

The Crucible, and the Crown, of Life

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] And we're now going to turn to our Bible reading for this morning. Willie Phillip, our senior minister, is preaching to us this morning from James. We're going to be spending the term in this letter.

So do you open up your Bibles to James chapter 1. We do have visitor's Bibles around the place. Do grab one. If you're not sure where they are, Duncan is on hand. He'll love to bring one to you if you wave your hand.

And do turn up to James chapter 1. If you're using a visitor's Bible, it's page 1011. And we're going to read the first 12 verses. James 1, verse 1.

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the 12 tribes in the dispersion. Greetings. Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.

For you knew that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

[1 : 11] If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. 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. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord. He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation and the rich in his humiliation. Because like a flower of the grass, he will pass away. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass. His flower falls, his beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits. Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial.

For when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life. Which God has promised to those who love him.

[2 : 24] Well, amen. This is God's word. And we'll return to it shortly. The letter of James. Well, do turn with me, if you would, to the letter of James.

And we're looking particularly this morning at the first 12 verses of chapter 1. Or really, verses 2 to 12. Last week, we began a new study of James.

And we saw that it is a tough letter for Christians who are in real danger of wandering away from the truth. And therefore, wandering away from the only path to ultimate life.

And verse 1, as you see, tells us that James' readers are dispersed. They're scattered in a world which is naturally hostile.

But the real problem that he's writing about is not so much that the church is in the world, but the world has got far too much into the church.

[3 : 23] In other words, it's the thinking of the world. In other words, it's the thinking of the world and it's the ways of the world which are really shaping Christ's people far more, in fact, than the word of God.

The truly royal law of their glorious Lord, as he calls it in chapter 2, verse 8. The law that he says alone will bring liberty and bring life.

But that is catastrophic because, as James says plainly later on, friendship with the world is enmity with God. Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world, says James, makes himself an enemy of God.

You cannot serve two masters, said Jesus. You'll be devoted to the one and you'll despise the other. And the real danger, you see, for these churches was that under a veneer of Christianity, in fact, they were becoming enemies of the God whom they professed.

And remember, this is just a little more than a decade after the resurrection. And that astonishes us. And yet, you see, the Spirit of God has preserved this letter in our scriptures for the church of Jesus Christ throughout the ages until he returns for a reason.

[4 : 46] So could it possibly be relevant to us? Well, let me ask, how much of our thinking about our lives is shaped entirely by the word of God?

And how much is shaped actually by the ways and the words of this world? How many hours this week have you spent being shaped in your thinking by listening to, by pondering, by applying the word of God?

And how much have you been listening to and watching social media, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and all the rest? Or advertising in all its multifarious forms?

Or the mainstream media, whether it's TV and radio, or whether it's the tabloids, or whether for you it's the FT and the Economist, which is just tabloids for people who think they're clever? All of which, all of which, are nothing more and nothing less than powerful propaganda from a world that is at enmity with God.

And that's why one of the most consistent warnings from our Lord Jesus and his apostles is, Do not be deceived. Do not be led astray. Don't be deceived, my beloved brother, says James here in chapter 1, verse 16, and repeatedly.

[6 : 04] And you see, friends, I think we deceive ourselves if we don't think that we need these very real warnings today. Dangerous wandering is a perennial danger for Christians, for whole churches.

And so we still need to hear and heed James' letter, which was written, to turn believers back from divided loyalties to a wholehearted commitment to Christ, and to urge his readers to be doing the same for one another, so as to save their souls from death, as he puts it in the very last verse of the letter.

The stakes really are that high, says James. And James administers some pretty tough medicine, that's for sure. And in order to convince his readers that it's actually needed, he exposes the real pathology that gives rise to the many symptoms that are actually evident in the church.

They're manifesting themselves in all kinds of relational problems between people. It's like, you know, those horrific pictures that are there now on every single packet of cigarettes, if you see them.

Horrible pictures of diseased lungs, diseased hearts, and things like that. And the message is very clear, isn't it? Don't buy me, and certainly don't smoke me. By the way, isn't it interesting how we all accept that and probably approve of that?

