

# The Remedy for Unanswered Prayer

*Epistle of James*

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to James 1. The epistle of James, chapter 1. It was good to be able to be away from the pulpit a couple of weeks and have Jess and Ken Temple fill the pulpit in my absence, and it's also good to be back and excited to be back into our study of the book of James which we began a few weeks ago. And we're going to be looking this morning at verses 6 to 8 of James 1. The title of the message is "The Remedy for Unanswered Prayer." The remedy for unanswered prayer, and we're going to see that essentially the remedy for unanswered prayer is to pray in faith: to pray with faith, to pray from faith, to pray in faith. It's an interesting subject because I think it's one that we struggle with in our circles, I mean, it's an area of confusion throughout evangelicalism.

I Googled "the prayer of faith" to see what I would find online this week and much of what you find is, you know, how to pray so that miracles happen; how to make God do what you want him to do, essentially is how so many people see the prayer of faith. So they pray as if to change God's mind and that if you want it bad enough, you'll change his mind and he'll do what you want him to do. That's what it means to pray in faith. But that's not at all what the Bible teaches it means to pray in faith. We're going to see praying in faith is responding to what God has already said he wants to give you. Faith is not something you decide on your own, it's not something, an autonomous decision that you make and that you claim. Faith is always a response to the word of God. Faith is to take God at his word and trust him for what he has promised.

Nevertheless, in our circles, those of us who have a higher view of the sovereignty of God and the glory of God and who focus on those things because we see that in Scripture, sometimes we can miss the mark on the other side and sort of be a little bit fatalistic in the way we pray. Well, you know, pray but if it's God's will. And we should pray with that mindset just as Jesus did, "Not My will but Your will be done," but it doesn't mean you don't keep praying and this is the balance. How do we have that balance? How do you deal with the times when it seems that the Lord is not answering our prayers? What does a godly prayer life look like? And James is going to help us with that a lot in his epistle. He keeps coming back to the subject of prayer throughout the book and we're going to come back again, but today we come to it in the first eight verses and he teaches

us how we can deal with unanswered prayer, how we should deal with it, and he teaches us what it means to pray in faith.

I want to read verses 1 to 8 to get the context but we are focusing in on verses 6 to 8 this morning.

1 James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings. 2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. 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.

Let's pray together.

*Father, we ask now that you might grant us wisdom, that you might grant us faith to trust you that you will give us the wisdom that we need. We pray that you might make us a people who are mighty in prayer, who persevere in prayer the way that you intend us to and who are enabled by you to move mountains spiritually because of your great power and for your glory. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

The remedy for unanswered prayer. Now, let's see how this has come up in the context of what James is dealing with and to just kind of remind you since it's been a couple of weeks especially since we've been in James. We noted that James is the author of the epistle who is the brother of the Lord Jesus, the leader of the church in Jerusalem in the first century, and he is apparently writing to those Jewish believers who have been dispersed throughout the area of the Near East as a result of the persecution that broke out even in Acts 7 with the stoning of Stephen, and so that there has been this dispersion of Jewish believers throughout that area of the Mediterranean world. So he writes this epistle to encourage them. These are Jews who he knows are suffering because they've been displaced, they're suffering because either they have been persecuted or they're going to be persecuted, and so his pastor's heart beats with compassion for them and he writes to give them help, to give them aid that will help them to persevere and glorify God.

So he starts off right at the beginning of his letter talking about trials in verse 2 and he says, "Listen, one of the ways you're going to bear up under trials is to understand that trials are necessary, and if you really saw it the way God sees it, you would count it all joy, that you should be the happiest person in the world as a Christian no matter what happens in your life. When you find yourself surrounded, you find yourself to fall among various trials, variegated trials, many colored trials, when you find yourself surrounded

by that, count it joy because God is using that to perfect your faith, to make you more complete as a person in him, to come to understand more of his wonderful sufficiency in Christ, to understand more of the depth of his love, the perfection of his wisdom." So count it joy when you're going through that.

Now, trials come, suffering circumstances and temptation, sort of the various things that we can find ourselves in. He says, "Count it all joy when you encounter those circumstances." And then as if anticipating the fact that it's hard to know how to respond to those things, how do we really work that out. It's one thing to say it theoretically, isn't it? Sometimes you say to yourself or you say to someone else, "God's sovereign and God is good, God is wise, God loves me, he wants my best, therefore I should be happy." That doesn't always work, does it? It's hard to make that come down into your heart, into the circumstance, the reality of what you're dealing with.

So James understands that and how am I supposed to bear up in this particular circumstance? What do you want me to do? I don't know. When you've got trouble swirling around you, isn't it amazing how quickly you can lose your bearings and not even know where to begin? So he understands that and that leads to him saying in verse 5, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God." You're going to find yourself in trials, overwhelmed, and what do you need to do when you're overwhelmed is ask God for wisdom. We saw that last time. The Lord loves to put us in places where we know we don't have the resources we need. This is his way. This is how he deepens faith. Faith is trusting him. How does he get you to trust him but to help you trust yourself less? So he puts you in circumstances where you see your own inadequacy, we see we don't have what we need and we cry out to him. This is his way and it's a wonderful wonderful way because we get to see how lovely and wonderful Christ is more deeply, more fully, as we walk through the trials that he sets before us.

