

*The Giver*  
James 1:16-18  
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As we consider God as giver, turn to James 1:16-18. As you turn there, I believe it's important for me to remind us that a part of worship is not only giving God the praise that is due His name. Worship is also to be a place of refuge because in this place as we gather together, although we've been busy already in this service, worship is to be a place where we can be quiet before God, where we can ask Him to speak to us because even when we're quiet, when we're honest we also know that our minds are not quiet. Mine is rarely quiet. And so, I need worship to find a place of peace, to find a place of quiet. And I can think of no better place than to be quiet before this brief passage in the first chapter of James about God as giver.

Let's hear now God's word. And after I read it, I'm going to allow for a few moments of quiet. And then I will close that time in prayer, and we will begin to look at God's word together. Hear now His word.

Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

[ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

As the giver, O Lord, you have given us your Holy Spirit. So, now I ask in humble reliance upon that same Spirit that you would remind this people and remind me that we come to a God who is the giver. So, help us to receive. And then help us to learn from you that we might give to others. Help us, O Lord. Help the teacher. In Jesus's name. Amen.

We live in a world of irreversible evil. We live in a time of harsh partisan judgements. We live in the midst of a plethora of transactional relationships. I do for you; you do for me. We live and are surrounded by and are tempted by unbounded greed. We are a part of the celebration of selfishness. And we live in an age of anxiety, and so did James. James is communicating to a people that were living in an age of anxiety.

While we live in a world of these things, consider what you and I come into this service with whether consciously or tucked away in the crevices of our own minds. From Ron Highfield's book *The Faithful Creator*, he states, "We live in an age of anxiety, and we always have. Anxiety is built into the structure of human existence."

Consider for just a moment how often our days are greeted with fear. Our hearts are troubled by the threats and rumors of war. We are afraid. Our hearts are troubled. And we often find an inner voice that gives to us a barrage of questions. Will I find a good job? Will I find love? Will my children turn out all right? Will I have enough money to retire? What if I am injured in an accident? What if I get cancer? If these voices grow quiet, still other troubles take their place. We find ourselves disturbed by a misplaced phone, an unexpected repair bill, and a lower grade than we expected on that exam. There is no limit to the number of voices in our heads. We live in this constant state of anxiety. And it was, as I said, the same for James and those who read his letter which is why I think it is very important for us to consider this passage this morning, to quiet our minds and our hearts as much as we are able by the Holy Spirit to consider this God as giver.

But before I look any further in the text, I want to be very clear in what I mean and what I believe the Bible means by God as giver. For if I say God is a giver, it is often greeted with agreement. The

question is what kind of agreement are you assenting to when you consider God as a giver? If you think God is a giver as one who is a negotiator, that He gives so long as we give, that is not a god worth worshipping. Our God is not a negotiator. But neither is our God a Santa Claus where instead of being a negotiator, He just gives like a naïve old man and gives without limit no matter what. We do not worship a god who is a Santa Claus because he, too, would not be worthy of our worship.

We worship a God who is deeper still. And what James wants to do in a very short three verses is to have us look deeply into the character of God and of the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And I want you to see these three verses through the lens of giver, but in two ways. First, as creator, He is a giver. And secondly, as redeemer, He is a giver.

Together, let's look at this first portion as James addresses them in his letter when he first deals with God as giver with regard to creation. He has just finished warning those who were reading his letter about the realities of temptation. And what happens is that we are often tempted by what we see, feel, taste, and desire. And when desire wells up within us finding the opportunity in the creation around us, there comes the possibility of sin. And sin, which he tells us, through desire and temptation, conceives sin and therefore leads to death.

James then wants to counter what he's just said with regard to sin and temptation and to consider God. And he says, "Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers." Why does he open in that way? He opens in that way because he's just talked about how we are often lured away by that which we see in the world and we desire, and we're drawn away. And then being drawn away gives birth to sin which leads to death. And so, he wants to be very careful. He doesn't want any to be deceived that it is God who tempts or that it is God who gives the possibility for us to sin. That would not make God a very good God. Rather, He does not give us those things. He gives us good things.