[7 : 28] And yet many, many people, including even Christians, get very angry, don't they, when somebody in the street displays not an unhealthy, but a perfectly healthy human fetus little baby in the womb to educate people about what abortion really is, which is the killing willfully of human beings, healthy human beings.

That's just one example, isn't it, of how the world's thinking so dominates even the thinking of many Christians. Well, James doesn't sugarcoat his medicine.

He gets very real, and it's very challenging. But he is a skilled physician of souls, and his aim is to heal. It's not to harm. It's not to bring unnecessary hurt.

And so his focus at first is not on the hard aspects of the treatments, although that will come, but his focus at first is to give hope. It's to encourage his readers and us.

That although the Christian life will be hard, there will be many trials of all kinds. That is inevitable. He wants to remind us that God's promised reward for faith believers is certain.

[8 : 43] And he tells us that more than this, he says all kinds of trials are necessary because it is in the crucible of our trials that the crown of our triumph is being forged.

It's through the crucible of all life circumstances that the crowning of our character will one day result in praise and honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, to borrow Peter's phrase.

So look at verse 12. Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him.

Now, Jesus is writing to believers who have been dispersed from the mother church in Jerusalem following the persecutions that erupted. You read about in Acts 8 and so on. And so it's natural that he begins with trials of various kinds that inevitably they're facing.

Notice verse 2. He says, when, not if, you face trials. And there will be various. There will be many different kinds. Not just act of persecution, but every other situation in life.

[9 : 58] Including them, no doubt, being homeless, being poor, working in exploited situations. No doubt that was very real in their situation. But also other things, various things. Sickness, bereavement.

Every other trial common to humanity. Because Christians are not immune, are they? To all the things that ordinary human beings face. Christians die in wars.

Christians become refugees in wars. Just like others do. That's happening today in Ukraine. It's happening in Gaza. It's happening in Syria. Terribly to Christians. You don't see that on your television. Christians also get called up to fight in wars.

And so do their children. None of us here are old enough to remember that here, aren't we? But if our warmongering leaders get their way, friends, that may be something that we all have to face. Think about that. Especially if you've got children.

But all manner of trials will face us in life. In all kinds of contrasting situations.

[10 : 59] Including wealth. As well as poverty. We'll get to that in verse 10. And sometimes that can be a far more dangerous trial for Christians. But for Christians, in God's hands, all such trials bring spiritual opportunity.

For those who love God, as James says in verse 12, all manner of trials are the road of blessing, he says. The road to glory, to the crown of life.

It's through the crucible of trial that we shall win and wear the crown of triumph. And that is God's purpose.

But it is not automatic. Trials can lead to maturity, to beauty. That renders faith resplendent.

But trials can also lead to misery, to bitterness. Trials can leave faith ruined. Trials can make us far better Christians.

[12 : 08] But they can also turn people into bitter Christians. And there are a few things so corrosive to a church's health. And embittered Christians. People who are soured.

They're angry because life hasn't given them what they want. Or the church hasn't treated them as they want. Which really means in the end that God hasn't been to them what they want.

Trials can bring out the worst in a church. And in Christians. And that is actually the situation that James is writing into. It all depends on the way we consider these various kind of trials.

If you have an NIV, that's how it translates that first word. In verse 2. What we count them as. Whether we count them as something to be deeply resented. Or something to be deeply rejoiced in. Verse 2. Whether we count it all joy. Pure joy. Because. Verse 3. Of what we know. Of what we know about God and his ways and his gospel promises. Now be clear what James is not saying here.

[13 : 16] He's not saying terrible trials in themselves are all joyful things. He's not saying bad things are really good things. No. Not is he saying either that we should feel happy amidst all sorts of sad things.

He's not saying let's pretend you know we should clap when we get a diagnosis of cancer. We should be dancing at funerals. Not at all. And nor is he even saying look grit your teeth.

This is the pain. But when it's all over there'll be gain. No. What he is saying is this. If you change the way that you think. You consider your trials.

In the light of what God has told you. Of what you know of the revelation of gospel truth. Then. Then you will see things very differently.

You'll see with the wisdom from above. Not just with earthly and unspiritual perception. The things that are unnatural to us. You'll see.

[14 : 12] That the crucible of trial. Is the necessary road. For the crown of triumph. And you'll see that all this trial. Is actually doing something. Wonderful for us.