So he says ask the Lord, and we talked about that last time. "Ask" means, it's a present tense continuous verb. "Let him ask," it means "to keep on asking; keep on asking and realize that God is a God who gives generously and without reproach." And if we keep on asking, he says in verse 5, "it will be given to him." He says what Jesus said in the passage we read earlier in Luke 7, "Ask and it will be given. Knock and it will be opened. Seek and you will find." God says he answers prayer.

Now, interestingly, he also tells us, though, how we ought to pray and that sometimes we're to pray like that neighbor that comes next door and says, "Hey, I've got some folks who just came in town," and you know, back in that day you couldn't go to, the Quick Trip wasn't open 24 hours. I remember when stores weren't open 24 hours too. Do you remember that? There was no place open after 11 o'clock. The 7-Eleven closed at 11. I guess that's where it came from, 7-Eleven. That just occurred to me. So there was no place to get bread but back in that day you had to make the bread, you had to grind the flour, and so it took a long time to fix some bread for some folks that show up from a journey. They couldn't call ahead with their cellphone to tell you they're coming. They show up in the middle of the night. They are famished from this journey they've been on. They've had a hard time. They need something to eat. You go to the next-door neighbor

and say, "Look, I don't have any bread but, surely, you've got something you can give me to give to my friends. You're my friend." And the neighbor is sitting there, he's asleep in a dead sleep, he wakes up, the last thing he wants to do is get up and deal with your stuff. He wants you just to be quiet so he can go back to sleep. Jesus says, "I tell you if he won't get up because he's your friend, if you just keep knocking on that door and keep begging him, he will get up because he wants to go back to sleep and the sooner he can get you off his back, the sooner he can go back to sleep."

Jesus says, "Pray like that." Why do we need to pray like that? God isn't like that? He says pray like that. Apparently God doesn't need you to come to him to remind him over and over again as if he's some kind of forgetful Creator and Ruler. He knows that you and I need to go and ask over and over and over again for us, because the deficiency is in us. And he says pray like that and he says later in Luke 18, remember the story of the woman who doesn't have justice and she goes to this judge who is an unjust judge but Jesus says, "If she just goes to him every day, day after day, even if that guy doesn't care about justice, he will give her what she wants. Pray like that." So it's clear God wants us to pray continually and so he says, "let him ask of God," and the "ask" means "ask and ask and ask and ask." The Greek present tense is what dominates all this instruction here.

It will be given to him, but then he qualifies that. He realizes that for many of us, we will find there are times where we're not receiving what we've asked for and we feel like we've been asking and asking and asking and he wants to help us understand when prayer is not answered, how should we deal with that? And he gives us one of the keys in verses 6 to 8. Like I said, he's going to come back to this later and talk more about it because, remember, James is so concerned about practical Christian living. How do you take your theology and work it out in your life? This is his heartbeat. All of Scripture is that way but he really comes at that front and center.

So he wants us to deal with unanswered prayer in God's way so the title of the message is "The Remedy for Unanswered Prayer." And on a breakdown of my outline this morning, the outline in two major points. The two major points: the instruction that he gives and the application of that instruction. We're going to look at his instruction and then we're going to look at the application of that instruction. There are going to be some sub points on each of those points, though. Maybe not as many as Jess had last week. I was impressed with his points and sub points. But there are some key points we need to look at here.

The instruction that he gives. That's our first major point: the instruction. And there's really, he says the same thing two different ways so there are really two sub points here on instruction but they're essentially saying the same thing. Let me show you. He says it once positively and once negatively. He says, "If you're having unanswered prayer, be sure that you're asking the right way," is essentially the message. And the first sub point, the first instruction is: pray in faith, "but he must ask in faith," verse 6. I'm reading the New American Standard translation, "but he must ask in faith." And again, "ask" is a present tense Greek verb which means, emphasizes not so much the time of the action, past or present, not so much that as the kind of action and it emphasizes continuous

action, ongoing action. So the same way he had said ask in verse 5, he says it again, "but he must ask." He must go on asking. He must continually ask in faith. Those two words, "in faith."

Now, it's a command in verse 6, "he must ask in faith." That's an imperative. So he says he must ask in faith and then he's going to turn around and say the same thing without any doubting, the next phrase. To pray in faith is to pray without doubting. You see it's saying the same thing. He's saying it two ways: positively pray in faith, pray trusting; and then pray without doubting, without failing to trust. Do you see that?