And so, James begins with this idea. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." In some sense, he begins in the broadest sense that he could cosmologically looking at God as creator of what He has given. This idea, he's actually calling us in his language when he says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above." And so, in some sense, he's not just turning our heads to look up as if God is up there somewhere, but rather he's saying to look at the creation around you and you will see that in its deeply beautiful order, an order which is deeper than we could ever imagine or even think that could be summed up in the idea of a grand designer, that it is God who has put all things in place by the word of His power in the space of six days.

This is James declaring that it is God who has given us these gifts by which we are to discern that He as the giver is the one who has created it. Consider the psalmist in Psalm 19.

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day, pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them, he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat. [ESV]

This is not the psalmist teaching us the science of creation. That's not the purpose of scripture. The purpose of scripture is to declare and appoint to the drama of creation and the one who has set it in place.

Let me say that those who are called to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, those to whom James would write, we ought to be the first in line to declare the glories of all that which is created. And quite frankly, honestly, a lot of the time as a pastor, I am often exhausted and tired about just how cranky Christians seem to be about the world. Oftentimes, the Christian posture seems to be that we're just so angry. But

this passage tells us that our first response and posture is not anger or fear or wrath but joy. And that we get to look at the creation and the world around us and begin with worship from the smallest of things to the grandest of all that is in the heavens.

As a person who is given to great business, I have to get to that place. And I don't always do it every day. The first thing I wake up doing oftentimes is looking at the headlines. And wow, does that make me an unhappy person. They're not the problem. I am. And yet every day out of the east side of my house is the sun which is rising. And I'll be honest. I need the Holy Spirit to remind me every day that I need to pour that cup of coffee because that's God's creation. You know I need that. And I need to walk to the east side of my house, and I need to open up the blinds. And I need to begin the day with worship because if I remember and I am reminded that it is God who has set before us all creation, then I am reminded that all good gifts including the rain, including the clouds, including the seasons in their perfect order is all God's doing. And I find that when I allow the Holy Spirit to draw me to worship first, my mind and my heart begin to quiet. And my to-do list self, my intense mental brain that has a hard time quieting down and just resting in worship, I am reminded that all good and perfect gifts come from the Father above.

And what I need in that moment is not just quiet. I need to be reminded that all of life is in the palms of His hands because when I forget to do this, when we forget to do this, we become exhausted very quickly.

Someone texted me this last week, and we were to have an appointment. And I fully acknowledged to this person, I said, "I am running on ether." Do you feel that way? Do you feel like I do? Do you feel anxious about what has just happened or what you're concerned about is going to happen?

I think James is reminding us, "Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers." Let me translate this for us. Do not be deceived, brothers and sisters. Our temptation towards anxiety is not from the hands of the Father. It begins in our own hearts when we forget that He is God and we think we are. We forget to stop and rest. We forget to stop and consider that He has put all these things in place, and that by them, we can declare that He is God.

But more than that, not only has He given it that we might find rest in the fact that He has created all things, we also take great rest that He does more than create. He goes further. He says that not only are these things from Him, but "there is no variation or shadow due to change."

So, in the very breath in which I recognize it is God who causes all things in creation to take their place and the sun which rises and it sets, the beauty of all that the sun is, there is always night which is to come. There is always going to be shadow. There is always going to be a change. I can never find that place where even in creation I can find my place and rest which is why we do not worship the creation. We can see God through it. We can see even the invisible things about who God is through that which He has made, as Paul says. But that is a very different thing than trying to find my worship of the creation in hopes that there I can find peace and rest because even there, the creation will not be able to provide for me.

For he says here that though the creation has shadow, though it has change, and though we can recognize, if you will, that it is God who puts it all in place, there is no shadow of turning with Him. He is faithful. And He will do it. This is why we sing "Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father. There is no shadow of turning with thee. Thou changest not. Thy compassions, they fail not. As thou hast been, thou forever will be."

If you will, in contrast to what James has just said to them regarding temptation and desire, to whom can we turn for a place of refuge when we are most tempted to worry and to fear or to find sustenance and peace in that which has been created? We can turn to Him for in Him, He will always be. For it says, "Morning by morning, new mercies I see. All I have needed thy hand hath provided. Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me." And even when I fail to turn to Him and I turn to the creation and am

tempted and lured away, even then I can be reminded every morning that His mercies and His compassions are made new.