In God's hands. And so. That means that when all manner of trials. Crowd into our lives. We shall not. As J.B. Phillips translates it. We shall not resent them as intruders.

But rather welcome them. As friends. And that's what James means. When his prescription. For true spiritual health. Is to consider it pure joy.

When you face trials. Of many kinds. As the NIV puts it there. Joy. Joy is defined by one scholar. As a settled contentment. In every situation.

Or an unnatural reaction. Of deep. Steady. And unadulterated. And thankful trust. In God. God. It's the thankful rejoicing.

[15:11] That Paul speaks about. To the Philippians. Where he says. That he's learned the secret. Of facing all manner of circumstances. Whether it's plenty. Or hunger. Whether it's abundance. Or need. And to do it all.

Through God. Who strengthens him. Content. To trust God. In every circumstance. Knowing that he is. Pressing on. Towards the great goal.

Of the glory to come. So how can we see. The joy. Of that. In all manner. Of. Of such trials. Well James says. We will not see it. Through mere earthly wisdom. Only. Only if we see it. From God's perspective. In the light of his wisdom. From above. And in the light of his. Promised glory to come. So right at the start. Of his letter here. He urges his people. To listen up. To God's word. And to keep looking up.

[16:07] For God's grace. And to keep looking forward. To God's glory. So first of all. Look at verses two to four. Where James. Is saying. Listen up. Listen up. With perspective.

Because there is a way. To greet trials as friends. And not as enemies. Because we know. He says. We know. That these trials. Will accomplish.

Wonderful things. In people of true faith. We know. Verse three. Well. We know that trials. Accomplish three things. First. You see. The proving. Of our faith. The testing of our faith. He says. Real faith. Stands the test. Just as real gold. Is shown to be real. And not fake. Through the refiner's fire. Fire tests.

And proves it true. As it does in other ways. I. As you know. Go to India. Every year. When I'm there. I always visit. My favorite place in Delhi. Which is called. The Dilihat Market.

[17:03] And it's a place. Full of beautiful things. And I always buy. Forty many. Beautiful things. Anytime I haven't. This woman. Wife's been with me. To restrain me. But fortunately. She isn't. So. Normally there. So I go a bit wild. But they have.

The most beautiful things. Including very beautiful. Pashmina wool. Scarves. And stools. And things like that. That come from. Kashmir. But. Here's the thing. If you don't know. What you're doing. There's plenty of fakes. There's all kinds of ones. That look lovely. But they're just polyester. But the guys. Who are selling. The real stuff. They get out. Their cigarette lighter. And they put it up. To the wool. And you can see. It doesn't burn. Because it's real. Try that with a polyester. One. You burn your hand off. Fire. Tests. The real thing.

And just so you see. It's hard to know. Isn't it? If our faith is real at all. While everything is just rosy. And wonderful in life. Can look great. Can't it? Like. Remember in Jesus' parable.

[17:58] Of the sower. The soil. The seed that fell on the rocky soil. Immediately. Received with joy. Looks wonderful. But. Just as immediately. Falls away.

At the very first hint. Of any tribulation. It's tested. And failed. You see. But you see. If you are battling through trial.

And you're trying to see. God's perspective. Well. That means your faith is real. Because if your faith wasn't real. You wouldn't even want to know. What God's perspective is.

Would you? The testing. Of your faith. And that leads to more. Than just that. You see. Secondly. It leads to the perseverance. Of faith. Testing. Produces.

Steadfastness. Says the ESV. Patient. Endurance. The word literally means. Remaining. Under. It means. Bearing up. And not buckling under. It's like the weight lifter.

[18:54] Bearing up. Under the barbell. His legs not buckling. It's like the prop forward. Down in the scrum. He's not being lifted up. He's not collapsing down. And giving away a penalty. He's taking the strain.

And that patient endurance. You see. Is. Is the fruit of the spirit. Just as the trials. And testing. Are the instrument.

Of the spirit. Staying patiently. Under. Trusting God. In all of it. That. Is real faith. You see. You can't have perseverance.

In theory. Can you? Just like you can't have generosity. In theory. It's not the thought that counts. Is it? It's the giving that actually counts.

