1:2-3a says *[2] Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, (Why?) [3] for you know... there is something you know.* The trial comes and you put it through the filter of what you know, knowing that the testing of your faith, meaning God has a purpose. The immediate purpose is steadfastness, to prove what you know. The ultimate purpose is to complete and perfect you so that you're lacking in nothing.

Now let's look at the very next verse in James 1:5 which says "If any of you lacks wisdom..." In other words, when the trial comes and you put it through the filter of what you know, the first thing you find out is that you don't know enough. You are lacking in wisdom. That is the first thing you realize. Here is reality and I don't have enough wisdom. You have to go counter culture right now. You live in a secular world and here is what the world says; here is reality so we just need another technological toy or another pill or another shot or another technological advancement.

Our forbearers and God is telling us, while there is a place for therapy, technology and all of those things that come from God's gracious kindness and providence, what you need when you deal with the realities of life in a sin-cursed world is wisdom. That is the essential, indispensable need that you have when you deal with those realities in life. Here is a death, my disappointments, dealing with no children, dealing with no spouse, dealing with disease, not married, whatever it is that is bringing the challenge of life the first thing I need is wisdom from above. If I don't get that I'll use the wisdom from below. Wisdom from above is my essential need.

So here is the astonishing premise that he has made to us. In order for the trials of life to achieve their God designed immediate (super stand) and ultimate purpose (grow, be completed and perfected lacking in nothing) you must have Gospel wisdom from above. When the trial comes you put it through the filter of what you know and then you realize I don't know enough. I need wisdom from above.

Here is the astonishing promise. If that is true then what I have to tell you next is great news. If my essential need to live the Gospel life in a sin-cursed world is to stand firm, take ground, and grow which is Gospel wisdom for the Gospel life, then now I have

an astonishing promise from this text and this is it. James tells you the Lord who is wisdom gives wisdom. Here are four things this entails. One is the Lord gives wisdom. It's not earned or merited but given. It was merited but you don't merit it. Jesus purchased the wisdom given to you when He redeemed you at the cross. So now God gives you wisdom.

Secondly, God gives wisdom generously, gloriously, and lavishly. He doesn't just measure it out a little bit. Now everyone has their own measure of wisdom that God gives but it's a lavish gift, a generous gift that He gives.

Thirdly, the Lord gives wisdom without reproach. He doesn't reproach you for your lack of wisdom. He welcomes you when you come lacking wisdom and He gives it generously.

Fourthly, He gives wisdom without partiality. It doesn't matter who you are, if you belong to Him, He gives you wisdom. God is so gracious in this for He not only gives generously in this without reproach to His people but He also has an overflow to a people who are not His people. We call that common grace. Benjamin Franklin came up with some good stuff and that was through God's common grace giving him some insights that are wise. So God gives wisdom beyond His people but to His people He has promised to give it to all of them without partiality. All of them get it and they all get it generously.

How do you get it? Here is the provision. You gain wisdom from the Lord who gives generously without reproach and without partiality, through single-minded, believing prayer. Single-minded is to let him ask and ask in faith, believing prayer. You are not to be double-minded but single-minded. Double-minded means to be looking in two directions. So we need to be single-minded. "Lord, I need Your wisdom." It is not Your wisdom plus the world's wisdom. That doesn't mean some of Your wisdom hasn't been overflowed to the world that I can draw from but I need Your wisdom that comes through common grace or that comes through redeeming grace. I need Your wisdom and I need to face in one direction. I need to face toward You and not toward the world or to myself. I need to have a God-centered view of life.

How do you know if you're double-minded? You are always vacillating. Oh Lord, can I have some wisdom and then you decide to rely on yourself. Lord, I need wisdom to live for you but then you actually start living for yourself. That is a life of chaos and instability. He says 'no' for you need to come single-minded. You need to come with a simple childlike trust and faith. It's not childish faith but a childlike simple faith. As I go through the trials of life my Father knows best. We are to have a single-minded, simple trust in Him that He will generously, because of what Christ has merited, graciously without reproach and partiality, will pour forth grace in all of His people who ask Him.

When someone has wisdom from above, how is it branded? What are the marks of it? Here are the five marks of Divine wisdom from above. These are not the effects of Divine wisdom. I will give the effects of Divine wisdom in eight more studies when we get to John 3, but from this text I want to give you the marks of Divine wisdom. Four of the marks come from the text and one of them is assumed in the text.

The one that is assumed in the text is the first one and that is the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. When James says 'my brothers,' he is assuming that you have developed to some degree the fear of the Lord that you live in awe and respect of

the Lord your God. In other words, why is that crucial for the beginning of wisdom? You and I need to know who is in charge because we start off thinking that we're in charge. Therefore when the adversity of life comes up I have the answer and if it's not me then someone else like me has the answer. We don't need the Lord's answer to this for we need someone else. So the fear of the Lord says the Lord is in charge. I am not in charge for the Lord is the focus.

