

Pastor Don Nelson

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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“GET WISDOM”
James 1:5-8

Life is good. You can handle whatever it throws at you (# first world problems). You know where you are going, how to get there, and what to expect along the way.

Then: Bam! Your child comes out, or you are diagnosed with cancer, or you find out that your spouse has a second family.

Now, life is terrible. The blow sends you reeling. Quite suddenly you don't have a clue where you are going, much less how to get there or what to expect on the way.

? Has the rug ever been pulled out from under you?

When that happens, even an atheist might cry out to God: Help! Save me! How much more those of us who already acknowledge him.

The LORD is well able to reset our lives, restoring our material abundance, physical health, vital relationships, or whatever else we have lost. Sometimes he does.

Then again, he often saves us *through* affliction instead of *from* it. For every Job who gets it all back in the end there is a Jeremiah whose life goes from bad to worse.

☑ {Scott Krippayne} To quote a song from the 1990s,

**Sometimes He calms the storm
With a whispered “peace be still”
He can settle any sea
But it doesn't mean He will**

**Sometimes He holds us close
And lets the wind and waves go wild
Sometimes He calms the storm
And other times He calms his child**

But there is nothing automatic about this. I have known sincere Christians whose adversity crushed them, not for a season but for the rest of their lives.

? How can we stand firm if the storm does not let up? How can we keep our footing when the rug is pulled out from under our feet?

{1:2, 12; 5:10; 4:14} James' audience is being subjected to “[ordeals] **of many kinds**,” “**under trial**,” and “[facing] **suffering**.” Their lives are like “**a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes**.” They know what it is like to have the rug pulled out from underfoot.

■ In 1:5 he writes: “**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.**”

📖 “**Wisdom**” is what can keep us on our feet. It is not, as James uses it, intelligence or even knowledge of the truth; it is a character quality by which we can discern and carry out the will of God.

Wisdom is neither passive nor private. It is made real in deeds of mercy and holiness that cultivate right relationships within the community.

● Later, in chapter 3, James explains:

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.

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” [so-called] 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.

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.

Wisdom equips us to exercise moral integrity and to fulfill the law of $\alpha\gamma\alpha\pi\eta$ [agapē] love, even in hard times, even toward our enemies. It is so tightly intertwined with maturity and “**perseverance**” that they cannot be separated.

● Hence, “**If any of you lacks wisdom**” follows these lines in verses 2-4: ² “**Consider it pure joy ... whenever you face trials of many kinds,** ³ **because you know that the testing or your faith produces perseverance.** ⁴ **Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.**”

📖 Maturity is not sinlessness or perfection. It is a healthy degree of development in behavior and character, proven in reliable obedience to God. Framed in more

theological terms, it is a relatively close resemblance to Christ Jesus.

As we read in Romans 8: ²⁸ “**In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purposes.** ²⁹ **For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn of many brothers and sisters.**”

★ God’s ultimate aim for us not our happiness, not our comfort, not even our safety and security. It is our maturity. The Almighty can quiet the storm, yet his bigger priority is to make us wise.

■ He promises the latter, but not the former. Verse 5: “**If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God ... and it will be given to you.**”

? Do we ask for wisdom “**whenever [we] face trials of many kinds**”? Or do we stop at imploring the LORD God to rescue us from suffering?

★ Hardship is inevitable. Maybe we would overcome it better if we focused on perseverance.

Having said that, asking for wisdom does not guarantee we will receive it. Prayer is only ½ the equation.

■ “**Ask God,**” verse 5, “**and [wisdom] will be given to you. But,**” verses 6-8, ⁶ “**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 **Those who doubt should not think**

they will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ they are double-minded and unstable in all they do.”

✈ Being wise depends on God’s generosity, and our action of requesting it, and our attitude of trust.

Allow me to clarify what I *don’t* mean.

📖 Trust is not silent, unthinking acquiescence to everything that happens.

{Heb 5:7} The Son **“offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.”** In Gethsemane, he begged three times: **“‘Abba, Father,’ he said, ‘everything is possible for you. Take this cup for me.’”**

{II Co 12:8-9} Likewise, the apostle Paul **“pleaded” “three times ... with the Lord”** to end his suffering. The Lord refused, saying **“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”**

📖 Neither is trust presuming that God will protect us from pain and suffering. If that was true, James would not command us to **“Consider it pure joy ... whenever [we] face trials of many kinds.”**

Ease is more the exception than the rule. First Peter 4:12: **“Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.”**

Our Lord himself has explicitly warned, **“In this world you will have trouble”** (John 16:33).

? So, what is trust?

📖 Trust is strong conviction in God’s love, wisdom, and power in every circumstance. It is the confidence that he is kind and merciful, knows our situation, and will accomplish his perfect purpose – even if he does not improve our material situation.

{Heb 12:2} Christ Jesus is our model in this. Why did he **“[endure] the cross, scorning its shame”**? It was **“for the joy set before him.”** He trusted that, contrary to all appearances, his Father really did care, that he really did know what he was doing, and that he really was able to conquer death.

Trust is strong conviction in God’s love, wisdom, and power.

📖 {Lk 9:24-25} Trust is also steadfast commitment to do the will of God at all costs. It is denying yourself, taking up your cross daily, and following the Savior to Calvary and beyond. It is losing your life in order to save it, and losing the world in order to gain your soul.

{Mk 14:33-36} Once again, Christ Jesus is our model. In the garden he beseeched God, **“‘Abba, Father,’ everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me.” “Take this cup from me.” “Take this cup from me.”** He was **“deeply distressed and troubled,” “overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.”**

{Mt 14:33-34, 36} Messiah absolutely did not want to suffer the pain and humiliation of crucifixion. Even so, he ended each entreaty with the phrase, **“Yet not what I will, but what you will.”** And then he went through with it.

Trust is steadfast commitment to do God’s will.

‡ Has the rug ever been pulled out from under your feet? Sooner or later it will be, if it hasn't already.

Life will be terrible. The blow will send you reeling. Suddenly you won't have a clue where you are going, much less how to get there or what to expect along the way.

‡ How will we stand firm? How will we keep our footing?

By trusting God and seeking his wisdom, that we might develop perseverance and become mature in Christ Jesus. And let's not wait until the going gets tough; let's start working on this while the way is easy.

James 1:5-8 is the word of the Lord.