That's what makes you generous. Well. How can we know that we. We can have perseverance. And that we will persevere. Unless we have to. We can't. The testing of our faith.

[19:52] Produces. Steadfastness. Endurance. Perseverance. But even that's not an end in itself. Do you notice? The full effect.

The full purpose. Of steadfast. Enduring faith. James says. Is to bring completeness. Real maturity in Christ. That's his third thing. It's the perfecting of faith. That trials bring. That you may be perfect. He says. Brought to mature. Finished. Maturity. Complete. He says. Lacking in nothing. The finished article. Of the authors. Intended purpose. Think of that essay. Or that. That dissertation. Or that thesis. That's finally ready. At last. To hand in. Or the finished painting. After dozens and dozens. Of sketches. And. All of that. Or think of a finished book. After all the writing. After all the editing. After all the proofing. After all the test printing. [20 : 49] Goodness. The book team found that. This last year. Didn't it? It only comes through. Patient endurance. Perseverance. On and on and on. Because it's the entire goal. Of the enterprise.

But imagine going through all of that. And never getting it complete. It's just incomplete. It's unfinished. That's no use at all. Is it? For all that work. That's been put in. Unless you get to the end. And that's why. It's important. And that's why. You see. It is vital. That we actively change. Our entire perspective. On trials. By recognizing. What we know. Of God's purpose. For us. In them. And so we rejoice. In that purpose. And then we remain. Under those trials. With patient endurance. And we go on. Doing that. So that. Steadfastness. Will have its full effect. And that's God's pattern. [21 : 44] He says. For all of his children. The Lord Jesus himself. We're told. In Hebrews. Learned obedience. Through what he suffered. In his earthly life.

And so he was made. Perfect. Complete. Complete humanity. Lacking nothing. And thus became the source. Of eternal salvation. For all. Who trust him. And therefore. Follow in his train. And are being made. Holy like him. Again. You see. It's not automatic. We all want to become. More like Jesus. Don't we? We just don't really want to. Have it have to be that way. Do we? The thing is. If we don't go on. Allowing. Perseverance. To have. Its full effect. If we give up. Trusting God. [22 : 39] And try to do things. In life. Our way. Instead of his way. We can become hardened. Can't we? We can just become. Stoical. And cynical.

Through our trials. We can even become. Rebellious. Angry with God. In his ways. We can just grow. A thick skin. Just become hardened. Not softened. By trial. And that happens. You see. When we don't see. Where it's all going. We don't see the goal. The end. The perfect. Complete joy. Of the crown. Think about just doing. Endless. Athletic training. But never actually. Running an actual race. Or endless training. For rugby. Or football. Or something. Never actually. Having a game. But you see. The Christian life. Is not just a relentless. Trial. Purposeless trial. And struggle. There's a goal. And if only. We'll allow our thinking. [23 : 35] To be changed. By what we know. And persevere. Under it all. Letting steadfastness. Have its true effect. We will consider it all joy. If. And as long as.

We never lose sight. Of that great goal. The crown of life. The crown of triumph. That comes through. This crucible of trial. Which God promises. Promises. For all who do remain. Steadfast under trial. And it's that crown. Verse 12. You see. That the perfect. Completeness. That he's speaking about. In verse 4. Is inexorably. Tied to. And that's the message. Of verse 12. And indeed. Of verses 9 to 12. Before it. You see. James gives us. A second injunction. Yes. We need to keep. Listening up. With perspective. God's perspective. On trials. But knowing. What he's promised. He says. Secondly. We need to go on. Looking forward.

[24 : 30] With patience. Because we know. That there is glory. To become. At the last day. He will give. The glorious crown of life. To all. Who love him.

And who show that love. By trusting him. Particularly through. All these trials. Of all kinds. In all. All. The contrasting. Circumstances. Of life. See. Remaining. Under trials. Steadfastly. Is not easy. Is it? It's hard. And by nature.

We don't want it to be. As Paul says. In all these things. That we're more than conquerors. Do we? We want out of the trials. Just like we don't want to be told.

That remaining under. A regime of diet. And exercise. Is actually the real way. To slimness. And health. We just want pills. Don't we? Or now we want these magic injections. The latest thing.