So we're going to talk about the first sub point: pray in faith. Let him ask in faith. I said that's a command. It's a continuous action, command. Keep asking in faith. But it comes back to what we said a moment ago in the introduction: what is faith? What is the prayer of faith? Today there is a very mixed up idea about what faith is in our culture. Faith today in the culture, people will talk about, you know, "Keep the faith." What do they mean? Sort of keep a positive outlook. Keep believing in what you believe in, whatever that is. And that's good, faith is good. The world believes in faith, pretty much, by and large. But they almost believe in faith for itself, that it's just the faith itself that matters but biblically that's not the way faith is described in Scripture. It's not the strength of the faith itself, it is the strength of the object of the faith. In fact, biblically, faith is putting all of your trust in the object of your faith. Faith is dependence. It's knowledge of truth, of God's promises. It's belief that those are true, assent, knowledge, assent and trust, and it's trusting. It's trusting in the promise of God. It's trusting in the sufficiency of Christ, the finished work of Christ. To have faith in Jesus, it's not so much how much faith you have, it's that your faith is located in the right place. Sincerity doesn't get someone to heaven. You can sincerely believe in the wrong thing and it will lead straight to hell. There is only one name given under heaven by which men must be saved, it's the name of Jesus. You must place your faith in Christ.

So faith, then, the prayer of faith is not something that originates from within us. The prayer in faith, prayer of faith, originates outside of us in the external word of God. I mean, what does the Bible say about how faith comes into being? Romans 10:17, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ." Faith is not something you work up in yourself, it's actually a gift of God, according to Ephesians 2. When we're justified by faith, it is the gift of God, not of works so that no man may boast. But Paul in Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ," that is, the message about Jesus, the truth about him and what he has done, the truth about who he is, when you receive the truth that Jesus is the eternal Son of God, that he became man, that he lived a sinless life, tempted in every way yet without sin, that he offered himself as an atoning sacrifice, when you receive these propositional statements, these propositional truth claims and you say, "Yes, I believe that the man, Jesus of Nazareth, is the eternal Son of God who became man at a point in time and space. I believe that he lived a perfect life. I believe that he died on the cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. That when he died, he bore the sins of everyone who would ever believe. That he finished the debt, the sin debt. He bore the wrath of God for my sins. That God received his sacrifice as a worthy sacrifice and declared it to all men everywhere by raising him

from the dead. I believe that not just theoretically, I put all of my trust in that." You see, faith is responding to the truth and depending on it.

So the prayer of faith is the same thing. It's responding to the promises of God and depending upon them. It's not deciding what I want and then just believing it and determine to believe that it's going to happen. You know, like somebody says, "Take out your wallet." I heard somebody talk about this that a pastor said, "Take out your wallet and you see it's empty, believe that there's going to be money in that." You know, that is some foolishness right there. There is nothing in the Bible that would lead you to say that you're supposed to be able to create money. God is the Creator. We don't create anything. God is the one who runs everything, all that we run is our mouths when we say foolishness like that. So we're not in charge of anything. We are to respond to what he says.

So the prayer of faith is to correctly understand what God has said he wants us to have and then to claim that by believing that he has said it and he's faithful to his word. That's faith, depending on him, not me. And so it's not about working up more energy myself, it's keeping on looking at him, who he is, his character, his word. I keep looking at him, I keep looking at Christ and I put my trust in him. That is a picture of how we're supposed to pray, what James is saying here. So faith doesn't dictate to God what we want, faith responds to what God says he wants us to have and we are to ask God for the things that he has promised to give us.

Now, when we start praying, when we're in a situation like go back to the context again, we find ourselves surrounded by trials, temptations, difficulties, we find ourselves overwhelmed, we don't know what to do. We need wisdom. Wisdom is practically knowing what to do, how to take knowledge and apply it to life. But not to make life work for me and my goals. Wisdom biblically is to know how to take knowledge and apply it to life to be godly, to be righteous, to live for his glory. That's the wisdom that he promises to give. He promises every one of us that no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in, he will give us the wisdom we need to live a godly life and to respond in holiness in that moment. That's what he promises. He's not promising to show you how to win friends and influence people. He's not showing you, promising to show you how to make it stop hurting. He's not promising to show you how to make things work out according to your plan. No. He never promises that.

God has this habit of wanting to be God and the wickedness of our hearts is that we have a habit of wanting to be God, but he will not bless the prayer of someone who, at that moment, is wanting to control things. If something happens that they actually wanted this, it's incidental, it's not a part of God blessing them. If that does happen, it's possibly him just cursing them by giving them what they want because they want the wrong thing and so he says, "Have your fill of it."

So to pray in Jesus' name, that is, in a sense, praying for, learning to pray in accordance with what God's will is. Jesus' name is his character, his work, his desire for us. So when we pray in his name, it's not just a formula that's hatched at the end, that's magic words.

It's really to express our heart. "Lord, I want your will to be done." It's, in a sense, like Jesus saying, "Not My will but Your will be done." "Lord, I ask these things in the name of Christ on the basis of what he's accomplished and for his glory and his purposes."

You know, we read the Lord's Prayer a little while ago in Luke 11 when the disciples asked him to teach them to pray. Here again, he told them the essence of the Lord's Prayer and how does the Lord's Prayer start? "Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done." You see, God knows that we need to be told, "Hey, what we've got to do and when we first go to pray is remember it's not about me and what I want." Because prayer really, the purpose of prayer isn't to change God's mind to do what I want, the purpose of prayer is for God to change my heart to want what he wants.

