

I. Building a Life of Integrity

A) Who is James?

The truth is, there are several men named James in the New Testament; and ‘James’ is just the Anglicized version of ‘Yaakov’ or ‘Jacob,’ his Hebrew name.

Two Options:

- i) **James the Apostle:** The son of Zebedee, who was called along with his brother John from their fishing business.

This is James from the ‘Peter, James and John’ – the three closest friends of Jesus. James was killed, within a decade of Jesus’ death and resurrection, by Herod (see Acts Chapter 12). If this is the James who writes the letter, it is very early, since he died in A.D. 44.

- ii) **James, the Half-Brother of Jesus:** He is often called ‘James the Just’ – largely because of how he emphasizes living with justice toward the poor in the letter we are looking at. This James, we hear from what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:7, was met by Jesus after His resurrection and became a Christian at that point. He is known to be the leader of the Jerusalem Church, and we hear how he gives clear leadership in Acts 15. This James was killed for his faith in A.D. 62.

In either case, the letter of James is very early and addressed mostly to Jewish Christians who have been pushed out of Jerusalem because of persecution, and they are facing the challenge of learning to live according to the teachings of Jesus, while being mistreated - and probably highly tempted to ‘hit back.’ So, James is writing to bring them – and us – back to the way of Jesus; and to borrow the cliché, not just to ‘talking the talk’ but ‘walking the walk.’

B) The Main Theme of James is summed up well in the opening lines:

*“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be **mature** [teleios, (TEH-lee-os)] and **complete, not lacking anything.**”* [Emphasis Added] – James 1:2-4

This word ‘*teleios*’ which can be translated as ‘perfect’ in certain contexts, is repeated seven (7) times in the book of James.

God intends to make us ‘*teleios*.’ In the biblical languages [Hebrew, *tamim* (Tah-meem), and Greek, *teleios*] – the word refers to ‘wholeness,’ to be mature, complete and full of integrity.

Teleios is about, ‘being what you were made for.’

“...[*Teleios*]...means wholeness. It means living a completely integrated life where your actions are always consistent with the values and beliefs that you’ve received from Jesus. Jacob knows that most of us actually live as fractured people, with big inconsistencies in our character. We are all more compromised than we want to admit. However, God is on a mission to restore fractured people. To make them ‘whole,’ and it begins with wisdom: the ability to see my hardships through a new perspective”
(Mackie, 2025)¹

This theme borrows from the conclusion of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount:

²⁴ “*Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.*” – Matthew 7:24-29

James 1:22 says, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”

“There is nothing in the Letter of James that does not conform to the vision, teaching, and mission of Jesus.” – P.J. Hartin²

II. Pure Joy

“*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds...*” – James 1:2-4

“To respond to difficulties with joy seems absurd. James knows this and so in verse 3 he offers his answer to our natural question: Why should we rejoice in the face of trials?”
– David P. Nystrom³

In the Hebrew Scriptures, God is depicted like a goldsmith who is working to remove all that doesn’t belong in his beloved people. Trials are like that smelting fire, which removes the dross, the impurities – those parts of our lives that are not yet reflective of God’s own character (see Zechariah 13:9; Malachi 3:2-3; 1 Peter 1:6-7).

¹ Mackie, Tim. (2025). *The Book of James*. BibleProject [Video]. <https://bibleproject.com/videos/james/>

² Hartin, P.J. Multiple References

³ Nystrom, David P. (01 Jan 1997) *NIV Application Commentary: James*. Zondervan

James is echoing the words of Jesus in the opening of His Sermon on the Mount:

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” – Matthew 5:11-12.

‘Rejoice and be glad,’ because the King of Heaven notices. The King of Heaven will ‘vindicate’ innocent suffering. He will exalt those who humbly endure.

Note: it was through suffering, in His earthly life, that Jesus himself was brought to maturity.

“Son though he [Jesus] was, he learned obedience through what he suffered and, once made perfect [telios, ‘complete’, ‘mature’ same word as in our text], he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.” – Hebrews 5:8-9

“[S]uffering is not a gift simply because it ‘builds character’ (as our culture might say), but because suffering and death (physically, spiritually, emotionally) is the Christ-appointed path to vindication, maturity, and a new empowered life...And Christians are called to be co-rulers with Christ: ‘if we remain steadfast (*upomenomen*), we will also reign with him’ (2 Tim 2:12)”
(Meyers, 2022)⁴.

The varied types of trials we face *can* become the site of God’s maturing work in our lives. But, as James points out, that’s not automatic. There is a kind of wisdom required to perceive how God intends to form us. “*Let perseverance finish its work,*” he says in James 1:4.

We do have a choice about what to do with the pressure. A choice about how we will respond.

Are you are inviting God to work in us and through the trials?