[25 : 24] Big Pharma is offering us. Because we know that. Injections that Big Pharma offer. Are always safe and effective. Children don't want to remain under. Do they? Regimes of.

Of practicing the piano. Or something like that. To let perseverance. Have its full effect. I certainly didn't. I just wanted to play rugby. And do other things. But long ago.

I'm past the stage of being able to do that. I could still be playing the piano. If. If. I'd remained under. Except I can't. Well. I can play happy birthday. That's about it.

I blame my teacher. She was a stupid woman. You never inspired me. Never ever. Helped me to see the great goal. That lay before me. But I didn't patiently endure.

Did I? And the result wasn't. Perfection. It was a complete lack. Of all ability. To play the piano. And that's the natural attitude. Isn't it? And that's the attitude.

[26 : 19] We so often have. Also in the Christian life. We don't want. Steadfast. Burden bearing. What we want. Is sudden blessing. Our prayer.

Isn't usually. Is it? Lord. Give me strength. Your grace. Is sufficient for me. Our prayer is. Lord. Give me a relief. Take this burden. Away from me. Isn't it?

We want changed circumstances. But you see. James says. That trials. Come in all circumstances. Some of what. Some of which. Don't even seem to us. To be trials at all.

And what he's saying to us. Is that changed circumstances. Just will bring you different trials. Look at verses 9 to 11. He says. Both poverty. And prosperity. Are real trials.

Now poverty. Was almost certainly. The main issue. For his first readers. And he addresses that first. The lowly brother. That word lowly. It does. Does include financial poverty.

[27 : 17] But really. It means somebody. Who's regarded. As low. Somebody of little significance. In the eyes of the world. Somebody who's poor. Not precious to the world.

Somebody who's expendable. Not exalted. To the world. Somebody who's reviled. Not revered by the world. And when you are poor. You see.

The obvious solution. Is wealth. Isn't it? If you're financially poor. That's the obvious solution. And of course. It may help. But. James says. It's not the answer to life.

And actually. We know that. Don't we? Think of some of the. People who've won vast millions. In the lottery. And have ended up. Utterly ruining their lives. Spike Milligan said. Money can't buy you happiness.

But you do get a better class of enemy. And we would usually rather try that. Wouldn't we? But no. Says James. Look at verse 9. Let the lowly brother. Boast in his exaltation. See.

[28 : 14] If you love Jesus. If you remain steadfast. Although the world thinks you have nothing. The crown of life. Will be yours. He says. And that is lasting treasure. That is lasting wealth. Don't let your present lowly state.

Blind you to that great exaltation. That's to come. Keep looking forward. With perseverance. Because you know. That glory does lie ahead.

And the same message. Keep looking forward to ultimate things. Is the prescription for the trial. Also of prosperity. Just as it is for poverty.

And James says that. Prosperity. Especially wealth. May even be a far greater trial. Than worldly poverty. Well let me try it. You say to yourself.

Spike Milligan again. All I ask is for the chance. To prove that money can't make me happy. That's why we feel. Isn't it? Be careful. What you wish for.

[29 : 14] Friends. How hard it is. Says Jesus. For the rich person. To enter the kingdom. Of heaven. It's so easy.

For the person who has it all. Who has wealth. Who has status. Who has the approval of others. Who has envy from others. It's so easy. To forget the future. Isn't it? Verse 10.

Look. To forget that humiliation is coming. He too will pass away. Even the most resilient grass. Even the most beautiful flower.

Withers and falls. And their beauty perishes. And so also. Verse 11. Do you see? The rich man will fade away. In the midst of his pursuits. And all those things that he and the world thought were so important.

So impressive. Fade away. Gone. And James is simply rehearsing here. A very common theme all through the Bible. I think he's quoting here from Isaiah 40.

[30 : 11] But we sang it earlier. In Psalm 90. You return man to dust. So teach us to number our days. That we may get a heart for wisdom.

You see? Apparently. Absolutely opposite. Contrasting trials. Poverty. And great prosperity. And yet the same prescription. In both. Keep looking forward. With patient trust.

In what you know. Don't feel sorry for yourself. If you're in a trial of poverty. Of insignificance. Of feeling expendable in the world's eyes.