Now that's praying in faith, but he really expands on this on the negative half. As I said, it's basically two ways of saying the same thing. So the instruction is, "Pray in faith," and Point B, A was pray in faith. The second half of the instruction, B, is pray without any doubting. He says in verse 6, "he must ask in faith without any doubting." It's another way of saying exactly the same thing. He said pray in faith, that is, pray trusting. Now he says pray without any doubting, pray without failing to trust. Let him ask in faith, let him ask without any doubting.

Now, it's interesting, then he really elaborates on this point quite a bit because verse 6 to verse 8 is him expanding on why you don't want to ask doubting. It's like he's underscoring it, highlighting it and circling it. "Do not be a doubter when you pray." And let's consider that part, pray without any doubting, under two sub points. So we're 1B is pray without any doubting and we're going to consider the character of doubt and the consequence of doubt all here under still point 1, instruction.

Pray without any doubting. The character of doubt. First of all, the word "doubting" or "doubt, pray without any doubting, for the one who doubts," that's the same Greek word in the text, the Greek text, exactly the same word, doubting and doubts. A Greek participle from a verb which means "to distinguish; to separate." The root verb actually is also translated often "judge." So he's saying this doubting word comes from a word which means to judge. It means to look at things and to take one and put it over here, one and put it over there. It's like separating maybe you're separating your coins that you want to roll them up and take them to the bank or something, and so you separate the quarters from the dimes and the nickels and the pennies. Not hardly worth even rolling up those pennies, is it? Melt them and make them into something, I guess. Anyway, sorry, I digress.

You're separating, you're distinguishing, you're separating these things. This is what he's saying. Doubting begins with this process of separation and the word is an intense form which means "to separate thoroughly." So the character of doubt, you're looking at a circumstance and it describes a process where you're trying to distinguish. You're looking at your circumstances, you're looking at yourself, you're looking at your abilities, you're looking at your need, and you're separating these things.

And the verb is also a middle voice verb. Now, verbs have not just tense, present, past. They have mood, imperative, indicative. They have voice. Voice relates to the action of the verb and who is doing the action. If the subject is doing the action of the verb, it's an active voice verb. If the subject is receiving the action of the verb, it's a passive voice verb. Right? I hit the ball would be an active verb. The subject is doing the action. I was hit by the ball, the subject "I" is receiving the action, "was hit." I hit myself is a middle voice which is reflexive. I did the hitting but I also received it. Do you see what I'm saying? That middle voice.

This verb is middle voice. This word "judging and separating" is a middle voice verb. It means that you're looking at something and you're actively doing it but what you find out is, you're really doing it to yourself, that is you're distinguishing as you're separating, as you're reflecting on the circumstance in dividing and separating, what you're really doing is dividing yourself. He's picturing a person who is considering the trials and the discouragement and the difficulties and they're looking at them and rather than becoming more focused and more committed to God, they're becoming more divided in their loyalties.

So the character of doubt starts with this process of...faith doesn't ignore the reality. Please understand that. Faith is not the world thinks, a blind leap in the dark that ignores the facts. No, faith takes full account of the facts biblically, but faith puts the facts in light of the promises of God. So faith takes account of all of the facts because in any situation, what is the most important fact? It's what God says about the situation. So if you're accounting of the difficulties but you forget to account what God says, you're just being foolish and you're not looking at the facts. You're looking at part of the facts. But when you look at the reality of the difficulties that surround you and you put them in light of the promises of God, that is the way we're supposed to look at things. And when you realize if the promise of God speaks to my circumstance, it's like the old saying: God said it and that settles it. Sometimes people say: God said it, I believe it, that settles it. You can really just knock that middle one right out of there. It's just: God said it, that settles it. It doesn't matter whether you believe it or not, right? If he said it, it settles it. Now, for you it does make a difference. If you're going to believe it, you're not going to be double-minded, you're not going to be divided. But if you're not going to believe it, you will be divided. That's what he's saying here.

So the character of doubt starts with this looking at the circumstances, weighing it, and some of that is appropriate but it stays there. The consequences of doubt. He really wants to hammer this home with us. "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." He starts piling up his reasons why we've got to fight against doubt and the first is here in this word picture. Verse 6, "the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea," this metaphor, this simile, it is a word picture of the ocean. "The surf of the sea," the word could be translated "wave" in some of the translations, but the root idea of this word is a surging of the water. It's not talking about waves coming up on the shore, you know, when you're at the beach and the waves come up. This is a picture on the open ocean when the waters are surging back and forth.



And he continues that image with these other words he piles on top, one after another. "Like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind." Driven, the word comes from a word for "wind." The root idea is the wind and the impact the wind makes; that when the wind comes, it can unsettle things. You know, you have your papers laid out, maybe you're sitting out and you decided to work on some things outside and suddenly the wind comes up and isn't it amazing how things can take off in the wind?