This same God of faithfulness reminds me only in Him can I find a place of true refuge and peace. And only in Him can I find rescue and grace and faithfulness even amidst my faithlessness. How great is our God? “Summer and winter, springtime, and harvest, sun, moon, and stars in their courses above join with all nature in manifold witness to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love. Pardon for sin and peace that endureth, thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide.” Do we not need His presence to cheer and to guide us? “Strength for today.” That is what we need. Let us not be deceived, brothers and sisters. We do not need strength for tomorrow. We need strength for today. “Great is thy faithfulness.” There is no shadow or turning with Him. “Blessings all mine with ten thousand beside. Great is thy faithfulness.”

What James is saying in a few short words, he is singing of the deep inner character of the Godhead, the Godhead who has chosen to embrace us. He has chosen to embrace us. He has chosen to give us the creation for our enjoyment and for His glory even though we abuse it, and we misuse it, and we misplace it. And yet God in His grace and faithfulness offers you and me the creation every single day.

God is good. But He, ladies and gentlemen, would be perfectly within His rights in all of His justice and faithfulness and perfection, He would be perfectly within His rights in the midst of all creation and creating us as men and women, boys and girls, to say, you know what? You messed up. Good luck. You go your way and I’ll go mine. He would be within His rights because isn’t that what we do? When we are done wrong in a million little different ways, passive and active, we say, you go your way and I’ll go mine. Or we want to seek out justice. You took a pound; I’ll take a ton. How dare you. But yet God would be righteous to be able to say, go your own way. But God chooses not to.

God is not just faithful. There is not just no shadow of turning with Him. What James is telling us is that God has gone further. He is saying to us, I am the giver of creation, but that is only part of the story. It’s only part of the story.

And it is only part of the story for James because God is not only giver in creation, but He is giver as redeemer. James moves in verse 18 looking at God and all that He has given us in creation and been faithful to us and to the creation. Yet, verse 18 says, “Of his own will,” the choosing, “he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.”

Now, why do I say he sees here God as not just giver as creator but God as giver as redeemer? It’s because there are several ways one could take this verse 18. But it is very clear what’s happening. He says in verse 18, “Of his own will he brought us forth.” Depending on your translation, it’s actually picking out the most feminine characteristics of who God is. It is literally saying it is God who gave us birth.

Now, is he talking of the creation or is it something more? Well, James tells us. He gives us birth by the word of truth. I believe and stake the claim that what I think James is pointing to is that it is God in choosing not just to be faithful to us in giving us the gift of creation, but He is the giver who also gives us birth into new life through the word of truth, which is salvation itself. God as redeemer and the giver of redemption. And when he says that God is the giver and the redeemer, when James talks about that He gives us this birth, but then by the word of truth, what he’s pointing to is our salvation.

And I want to suggest here for just a minute, I want you to consider first that our God doesn’t just freely give without great cost. He doesn’t just say, here you go, I redeem you. He doesn’t just sit up in the courts of heaven and pronounce salvation and it is done. No. He does something we can profoundly understand. He seeks to forgive. So, as redeemer and looking at redemption, we need to look at just when God chooses of His own will to bring us forth into new life by the word of truth, what He’s doing is that He’s first suffering in forgiveness.

What do I mean? Well, I’m grateful for the work of Miroslav Volf in his book *Exclusion and Embrace* when he writes these words.

“Christ’s crucifixion was more than simply another innocent person and their suffering. The suffering of the innocent as such has no redemptive value either for the sufferer or for anybody else. If that was all that it would be, it would be tragic rather than redemptive because that means it would only swell the already over-brimming rivers of blood and tears running through human history.”

God choosing to redeem us through His word of truth and through the crucifixion isn’t just an innocent man dying. No. It is more than that. The passion of the Christ is the agony of our savior’s tortured and wrecked body. It is as Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “It is forgiveness, in its greatest sense it is the form of suffering because when I forgive, I have not only suffered a violation but have also suppressed my rightful claims to restrictive justice.”

When Jesus dies on the cross, it isn’t just as an innocent person. No. He suffers and absorbs our violation against Him which is why it is declared, “Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.” He is absorbing our violation instead of giving up His rightful claim at coming back at us with His wrath.