Don't complain. He says rejoice. For you know where your true blessing lies. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Says Jesus. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek.

They will inherit the earth. Don't feel sorry for yourself. And don't feel satisfied with yourself. If yours is a trial of prosperity.

[31 : 09] If you feel very significant. And you're exalted in the world. So much so. In fact. You don't even see it as being a trial. Well. That's dangerous. Don't you be complacent.

He says. Be realistic. For you know. Your earthly life will fade away. And everything you have. And don't forget.

That the Lord Jesus said. It's the reviled. Not the revered. It's the persecuted. Not the promoted. It's the slandered. Not the celebrated. Who can rejoice.

Because they know. Great is their reward in heaven. And don't forget also. That he said. Woe to you. Woe to you. When all men speak well of you.

For so they said. Of the false prophets. Those who professed. To serve God. And speak for God. But in fact. Serve mammon. Serve worldly riches.

[32 : 07] I think friends. We can't deny. Can we. That for the vast majority of us. We're far more in danger. By the trials of prosperity. Than of poverty. And the warning.

That James introduces. Somewhat gently here. But. Much. More biting. Later on in his letter. In chapter 5. He gives us a very blunt rebuke.

To self-indulgent living. That forgets the very urgency. Of these last days. And the mission. Of God's people. And the great reality. Of both the judgment. And the reward.

Of the coming of the Lord. Behold. The judge. Is standing at the door. He says in chapter 5. So whatever. Our circumstances. We're grievous trials.

Or far more. Gentile trials. We might say. The message is the same friends. Keep looking forward. Knowing. That there is glory.

[33 : 05] And judgment. To come. On the last day. But that is so counter-cultural. Isn't it? So unnatural.

For us. As human beings. And it's not easy. To live like this. We're living in. Still sinful bodies. We're living in a still. Suffering world. We need help.

Don't we? Constant help. Divine wisdom. To keep us. In this perspective. Of God. To keep his promise. Central to our lives. And that's why.

In the heart of this passage. In chapter. Verses 5 to 8. James says. Thirdly. Keep looking up. In prayer. Because we know. That there is grace.

Now. And every day. That he will give generously. Without reservation. All that we need. To persevere in faith. To completeness. And to the crown. If anyone lacks wisdom.

[33 : 59] He says. Wisdom to see clearly. From God's perspective. Wisdom to see. And consider it. Pure joy. And to persevere. Under all these circumstances.

Let him ask God. Who gives. Generously. To all. Without reproach. God doesn't reproach us. He doesn't criticize us. For asking for help. Because he knows we need help.

But he promises. To give us help. Supernatural help. Generously. Unreservedly. It will be given him. But again. Notice verse 6. Do you see there's a but.

It's not automatic. We must ask. In faith. And he says. That means no doubting. That is no doubting. God himself.

Not doubting God's. Character. And God's motives. And therefore. His perspective on trials. As opposed to our worldly perspective. The doubting man.

[34 : 54] He says in verse 8. Is double minded. He's literally double soul. He is not wholeheartedly. Trusting God. Because he's got one foot. In this world. And it's thinking.

So his asking. His prayer. Isn't right. He doesn't really want to submit. To God's will. What he wants. Is for God to help him.

Change things. His way. My way. But you see. Friends. Here's again. Where we go so very wrong. Real prayer. Isn't. Seeking. To get God aligned.

With our will. For our life. And to make it happen. Real prayer. Is us. Submitting our desires. And our will. To God's will and purpose.

And his actions. For our life. Seeking God's wisdom. Simply means. Submitting to God's will. The psalmist says. Teach me your way.

[35 : 49] That I may walk. In your truth. Unite my heart. To fear your name. And that's the prayer here. That James is talking about. We need his wisdom.

From above. To live rightly. To persevere in trial. Not. The wisdom from below. From this world. It's earthly. It's unspiritual. Says James. In chapter 3. Verse 15.

Our wisdom. You see. Praise to God. Lord. Take this away. Why can't I have the life. That he's got. Why can't I have the thing. She's got. Our wisdom.

Is full of selfish ambition. And envy. He says in chapter 3. But no. That's not God's will for us. That prayer you see.