Not too long ago, I was somewhere and I forget where I was, and I had an important piece of paper in my hand and I got out of my car and I set my folder down for a second and the paper took off and it went like from here out that door in just no time. It was like amazing. Thankfully, the Lord provided somebody over there who saw it and basically corralled it and caught it and gave it back to me because I was actually, as I saw it go, I thought, "I may not actually be able to get that back."

That's the power of the wind and that's what he's saying here, driven along and tossed by the wind. The picture of just this agitation and the imagery is that you're on the open sea and you're in a storm and your boat is being dashed and tossed and crashed against by the waves and just this sickness that can come in those moments. You're seasick. It's a picture of misery. He's saying, "If you're going to allow yourself to be a doubter, you are going to experience misery, self-inflicted misery." James is saying, "Don't do it. Don't be a person who asks with doubting. Ask without any doubting."

He goes on to say not only that the misery that will come as a reason not to be a doubter, but then he says, verse 7, "For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord." He's basically saying, "If you are doubting like this, you will not receive. You can know that you will not receive anything from God." Do you want to have your prayers not answered? Then doubt. Guaranteed.

Let that man, it's actually an imperative, "that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord." It's hard for us to translate third person imperatives in English but he's basically saying, "That man needs to know that he's not going to receive anything from God."

"Being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." Do you see how he just keeps piling on how bad it is when we allow doubt? When we look at our circumstances and we spend all of our time parsing and evaluating how difficult things are and how inadequate we are, how unable we are to deal with the circumstance and we don't bring in the promise of God and the truth of God into that context, we just go from bad to worse, to the point that that division that started with that word "doubting," remember I said it's to separate and the middle voice means you start to separate yourself?

He then says, James uses a term that's used twice in the New Testament, twice in his letter and nowhere else in the New Testament. The word "double-minded" literally means in the Greek is "two-souled." A man with two souls. A double-minded man, you have two souls, double-souled person. It's like you're two different people. You're wanting to

believe God, you're wanting to cry out to God for help but you're also convinced he's not going to help you and you're going back and forth like a man with one foot in one boat and one foot in another boat. There is no way to live. And so you're unstable in all your ways. There is no place to stand. There is no place to find stability. The double-minded man is pictured in John Bunyan's "The Pilgrim's Progress" as Mr. Facing-both-ways. A man who tries to face two directions at the same time, to love the world and to love God; to trust God and to not trust God.

So he's saying, "Don't be like this." Pray in faith means don't pray with doubting. So how do you do that? Now we come to our second point: the application. The second major point. What does this really look like in our lives? How do we deal with unanswered prayer by learning how to pray in faith? There are six sub points on this. The application, six points of application. What do we do when we find ourselves with unanswered prayer? We find ourselves feeling double-minded. What do you do?

Well, the first thing that we need to do is check if we're asking for something that's biblical at all, in the first place. Check what you're asking for. James says that God promises to give wisdom to us. He promises to show us how to live a godly life in every circumstance. He promises to give us his Spirit. Remember Jesus said, "If you," I love that, "which of you?" And he's talking to a lot of those who come to faith and they're believing in him, his disciples are there, "Which of you if your son asks for a loaf of bread would give him a rock? If he asked for a fish, would give him a serpent?" I mean, which of you, if your son really was hungry, "Hey, dad, I want something to eat," and, "Here's a snake." You put it in the Happy Meal wrapper and he wraps it up and there it is. You wouldn't do that. Or if he asked you for bread, you'd wrap up a scorpion. No, you would never think of doing that. You are evil and you know how to give good gifts to your children, I love that. "If you being evil," he just gets right there, this is a truth: you and I apart from his grace, what are we? We're evil. We're bad. We're messed up. But we know how to give good gifts to our children. We give them bread. We give them fish. If you know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more does your Father in heaven, will he give good gifts to those who ask him? Will he give, as he said in Luke, the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

Which is another way of saying wisdom and empowerment. We first talked about wisdom and how James uses it and how the Old Testament background is. The first uses of wisdom in the Bible in Exodus are connected with the idea of the Spirit. We're told that Moses was told by the Lord, that God said, "I put my Spirit of wisdom upon the various men that were going to work on the temple." The Spirit and wisdom go together. So if you ask the Lord, he will give you. He'll give you wisdom and you know that he will give you wisdom because he's promised to give you wisdom, and because he's good. But the first thing is check the validity of what you're asking for. What are you praying for? Are you praying for what he's promised to give?

Secondly, stop focusing on your circumstances. It doesn't mean that you don't take account of your circumstances but stop focusing on your circumstances. Stop focusing on the difficulties. Stop spending all your time looking and parsing out all the challenges in

your life, like continually numbering. You know, fretting. This is what fretting is, just keep looking at how bad things are, how difficult things are. We're to look at it and face it realistically that we don't stay there. If you stay there, that's the recipe for doubting that will end up in double-mindedness.