This is why it is on my heart that you do not turn your back on theology – the knowledge of God. You need a big God because if you get a big God you get a smaller you. When you get a smaller you, now you're getting things in perspective. We need a big God, transcendent and glorious. What about the love of God? When you get this big God in place you find out He loves you. This God loves me! This God that is awesome, glorious, transcendent loves me. He gave His Son for me. He indwells me. He is the wonder of wonders, but the fear of the Lord gets the perspective established.

So there is one practice that I've drawn from this text. Every sermon series I have always preached I have always put under the title – going to God's Word so that we know from the Word of God, the God of the Word and get life in perspective. It is a God-centered view of life, in all of its glory and majesty. Who is in charge? Whose wisdom do I need? Who do I trust? My trust is in the Lord. Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Let try and illustrate it this way. A couple of months ago I was diagnosed with prostate cancer and you all have been very patient with me going through this process. I went through a search of who am I going to go talk to? Some told me to go to this doctor and one said to me "Go to this doctor for he'll save your life." I said "No he won't. He may in God's providence be used to prolong my life but even with all the technology we have today the death rate is still the same." One person, one death is the way it works. You may be living longer but it's still one person, one death. That person is not going to save my life. My life is saved by only One and that's Jesus Christ. He is my Savior and my Lord. There are those who can prolong my life until the Lord calls me home and I have finished what the Lord has called me to do and I finish the race. It is not technology or medicine or science that is my hope. I'm grateful for them because I get to know more about this God as He reveals Himself in general revelation but my hope is in the Lord and it's His wisdom that I want.

The second mark is the realization of our lack of wisdom. I don't have enough wisdom. I'm lacking in wisdom. The very first blessings of the trials of life, after you filter it through your wisdom, is you just found out you don't have enough. I need more. I want to be lacking in nothing and that means I know I'm lacking wisdom. The greatest evidence of somebody that is wise is that they know they're a fool. I'm like a child. I don't know how to go out or come in. I'm saved and praise the Lord. I have some knowledge but I don't have enough.

That brings me to the second practice I have learned from this text to do in my life and that is every time I meet with someone in my office we start with prayer for wisdom. It's not just a ritual with me. It's a need. Whatever issue it is that you have brought I do not have enough wisdom. I need wisdom. You need wisdom. We need wisdom from above to deal with it. I am lacking wisdom. I need wisdom otherwise I don't know how to view the trials of life.

Let me give you an illustration here. A couple of men in this congregation decided that I needed to become a man which meant that they wanted me to go on a hunting and fishing trip. So that meant I needed to go in the outback country in Alaska in the wilderness and they picked this place called Rocky's Place. There is nothing there. There are no electrical power lines or gas lines. They sent me a list of things that I needed to bring. The more I read what I needed to bring the more I realized I didn't need to go on this trip. Roughing it for me is the Hampton Inn. I land in a three-seater plane in the middle of a field and I'm thanking the Lord I'm getting off this plane. My son is with me. I was pointed to this little bitty cabin and I walk in. The first thing I see was a roughhewn bed with something on it that looked like a mattress. I thought 'praise the Lord.' Then I saw a toilet and thought 'praise the Lord!' Then I saw a shower that was only two by two for you had to make appointments with parts of your body to get a shower in there but I was just rejoicing about that.

If I had been with Cindy and that was our honeymoon night I don't think I would have been looking at it the same way. You see we go through life thinking we're entitled to a trouble-free life, don't we? God's wisdom says 'no.' Who is the one person entitled to a trouble-free life? It was Jesus. Did He have one? Why would I think I'm entitled to a trouble-free life? I need wisdom and I need wisdom to know that my God is sovereign. What the world may mean as opposition to me God is superintending to grow me. I need wisdom to know why it's there. I need wisdom to know what He is doing with me as He is putting me through it, as He is growing me in it. I am constantly confronted with the fact that I need wisdom.

Let me go to the world of science again. They have enough sense and I have lived long enough that in my elementary years when we took science toward the end of grade school they taught me the universe is infinite. Then I got to junior high and they said "we made a mistake for the universe is finite." Then I got to college and they said "we made another mistake for the universe is finite but infinitely expanding" and that's why I wouldn't encourage you to run out to get the latest science book to determine what you believe in the book of Genesis. Those scientists kept changing their position. Why? It is because they got more data. Have you ever heard a scientist say "I discovered the universe was infinite and now it's finite so I'm just going to quit." No, because they studied. When you run up against the obstacles of life in a sin-cursed world you don't quit. You go back to the Lord and say "I need wisdom! I need understanding! I need knowledge!" I need to know with knowledge and understanding how to translate that into my life for that is wisdom.