Volf writes, “Under the foot of the cross, we learn what active suffering of forgiveness looks like.” Jesus absorbs our sin, our violation against His name. And yet, God by His own volition, His own choice, James says, He chose to do this to bring you and me life. Thanks be to God. Great is thy faithfulness.

But more than that, it’s not just the suffering of forgiveness. It is the rebirth through the word. It is the rebirth through the word. Consider what Peter writes in his first letter when he says to us in 1 Peter,

Having purified your souls through the obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like a flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you. [ESV]

So, what’s interesting is he’s drawing a direct contrast to what he said with regard to sin and temptation. You and I are lured away by our own desires which find an opportunity in the creation around us, and we are lured away. And that leads to death. God reveals His word to us, and instead of death, He brings forth life. Why? Because death had to happen. But thanks be to God, it wasn’t ours. It was Christ’s. And by His work, we see God’s faithfulness. It is the rebirth through the word.

And I will finish this from the letter of Paul when he writes in Romans 3,

For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. [ESV]

Thanks be to God that though through our sin we have fallen short of the glory of God, God by His own choice as giver willfully, volitionally comes forward, and He embraces us through the suffering of His crucifixion. And we receive forgiveness because He absorbed our violation, yet He was innocent.

And then He pronounces it through the word and the word is preached. And the Holy Spirit works in us. And suddenly, our minds are open. Our hearts are engaged. And we begin to say, now that seems to be the truth because God is telling me something not only deeply about Himself but deeply about me, a

sinner justly deserving His wrath. And yet, God has chosen to forgive. And that has happened to many in this room. And I pray it's happening to someone this morning who can hear my voice.

Thanks be to God, He does not operate on transactional relationship where we do for God and He does for us. No. He operates on grace. And He is faithful, and there is no shadow of turning. Yes. Thank you, Lord.

I finish with these words. And I encourage you to hear these words. And then I want to give you action steps. And I am going to do this all in less than two minutes.

This comes from the great book *The Brothers Karamazov*. And it is the reflection of the hero Zosima as he reflects on the nature of the gospel, as he reflects on the nature of his life looking back on it and considering his place in it and looking at what God has done in His giving, he writes these words.

“It's the great mystery of human life that old grief passes gradually into quiet tender joy. The mild serenity of age takes the place of riotous blood of youth. I bless the rising sun each day. And as before, my heart sings to meet it. But now, I love even more its setting, its long slanting rays and the soft tender memories that come with them, the dear images from the whole of my long happy life, and over all the divine truth, the softening reconciling forgiving truth.

“Have no fear of men's sin. Love a man even in his sin for that is the semblance of divine love and is the highest love on earth. Love all God's creation, the whole and every grain and sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love the animals. Love the plants. Love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love.”

Friends, I want to tell you that this great truth of God as giver both as creator and redeemer isn't for our feel-good, let's go home and take a nap and have a meal. God does not want us to sit and bask in the suns of the righteousness of His grace and the goodness of His grace for our own benefit alone, for we would become a cesspool of selfishness. To be awakened by this divine giving both in creation and in redemption, we are to be awakened to the pattern of our God's giving, the pattern of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

And I know many of you are already doing this. But I want to challenge you as I challenge myself. Let us begin to greet this day and the days before us with, Lord, by your grace, who can I love today? Who do I need to forgive when I really want to take a pound of flesh? By God's grace, may He enable us to do that because that is not our natural way which is why we need more than just receiving of this great gift, but that this great gift would change us into a people who give to one another, who love one another, and even love our enemies as God has loved us while we were yet His. Let's pray together.

Father, I thank you for the patience of your people. Part of this, O Lord, as I'm working out my own salvation, I recognize, O Lord, my inability and my own sin that just causes me to be wrapped up in the anxiety of life, and I find myself often running on ether. And yet, O Lord, your compassion and mercy is made new every morning. And today, we all can bask in the gift of you as giver. But Lord, I pray more than just our ability by your Spirit to receive this gift, but that your gift would change us. Help us to love both the creation and also to love those around us because you have loved us. May you as giver make us a people who give. For the glory of your name and in response to your great grace, in Jesus's name we pray. Amen.