So first of all, check the validity of what you're praying for. Secondly, stop focusing on your circumstances. Thirdly, stop focusing on yourself. One of the real struggles that we have in our sin nature and Satan is lying to us and so we focus on how inadequate we are in a way that's not productive. It's good to know how inadequate we are if it makes us pray and trust, but very often we can start focusing on how inadequate we are and we can think things like, you know, "I don't deserve God to help me." Well, that's true but it's irrelevant. It's totally irrelevant because no one deserves God to help them, but Jesus has made it possible for God to help us in him and Jesus has promised that he will help us in spite of us. So it's unproductive to focus on the fact that, "I'm unworthy." No, God has made you his child. Don't focus on your weaknesses. "I can't handle this. I don't know what to do. I've never been in this circumstance before." If you keep thinking like that and you keep looking at the difficulties, you're going to find yourself becoming more and more double-minded and God's not going to answer your prayers and he's going to allow you to become more and more miserable until finally you give up and you trust.

A picture of this is really, I think, especially with the imagery that James uses, of a double-minded person who's like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind, I can't help but think about Peter. Remember when Jesus was walking on the water, Matthew 14? We're told that Peter called out to the Lord and said, "Lord, call me so I can walk on the water." Basically it's in chapter 14, verse 28, Jesus says, "Take courage, it is I. Do not be afraid." He's walking on the water. Peter said to him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." Command me to come to You on the water. Now, he didn't just jump in....you see, Peter was not guilty of the foolishness of modern evangelical whacky name it, claim it faith because the name it, claim it people would just jump out of the boat and start running and they wouldn't run, they would jump out of the boat and sink like a piece of lead to the bottom. Peter understood and he started really well, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come. Use Your word to command me to come." And he said, "Come." And Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came toward Jesus but look what happens, "But seeing the wind," verse 30, Matthew 14:30, "But seeing the wind, he became frightened and beginning to sink he cried out, 'Lord, save me!'" Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand, took hold of him and said to him, "You of little faith. Why did you doubt?" The same word, "doubt," to judge and to be separated. He started looking at the circumstances, looking at his own weakness, and it got the best of him and he forgot that all of that may be a factor but it pales in comparison because if God said that I'm going to walk on the water, what's going to happen? I'm going to walk on the water.

So when you focus on yourself, you focus on your circumstances, that leads to doubting. So the three points we've covered so far the application: check the validity of what you're praying for; stop focusing on your circumstances; thirdly, stop focusing on yourself. Fourthly: continue to focus on the promise of God, what God has promised to do. God

has promised to use our adversity for our good. God has promised us that he will be with us in every moment of every day; that Jesus will never leave us or forsake us. God has promised that he will allow some things to come into our lives and when we pray, he will deliver us from them. Sometimes he heals. When anyone is healed, it's because God has willed that to happen.

And we're supposed to pray like we did last Sunday. We anointed Gina W. and we prayed for her. James 5:16 tells us to do that. And we're praying that the Lord is going to heal her and you need to pray for her today, she's having a procedure, it begins today. She's hospitalized starting today at Emory Hospital. And we need to pray fervently and we need to ask God to heal her but we need to focus on what he's promised to do. We don't know what he's promised to do about her physically but we do know some things he's promised to do spiritually. We know that he's promised that she could be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, that she can have the peace of God guide her heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

We have all been promised that we're to bear one another's burdens and fulfill the law of Christ, that we could actually help each other come alongside each other and in this adversity, we can grow closer and demonstrate the glory of Christ. We know that and we should pray and claim that and act on that with a boldness that won't take no for an answer because God has promised it. We continue to pray, "Lord, heal her," but then we add what Jesus said when he asked the Father to deliver him from this cup, remember? "Father, if it be Your will, let this cup pass from Me. I don't want to bear the wrath of God. Please let this pass from Me, nevertheless, not My will but Your will be done." He expressed his heart's desire and then he surrendered to the will of God. He didn't do it just once, though, he did it three times.

So we pray more than once and we pray fervently but we surrender in the areas where he's not made himself known. We surrender to his will and his wisdom. The prayer of faith that people talk about, that if you just believe it enough God will heal you, therefore, if you're not healed, you just didn't have faith, that's a lie. It's just so inconsistent with Scripture. The Apostle Paul when he had a thorn in the flesh in 2 Corinthians 12, he entreated the Lord three times to remove it. Paul was a man of great faith but according to the teaching of many of the name it, claim it crowd, Paul must have lacked faith because God didn't heal him from that infirmity. What did God do? Jesus made a personal appearance to him and said this, "My grace is sufficient for you for My strength is made perfect in weakness." He said, "I'm not going to heal you because my grace is sufficient for you to walk through this trial and I'm not going to remove the trial, I'm going to sustain you in the trial." And Paul was so blessed by that, he quit praying. I'm telling you, he didn't pray anymore to be delivered from that trial. Maybe he had a fleeting moment one day where he thought about it again but he knew better because, "I can't pray what God's told me I'm not to pray for anymore. He's going to keep me strong in this." In fact, what Paul says after that is, "I've learned through this circumstance to glory in my weaknesses. I want God to make me weak every which way from Sunday so that I can be mighty by his power." You see, he surrendered to God's purpose, but now you can claim that Jesus will be sufficient for you in every circumstance. "I don't feel sufficient." Jesus

is sufficient. Pray and seek and keep asking and keep asking and keep asking and wear him out with it because he will deliver you the grace you need to be borne up in the moment.

