

James 1:5-8

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/jas/jas-1/james-15-8/>

James anticipates the possibility that some of his readers may lack the ability to rejoice in a trial, so he offers a remedy based on the character of God. The believer who lacks the faith to rejoice can ask God for the wisdom needed; but this request must be made with a single-minded faith, otherwise there is no reason to expect God to give the wisdom to rejoice in the trial at hand.

James understands that making a choice to rejoice in trials is a tall order for the suffering believer. In fact, he connects his solution for acquiring the ability to make such a choice to the end goal of spiritual maturity, where the believer is “lacking in nothing.” James 1:5 opens with *but if any of you lacks wisdom*. Clearly the lack, or what is missing, that is in view is the *wisdom* or know-how for rejoicing in a trial. Rejoicing in difficulty is obviously not a native trait for humans. It requires an acquisition of *wisdom*. This passage might connect with the previous section in that choosing a perspective that is true is a necessary component of *wisdom*.

Constructive know-how is the essence of *wisdom*. *Wisdom* is insight that leads one to make good decisions in life. It begins by seeing God’s perspective, which is a true perspective, through the lens of faith. This direction applies to *any of you*, that is, any of his readers who finds themselves lacking the ability to do what James has instructed, which is to rejoice in difficult circumstances. The remedy for *any of you* who *lacks wisdom* to see this truth is to *let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach*. The solution is for believers to pray and ask God to provide the wisdom to know how to apply a rejoicing spirit against difficulties, resulting in our maturity.

James is matter-of-fact in asserting that God will give this particular wisdom if anyone asks for it. The reason for confidence in our asking is because of God’s nature as one *who gives to all generously and without reproach*. The generosity of God means that He is an abundant, over-the-top, heavenly father who provides even more than may be required (for example, see the excess of fishes and loaves miraculously provided to the five thousand in Matthew 14:20).

Of course, God is not only generous, He is also not disgusted by requests for aid, or mocking of the needy believer who asks for such help. Our generous Father will not *reproach* believers for asking for help. He is not disappointed because we ask for His help in a moment of need. This tells us that God is for us. Every believer is His child, and He wants His children to succeed. Every child is fully accepted as a child, but God has granted each child the agency to make his or her own choices. God desires that we make good choices, that lead to great benefit. However, He is always standing by to provide good advice, and show us the way that leads to our very best.

Though we can come to God with confidence in asking for the wisdom for our need to understand how to rejoice in difficulty, the promise comes with some qualifications. James is offering two problem-solution scenarios. The first is that our lack of capacity to rejoice in difficulty is solved by God answering our prayer for wisdom. However, the second problem, having the faith to believe God will give us wisdom, requires an action on our part. The human

qualification for this answered prayer for wisdom in suffering is that the believer must ask in faith. James offers that faith is believing God will answer, but *without any doubting*. James explains that *doubting* is a function of being a *double-minded* person.

To illustrate the nature of being *double-minded*, James metaphorically asserts *for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind*. The *double-minded* has a belief in God which takes them in one direction, but they also have a confidence in a worldly answer which takes them the opposite way. The picture is of a wave which is thrown back and forth by the wind. “Will God answer our prayer for wisdom?” is countered by the *double-minded* person with something like, “God may not answer my prayer because this is a really big trial and I need to look for another way to get through this difficulty rather than just rejoicing.” James is telling his readers that the math of faith is $1 \times 0 = 0$, or that believing and doubting is the same as doubting.

But single-minded faith leads us to a reinforcing loop of reasoning. If any believer asks for wisdom to trust God that it is wise to rejoice in difficult circumstances, and asks *in faith without any doubting*, that believer is actually choosing to believe that God’s ways are best for us. That will naturally lead them to also believe that God’s provision for us in difficult circumstances is also adequate for our needs, as well as believing that God’s reward is the true reward we should seek, rather than the empty promises of the world.

Moreover, being *double-minded* is not just a one-off issue. Rather, this kind of double-vision will invade and disrupt the whole of one’s life. The *double-minded*, according to James, is *unstable in all his ways*. Being *double-minded* in thinking about circumstances leads to being *unstable in all our ways*. We could take as a matter of application that learning to rejoice in any circumstance would, conversely, lead us to a place of complete stability. This makes logical sense; if we view any circumstance as a blessing, then there should be no circumstance that can ever destabilize us completely.

God is generous and will give us the wisdom we need to rejoice in trials, but He simply will not honor the prayer of the double-minded one who constantly looks for answers apart from the character of God and His ways (Ephesians 2:10). The sure solution to finding true wisdom is found in asking the *Lord*, and believing that His ways are the ways of our true benefit.

The *double-minded* person *ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord*. The *double-minded* person has at least one foot in the ways of the world, desiring to receive the rewards of the world. Jesus said that we can’t serve God while serving earthly money (Luke 16:13). Similarly, we can’t gain the rewards of the world as well as those of God. If we want to gain the great reward of God, such as the “crown of life” (James 1:12) it requires us to seek the things of God, which requires an ongoing walk of faith.

Biblical Text

⁵ But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷

For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord,⁸ *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.