“When a Christian is tested it shows something real is happening....[Y]ou won’t be tested unless were doing something serious. Mechanics don’t test scrap metal; they test cars that are going to face tough conditions...Those who follow Jesus the Messiah are not simply supposed to survive. They are supposed to count, to make a difference in the world, whether through the quiet daily witness of a faithful and gentle life or the chance, given to some, to speak and act in a way which reveals the gospel to many others. For all of that, we need to become strong, to face up to the challenge” (Wright, 2012).⁵

⁴ Meyers, James. (28 March 2022). *Wisdom for Dissidents: The Epistle of James Through New Eyes*. Athanasius Press ISBN-13 978-1735169095

⁵ Wright, N.T. (2012). *James: N.T. Wright for Everyone*, Part of the Series NT Wright for Everyone Bible Study Guides. IVP Connect. ISBN-13: 9780830821969

III. Ask for Wisdom

Why pure joy? Because of what God will make us through it. Because of how God will make our life count because of it.

But how do we come to the place of seeing the world this way?

“⁵ 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. ⁶ But 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. ⁷ That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. ⁸ Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.” – James 1:5-8

A) Wisdom

The whole book of James is about what this ‘wisdom’ from God looks like.

*“¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them **show it** by their **good life**, by deeds **done** in the **humility** that comes from wisdom.”* – James 3:13

Wisdom is not about smart answers to tough questions. Wisdom is something you can see. It’s *shown*; and it’s obviously *good*, because it’s *humble* in nature.

*“¹⁴ But if you harbor **bitter envy** and **selfish ambition** in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵ Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find **disorder** and every **evil practice**.”* – James 3:14-15

Wisdom is not ‘self-evident’ to everyone.

*¹⁷ But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all **pure**; then **peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere**. ¹⁸ **Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.**”* – James 3:17-18

Asking for wisdom is primarily about letting God form you, in your trials, along this path of life.

B) Doubt and Double-Mindedness

What sort of “doubting”?

i) *Doubt As Duplicity*

What ‘doubt’ means here is not that we never have any intellectual questions, or that we will never feel the tension we find all through the Psalms, the honest, “Where are you God?”

To ‘believe’ and ‘not doubt’ for James is not simply an intellectual exercise as we often think about it. It’s about ‘where is your trust?’ It’s about giving ‘feet’ to our values and beliefs. Faith is something you *do*, not just what you think, or what you say you believe.

For James, the doubt and double mindedness is not loving God with all my heart, soul, and strength – as the repeated ancient Jewish prayer, the *Shema* states (Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37-40). It’s a divided love, and no real desire to change. No sense of ‘follow through’ that would transform us.

Take Home: To pray for wisdom – and not doubt – is to ask with genuine desire for that wisdom. It’s a genuine desire to take it into yourself, and let God transform your vision, transform you.

ii) *Doubting the Goodness of God*

There is a real temptation to doubt the goodness of God, and that often leads us to say: ‘I need to take things into my own hands. I’ll deal with this in my own way – thank you very much.’

The problem is that this kind of doubting and unbelief leads to a temptation to do things ‘my way,’ not God’s. It leads us to say, ‘I need to take things into my own hands. I’ll deal with this in my own way – thank you very much.’

That’s why James uses the language of being “...tossed like a wave...” When the winds come – and they always do – unless we are aimed at ‘perseverance,’ at seeking God’s wisdom – we remain that ‘fractured’, double minded sort of person - tossed about - moved here and there.

God has much better for you. The question is: Will you take it into yourself? Even your suffering can become a gift for your growth.

IV. The Goodness of God in Jesus

“Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.” – James 1:16-18

Why consider it ‘pure joy’ when we face the many and varied trials? Because our Father is consistent and consistently good.

In Jesus, this God, the True God ‘gives us birth’ precisely by coming for us - to be with us - to suffer for us. That’s the God we can trust, even with our pain, to make us whole. Will you?

Will you, ‘Consider it pure joy, whenever you face trials of many kinds?’ And to find that, will you ‘ask God’ for wisdom, because He’s the God who gives generously, without begrudging – without finding fault?

Life Group Discussion and Reflection

Dig In

1. **Read James 1:1-4.** In the message, we saw how vv.2-4 provide the central theme of James. How would you restate this in your own words?
2. What do you find encouraging or challenging about James’ words here? Why?
3. Have you had an experience of joy in trial that you would like to share with the group?
4. What was the “joy” for you in it?
5. What reason does James give us for turning in prayer and trust to God (v.5)?
6. Look again what James warns against in **vv.6-8**. As N.T. Wright says, the challenge of faith is the challenge to “not be a wave” – something that is pushed here and there by every wind of trial or difficult that comes our way.

In the message we saw that ‘doubt’ and ‘doublemindedness’ were related. These are not about moments of intellectual uncertainty, but about being ‘divided’ in our intentions. A ‘duplicity’ or fracture between what we say and what we really want.

God loves to answer our sincere prayer for wisdom, a wisdom that will help us face trials with “pure joy” as we let God strengthen us to persevere and grow us in maturity.

- a. As we move toward prayer, where do you need to ask God for his kind of wisdom?
- b. Look again at how James frames the ‘wisdom from heaven’ in **James 3:13-18**. How might this description of wisdom help inform what we are asking God for in prayers that help us in our trials?

Pray

Take time to thank God for being generous – for not being a ‘faultfinder’ – but merciful and kind. Take what was shared by your group and ask God together for his wisdom.