So continue to focus on the promise of God. Fifthly: continue to focus on the character of God. It's not just the promise of God we need to look at, we need to look at the character of God. It's not just the promise that God has made, it is the character of the God who has promised that we need to be looking at. He's actually told us that in James. Remember what he said in James 1:5? "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all men generously." He said, "Look at the character of the God that you're asking."

It's interesting, I think there is an intentional contrast there. I mentioned this briefly last time that the word "generously" in the original language means "singly; undividedly," and so the extension of that meaning generously in the context of giving. To give generously, but literally it means "to give singly; to give in an undivided way." And so it means that God is single-minded about giving. Do you see the contrast? If you forget that God is single-minded about giving, you become double-minded. But if you focus on the fact that God has promised to bless us, that every moment of every day for the Christian, he's leading us, if he leads us into bad circumstances and difficulties are going to happen, he's going to grow our faith but in all those things we overwhelmingly conquer through him who loved us. He's going to be sufficient for us in those moments. He's going to show us his love. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. "I don't feel loved but I know that you love me. Lord, let me know that you love me." Keep holding on, trusting him.

And when we put our circumstances in light of the promise of God and the character of God, it changes everything. You know, in a beautiful picture of this is in Romans 4. I mentioned earlier faith is not ignoring the difficulty, pretending it's not there. It's not Pollyanna Christianity. Faith takes full account of the difficulty but it takes full account of all the facts. Look at this illustrated in Abraham's life. Romans 4:17. The promise that Abraham received was, "A father of many nations I have made you." I'm going to make you a father of many nations, "in the presence of Him," this is Romans 4:17, "in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God," and look at Abraham, what he knew about God's character, God "who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, 'So shall your descendants be.' Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb." You see, he's looking at the facts. "Yeah, this is a tough circumstance. I've never been in this before. I have no idea what to do. Yes, yes, yes, that's true." Abraham, "I'm 100 years old. We've been trying to have kids for 80 years. My wife is 90. Yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver," the word "waver" is that word for "doubt," same word we had in James, "he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform."

He took account of all of the facts. That's the beauty of the Gospel and what it means to be a Christian. We can look all of the facts straight in the eye, straight in the face. Bring it on. If it's really truth, bring it on. Be careful, the scientists are always having to revise their textbooks because things are changing every day. They think they know one thing and then, well, they keep looking and, "No, it's different than we thought." Do you know what's so wonderful? The more that they see, the more it lines up with the Scriptures.

On Wednesday nights we've been doing a video series, "Is Genesis History?" We're finishing up this week. One of our elders, James R., has been leading it. The more you look at the Bible in the light God is granting grace to scientists and their cutting-edge stuff in all these different areas, it's just proving he is the one who has made it. He is a glorious God and he is revealing himself beautifully.

So the Christian can face things as they really are. But when you put all the facts on the table and you look at everything and you balance it out, all of these difficulties, you put them on one side, all of these inadequacies, my unworthiness, my inability, keep listing it all the way down and on this side, you say, "The promise of God." The promise of God wins and you anchor your heart to the promise of God, you trust him and you pray for him to keep his promise. He wants us to pray for him to keep his promise. He wants us to cling to him like a child who keeps asking his daddy, "Daddy, you promised me. You promised me and I know you keep your promises."

That is the heart of faith that will receive the answer to prayer. If you persist in prayer like that, you will always be victorious. Now, God may keep you waiting for a while because he's working on you in the moment to help you become more and more dependent and more and more determined to trust him, but what you'll find is your heart has been changed and then he gives you what you've been asking for and you're like Abraham who would say as a 101 year old man with a little baby on his lap, "Man, it was hard but I would not change a thing for I got a son and I also got a deeper understanding of the God who owns me and made me and I love him more than I've ever loved him before."

You continue to focus on the character of God, fifthly. Sixthly, and this is the part we need to really understand. I said to you, you check the validity of what you're praying for; you stop focusing, number 2, on your circumstances; you stop focusing on yourself; number 4, you continue to focus on the promise of God; number 5, you continue to focus on the character of God; and number 6: don't take no for an answer. When 1 to 5 are checked off, God wants you to not take no for an answer. What does that mean? You keep asking. Keep asking and keep asking and keep asking just like the neighbor who wants the bread for his guests, just like the woman who wants the judge to give her justice. Keep asking and keep asking and keep asking. God loves that kind of faith.

The most beautiful picture of this to me in the Scriptures is in Matthew 14, and there are so many wonderful pictures of it but this is one that has just blessed me. Actually chapter 15, Matthew 15, the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman. This is a picture of the prayer

of faith that receives the promises. It's a picture of how you deal with unanswered prayer. She is a living example of it.