The third mark is a desire and pursuit of wisdom from above. That's why trials are inevitable and multi-faceted. God keeps ringing the school bell for us. Why should my life be one of pursuit of wisdom? It is because I'm always being perfected, always lacking, I need to grow in my wisdom. We treat the trials of life as if they are interruptions in our life. James is telling you that the trials of life are not interruptions. It is life. The Gospel life is multi-faceted, multiple trials and you need wisdom from above.

The fourth mark is Gospel wisdom brings stability in a Gospel life. Gospel wisdom brings single-mindedness in life so that you then have stability, you stand firm and you grow. You're in a marathon and God's building your endurance. God is completing you and perfecting you. So as you're getting wisdom you're stabilized. You're super standing and you're growing in your life and in your ministry. I not only

need wisdom in the trials of life that are adversity so what do I do if I believe God has called me to be married but I'm not married. How do I respond to that? How do I respond to the fact that we would like to have children? How do I respond to disease or sickness?

I want to flip this for you. I not only need to know how to respond with wisdom when I'm childless but I need to have wisdom when I have children. I not only need wisdom as a single person but I need wisdom when I am married. I not only need wisdom in the day of death but I need wisdom in the day of life. I not only need wisdom in the day of poverty but I need wisdom in the day of riches. I need wisdom in the day of adversity and in the day of prosperity. I don't want the blessings that have come to me to become idols in my life. I need wisdom to know how to handle them. I am on a constant need of wisdom in my life because the trials of life are multi-faceted and they are coming from all kinds of directions. When you come to Christ by faith you get a new heart, a new record, you're on a new life, a new family, a new home but let me tell you what you didn't get. You didn't get a new mind but you did get God's grace so that you can begin to renew your mind. Romans 12:2 says [2] *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.* You are transformed with the wisdom of God to know how to deal with the issues of life.

The fifth mark is a conviction that the best is yet to come and will be better than it was. I will develop this more in the next study but the wise man knows that the best is yet to come. That is the problem with the secular world. The word secular comes from a Latin word meaning now and it's the notion that life is now. Our forbearers in the Bible tell us that your best life is not now. Your best life is coming. The best is yet to come and it will be better than it was. One reason we have a problem with adversity and suffering is because we know this isn't normal. We weren't made for this. We know intuitively as well as Biblically there was a thing called the garden that was good. And sin has brought all of this chaos and brokenness. We know that God is saving us in the midst of it and using it to grow us. He is taking us to what is to come and it will be better than what was.

How will this be better? There will be no pain, no sorrow, no sin, no tears, for none of that is going to be there. It will be better than it was because you won't even be able to sin then for you will be like Him and we will be brought to that glorious perfection. We know the garden. Now we're in the wilderness of a sin-cursed world and God is taking us to glory that recaptures the garden, but takes it to another level that is glorious. That is what we're headed to. We are so secular and that's why some of us have an unstable, chaotic life for we're living for now and now never satisfies so we need the next new thing. Therefore we'll do anything to get the next new thing to make now satisfying. I cannot tell you the number of people who make money off of that, because of our discontent and our misplaced notion that now is everything, instead of Christ is everything and He is taking me through now to then and the best is yet to come.

Here is my takeaway. Joyfully facing the trials of life sent by our sovereign God to prove and improve our Gospel life requires wisdom from God and also provides the opportunity to receive wisdom from God. When you go through the trials of life so that you become better and not bitter you have to have wisdom. The very thing that you need that you have, wisdom that brings you through it, you find out that what you're going

through is adding to your wisdom. You are actually growing in wisdom. You are finding out that Christ is all in all. So you are ready as the Lord takes you through to the next level.

I don't have dying grace now but I will then and God has given me the grace for now to let me know that in the wisdom for now, how to deal with the issues of the day, knowing that when those things come, I'll have wisdom for that, because the God who gave generously there will give generously then. I know because of what He is doing what He will develop and what I'll have at that moment. So I will be able to say with the Apostle Paul in II Timothy 1:12 [12] *which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.* Philippians 1:29 says [29] *For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.* Where is my wisdom O Lord? Here is my conclusion. Lord, be Thou my vision O Lord of my life.

If you want to have a cross bearing life of growing in grace then you need to have a Christ-centered, cross shaped mind. See your Savior, rejected and suffering, family and friends, see your Savior driven to the ground until His capillaries burst suffering in the garden. See Him going to the cross, suffering at the cross. He suffered, stood His ground and took captive my heart and soul. Now O Lord, let me bear the cross You have given me and stand my ground that people might see that Savior in me and be drawn to Him. Lord, give me wisdom for it comes from You through Your Word. I want to be in the pursuit of wisdom in this world and in this life. Lord, my wisdom because You're my life. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You Father, for its glorious depth and majesty. Please Father, continue to grow us in the trials of life establishing with endurance what we know and what we believe and growing us in what we're lacking so that people will see Your people persistent in ministry, joyfully maturing, with a Christ-centered, cross shaped mind that leads to a cross bearing life of growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ, I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.