Is the prayer. That comes from a divided heart. From the double-minded man. Which again. In chapter 4. James ruthlessly exposes. As telling us. That being double-minded.

[36 : 45] Means we're making ourselves. Enemies of God. We're two-timing God. Adulterously. The very opposite. Of what. What God commands. In the great commandment.

Remember. To love him. Exclusively. With all your heart. And soul. And mind. And with all the strength. Of all of these. So James says. We must ask for his wisdom.

Wholeheartedly. Actually. Wanting to be helped. To do God's will. His way. Not half-heartedly. Not wanting. God to simply.

Dish out some spiritual. Tranquilizers. For us. Far less. Asking hard-heartedly. With absolutely no intention. Of hearing. Or doing what he actually. Tells us to do.

God's wisdom. That comes from above. James tells us later. In chapter 3. Makes us open to reason. Makes us sincere. And gentle. And peaceable. Not resistant.

[37 : 41] Not rebellious. And asking without doubting. Trusting him. Is trusting that he is good. That he is true. That he is powerful. That he loves us.

Not doubting him. Not resisting his perfect way. Because that is how he will bring. To completion. Our character. For that coming crown of life.

See doubt is the opposite. Of a calm trust in God. In fact doubt really. In James' letter. Comes perilously close to frank unbelief.

Certainly in chapter 4. Where he is very clear. That that kind of double mindedness. Is something we need to repent of. But when we do ask for help. Humbly. And penitently.

God does give wisdom. He gives grace. In abundance. He doesn't reproach us. He knows we need wisdom. And he gives it. We need divine revelation.

[38 : 42] Without God's word. Without his truth. Without his wisdom. We would utterly despair. We wouldn't be able to see. The connection at all. Would we? Between the trying crucible. Of our life. And the triumphant crown of life.

Far less. Would we be able to count it joy. And persevere. To God's great completion. In that process. But friends. He will. Grant us that grace.

And that perseverance. If we want it. Without reservation. But not if we're asking. And hoping to have a foot.

In both camps. Not if we're wanting God's way. And also actually our own way. The world's way. Not if we pray. Lord. Make me godly. Make me like Jesus.

But not that way. Only this way. Like Augustine's famous prayer. Remember. Lord. Give me chastity. Just not yet. But isn't that often.

[39 : 39] How we actually do pray. So often. Or at least. The voice of our petitions. To God. Is contradicted. By the voice of our practice.

How we actually live. Lord. Make me prayerful. You say. Make me a man of prayer. But you never set foot. In the church's main gathering.

For prayer. Which is where you will learn. To become a man of prayer. Lord. Make me a mature Christian. And yet. You neglect. The very means of grace.

That God has given. To make you a mature Christian. You don't prioritize. Our Sunday gatherings. Our other gatherings. For fellowship. Where we grow together. In Christ. Lord. May my children. Grow up to be fine Christians. And yet. What you actually do. Is you prioritize. Their music lessons. And their sports lessons. And their hobbies. And their parties. [40 : 38] Everything else. Above church. Above. Tron youth. Above all of the times. When your children. Will actually be nurtured. In the faith. Verse 7.

Look. That person. Must not suppose. He will receive. Anything. From the Lord. Because the Lord knows. You're just trying to serve.

Two masters. And you can't. And the Lord knows. When you pray like that. That the truth is. You love the world.

And your friendship. With the world. Says James. Has made you an enemy. Of God. Now you don't think that. We never do. But it's not our judgment.

That counts. Is it? And James says. There is only one judge. Who is able to save you. And. Destroy. James 4. 11. Don't be deceived.

[41 : 37] See. If you approach. Prayer. In any particular situation. Like that. Half heartedly. Because you're. You're harboring friendship. With the world. Well you're going to become.

Unstable. James says. In verse 8. In all your ways. Or in fact. It betrays. That you're already unstable. In all your ways. And that's just obvious. Isn't it? How somebody reacts.

In one situation. Tells you. How they're going to react. In other situations. Especially challenging situations. Difficult situations. If you lie. To get yourself out of a scrape.

Be very foolish to think. That you won't do the same. In other situations. If somebody responds. To any sort of criticism. With violent rage. Well. They're very likely to do that again.