Look at verse 21, "Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon." He leaves the land of Israel and he goes out among the Gentiles in the district of Tyre and Sidon. "And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed.'" She's crying out. She's praying.

Look at verse 23, "But He did not answer her a word." Wow. Don't you care, Lord? Our daughter is cruelly demon-possessed. This has got to be worse than some of the other things that you're dealing with. He did not answer her a word and then his disciples, apparently, she keeps on talking. "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed." Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David.

Verse 23, "His disciples came and implored Him, saying, 'Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us.'" Lord, this is embarrassing. Just tell her to go away.

"But He answered and said, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'" That's interesting. She's praying to him, he ignores her first. The disciples, everybody hears it apparently except Jesus. Now, of course, he did hear it.

He ignores her. Then she is continuing to follow after them. The disciples come to him and basically intercede for her. "Lord, we've got to do something about this lady." He doesn't yet look at the lady and talk to the lady. Do you see what he does? He talks to the disciples. He says, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Why are you bothering me with this? I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

She hears that, first of all, "I'm not listening," apparently, kind of pushing her back. Secondly, "I'm only sent to the lost sheep of Israel," pushing her back again. How does she take the unanswered prayer, does she stop? No. "But she came and began to bow down before Him, saying, 'Lord, help me!'" Surely now he's going to answer.

He does finally talk to her but look what he says to her, verse 26, "And He answered and said, 'It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.'" Wow. I was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and you are a Canaanite, you're a Syro-Phoenician woman, you're not of the house of Israel. And there is a sense in which, you're so pagan that relatively speaking you're dogs.

Now if she was like us, she started focusing on her circumstances, "I've had this situation. There is no way my daughter can get well. You're right, Lord, I am unworthy. I'm a wicked person. I'm a Gentile. I'm a heathen." You see, if she started looking at herself and her circumstances, what happens? She just retreats and walks away. But she didn't look at her circumstances and herself, what did she do? She looked at the character of God. "But she said, 'Yes, Lord.'" She agrees with him. Yes, I'm a dog. The reality is even the Israelites are dogs too. Jesus tells them that in other places. "You think the Gentiles

are worse? You're no better than them. I tell you that people are going to come from east and west and sit down at my table and the children are going to be sent out."

But here he's dealing with this woman and what she needs and he says, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.' But she said, 'Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.'" She keeps asking. She keeps imploring. "Just give me some crumbs from the master's table. Lord, you know that that's true. The dogs eat from the crumbs that fall from the table. I just want a crumb from the table."

"Then Jesus said to her, 'O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed at once." What was happening is he was doing something in that woman's heart. How do I know that? Because I know who he is. He's not capricious. He's not uncaring, unfeeling. He knew her need more than she knew her need and when she cried out to him, he cared about her but he knew that she needed to grow in faith and to grow in believing that God would heal her, and to look to him in a whole-hearted way and so he basically said, "No. No. No. No. Yes." That's the heart of God. He will say yes if you keep seeking him. He will never ultimately turn you away. He will always say yes. All the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ Jesus. When you go to Jesus, when you go to him, you will always be received. If you keep going and keep going and you argue as she does, she's arguing the character of God.

I love what Richard Sibbes says about this in his book, "The Bruised Reed." He said this woman basically she heard what he said and she said, "Here you are, you're saying that you're only for the household of Israel," and Sibbes says this, "She considered the end of his coming." This is 16<sup>th</sup> century English. She considered the reason that he had come. Look where he is, he's in the district of Tyre and Sidon. She's like, "You say you don't want to heal any of us out here, why are you here? I know you want to heal us." And she lay hold of him by faith and her daughter was healed.

You argue the character of God back to God. "Lord, I know you're good. I know you wouldn't allow me to be in this circumstance without a good purpose. I know that you have a plan for me and I'm trusting in you and I'm going to keep clinging to you." And your heart is changed and your heart is changed and finally he gives you exactly what you need and it's all his glory and our good. The remedy for unanswered prayer is to pray in faith and when you pray in faith, you will receive that for which you pray in his time.

Let's pray.

*Father, we thank you for the wonder of who you are. We thank you that you are more. The more that we see what you're like, the more delightful you become to us. You are good through and through. Everything about you is wonderful, it's best. You're more than we ever imagined that you could be and we understand that the more that we come to understand you, we're going to always have that experience of seeing more and more of your glory, more and more of your goodness. For all eternity our hearts are going to be enlarged to see the beauty of who you are, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Make us people*



*who persevere in prayer. Make us people who truly trust you with everything that we are. We pray for those that are here today that have not cast themselves upon you in a saving way, that they would stop resisting and surrender fully to such a glorious and wonderful Savior. Be our all-in-all. Help us to persevere in trials, in the difficulties we find ourselves in. Help us to help one another. Father, we pray that in every way that you would be our joy, our delight, and that you would receive all the glory. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*