Aren't they? And by the way. Think about that. Young people. Long before you get. Into a marriage with somebody. You find that. Somebody you're dating. Reacts. Very badly.

[42 : 32] To certain things. With temper. Or perhaps. With manipulating. Self pity. Don't be taken in. By the romantic act. As the saying goes. You marry the act.

You will live. With the react. You see. This double-minded. This instability. In life. That James speaks about. It makes our prayer.

Devoid of power. He says. We can't receive help. Because. The truth is. We don't really want. The prescription. That God is offering us. Of joyful perseverance.

To the crown of life. We'd far rather have an injection. That we think. Safe and effective. Largely painless. At least just now. Something to take all our troubles away.

But no. Says James. The truth is. Hedging your bets. With the world like that. Will stop us. Persevering. It'll stop us. Growing to maturity. It'll stop us. Finishing the race well.

[43 : 26] And receiving the crown of life. Don't be deceived. He's echoing the words. Of the. The Hebrews writer. Who.

Urges us. To cast off. All these sinful attitudes. That cause us to vacillate. And to run. With endurance. The race that's marked out for us. Looking to Jesus. The pioneer.

And the perfecter of faith. Listening up. To what we know. Of his pattern. To shape us to be like him. Keeping on looking up. To him. For wisdom.

And for daily grace. As we keep looking forward. To glory. When the crucible of life. At last. Will yield that crown of life. That he promises. To all who love him.

So friends. As we finish. Let me ask you. Are you very conscious. Perhaps. Of the crucible of life. Being full of trials. Of various kinds. Just now. And if so.

[44 : 23] Perhaps. Are you doubting. God's power. To answer your prayer. Perhaps doubting. His goodness. To allow you. To face such trials. Even doubting. His love for you. Or you may be.

Doubting your own faith. Because. Life isn't as you hoped. It would be. Perhaps you become. Disillusioned. Maybe even bitter. About the church. About other Christians.

About God himself. If that is the case. Let me also ask you. Are you really. Listening. To the right voices. In your life. Are you? You're listening.

To the word of God. Not the words of the world. And are your eyes. Really set on the right goal. The crown of life. Or are you so. So preoccupied. Just with the cares. Of your own life. The cares of the world.

You can't see that. You've forgotten. And in your prayers. If you're still praying. At all that is. Are you asking wrongly.

[45 : 21] Are you just asking. For God. To. To satisfy your desires. Instead of asking. Him to help you rejoice. In his desires. His calling for your life.

See if that's you. Then. I'm afraid. Verse six. Does describe you. You're just a wave. Being tossed around. By the winds. Going nowhere. Not getting anywhere. Forever. And verse seven.

Tells you why. Your heart. Your mind. Is divided. You're trying to do the impossible. You're trying to serve two masters. You're trying to be a friend of God.

But. Friends with the world. Perhaps a relationship with the world. Maybe a particular person. Maybe a thing. Maybe a desire. That the world.

Offers to satisfy you. Well friends. James is saying to us. If that is you. You're deceiving yourself. You can't.

[46 : 20] Serve. Two masters. And if you try. You just make yourself. An enemy. Of God. But he says. There's an answer.

If you listen up. If you let God's voice. Show you his perspective. So you can. Consider it joy. Pray. Whenever trials of all kinds.

Meet you in life. And if you're led by his word. To keep looking forward. To the glory to come. To the crown of life. That's being forged now. Through. The crucible.

Of these trials of life. And if you keep on. Looking up. For grace today. Which he will give you. Every day. If.

If you will pray with Jesus. Not my will. But thine. One writer says.

[47 : 15] The incontrovertible teaching. Of the scriptures. Is that the grace of God. Lies hidden. In the trials. That come upon his people. To be prized from them.

And appropriated. For our holiness. And for our fruitfulness. So friends. Count it all joy. My brothers. When you meet trials. Of various kinds. Amen. Let's pray together. Amen. O Lord of all.

Power. And might. Who art the author. And the giver. Of all good things. Graft in our hearts. The love of thy name.

Increase in us. True faith. Nourish us. With all goodness. And of thy great mercy. Keep us.

[48 : 18] In the same. Through Jesus Christ. Our Lord. Amen.