

# The Obstacle to Joy

*Epistle of James*

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James 1, continuing our exposition of the epistle of James. Today we begin looking at the next section, verses 5 to 8. As we prepare to look at that passage, I want to remind you of the overall emphasis of James, his overall purpose is to help professing Christians. He's writing to Jews who profess to be followers of the Messiah and he wants them to apply their faith to life. Their belief needs to lead to behavior, needs to be evidenced in their behavior. He knows they're probably suffering. If they're not suffering now, they will be. Many of them have experienced persecution. They've been dispersed from Jerusalem and Judea throughout the Mediterranean world because of the persecution that had broken out. He knows they are experiencing difficulties and trials and so, as we saw last time, he begins his letter by encouraging them to walk in joy. To have joy; that they ought to be truly joyful and happy in God even in the midst of trials. He says, "If you understand God's purpose in trials, that faith must be tested, then you understand that this is essential, and if you think about that correctly, you will rejoice in what God is doing in your life and you will count it all joy." So he wants them to truly experience true, lasting, real happiness. Not a pretend happiness but a happiness rooted in an understanding of the ways of God and his book is about taking theory and putting it into practice.

So we see in verses 5 to 8, I think is a continuation of that desire for them to have joy and so he deals with, we'll call the title of the message this morning is "The Obstacle to Joy." The obstacle to joy, and what we're going to see is that in a word, the obstacle to joy is a lack of wisdom. He wants them to work out their faith. He's telling them, "As believers, in light of what God is doing in your life, you ought to count it all joy. You ought to be the happiest people in the world and I realize you're going to struggle with this and so I want this to be practical and real in your life." And so he carries on in verses 5 to 8.

I want to read verses 1 to 8 so we get it in context. James 1:1-8. We're really going to be focusing in this morning on verse 5 in particular.

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.

*Our Father, we ask you now just as your word exhorts us to, we ask you for wisdom that you might grant to us of the treasures of your wisdom by your Spirit, through your word, that we might know how to apply what we believe to our lives. We ask this for your glory and in the name of your Son. Amen.*

So, essentially we see that verse 5 is really connected to verse 1 to 4, first of all, by the first word in verse 5, "But," the conjunction. "But if any of you lacks wisdom." It's not like James has just run to a new subject. "Okay, I talked to you about suffering and I talked with you about trials, now let's move to wisdom." Now, there is some sense in which as you read James you feel like that at times there are these more disjunctive moments but I think the first 18 verses he has in his mind dealing with this issue of trials and testing. We see it comes up again and again through this passage, the first 18 verses of the book, and here in verse 5 it's connected to verse 4 with that conjunction, "But if any of you lacks wisdom." The idea is, "Listen, I've just told you you're to count it all joy when you encounter various trials when you find yourself surrounded," as we saw last time, "by trials, by difficulties. When you find yourself surrounded by those difficulties, count it joy." How can you count it joy? "Well, you know that your faith must be tested and the testing of your faith produces perseverance and perseverance produces godly character as he talks about. Endurance and godly character so that you'll become perfect and complete and lacking in nothing. So you realize the Lord wants you to grow spiritually and so the only way you can grow is through testing so count it joy when you are tested because you're going to grow. Rejoice in the outcome of what this is going to bring."

Now, he says that and that really ought to be enough, in one sense, but the Lord knows that it's not enough for us because we're sheep, and isn't it amazing the distance. Someone said the greatest distance in the world is the 18 inches between the head and the heart. We know things in our minds and yet living them out in our lives, really embracing them and walking in them, is difficult and James understands that in theory this idea that God is at work, God is sovereign in every way so that everything I encounter I ought to be able to rejoice in and give thanks in, in everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you, and yet why is it that we aren't joyful? Why is it that we aren't growing? And graciously God continues to give us help.

And what he essentially says is, "Listen, you should be enjoying the Lord. You should be growing. When God is working in your life through adversity, you should be growing and becoming more and more perfect and complete, lacking in nothing, and you should

be filled with joy but when you're not.... But if any man lacks wisdom, that is, if you lack the ability to understand how to apply your theology to life," which is essentially what wisdom is. Biblically, wisdom in the Hebrew mindset is different than the Greek mindset of wisdom. In the Greek way of thinking, wisdom can just be more theoretical, just the wonder of knowing things. You see this sort of exemplified in Acts 17. Remember when Paul went to the Areopagus to preach the Gospel? And Luke tells us that he goes to preach at the Areopagus where the philosophers would get together and basically just spout their philosophies and he says they got together just to hear the new thought processes that were out there. "Let's just hear some new ideas and what's up? What's your theory? Okay, we hear your theory, now let me give you my theory." So they're just thinking about and just loving the idea of ideas. The Hebrew mindset of wisdom is not like that. Wisdom is practical application to life. It is knowledge not for the sake of knowledge, but knowledge applied to real-life circumstances.

So James is saying, "Listen, you have some theology but your theology has got to be applied to your life and if you see that your theology is not being applied to your life, then what do you do?" That's the issue he's dealing with here. You see, the obstacle to our joy is that we don't know how to apply our theology to our lives and what we need is wisdom. Wisdom is the one thing that removes that obstacle. The obstacle is a lack of understanding and what we need is wisdom from God. We read earlier from Proverbs 2 that God is the one who gives wisdom. If you cry for wisdom, if you search for wisdom, then you will come to know wisdom. So James is echoing that here in this passage. Biblical wisdom is knowledge applied to life. You know the truth, how does it make a difference in your life. That's what he's calling us to do.

So to consider this, let's look at four points this morning, four main points that James is encouraging us to overcome this obstacle to joy by receiving wisdom. How do you receive wisdom? Well, first of all, you need to know the ways of God. You find yourself in trials and difficulties and you're not joyful. "You know, I should be joyful but I'm not. I know I should be rejoicing but I'm not. I know I should be looking more like Jesus but I'm not. What do I do?" Well, first of all, know the ways of God. Understand how God works. When he says, "If any man lacks wisdom," he's basically pointing out our great need. "When you realize that you're in a position where you don't have the resources that you need," that's essentially what he's saying. The idea of "lack" means "to fail; to be wanting; to be destitute; to be completely inadequate." If any man lacks wisdom.

Now it's ironic because he uses a word he's used in verse 4, to be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. God's desire for you is to be perfectly complete, lacking in nothing, but if you lack something, what do you do? If you're not perfect and complete and lacking in nothing though you're surrounded by trials, what do you do? Well, the first thing, understand the ways of God and essentially rejoice in the fact that you're right where God wants you to be, that is, that when you realize that you are destitute and impoverished and in need of God's hand to work in your life, you're exactly where God wants you to be. The ways of God are that he leads his people regularly and consistently into places of inadequacy. This is the way God works so when he brings the trials into your life to perfect you, one of the things that you're going to have to experience is at first

you're not going to know what to do. To grow your faith he's got to test your faith and to test your faith, you're going to find yourself grappling and searching and aware of your inadequacy. This is his pattern that he uses throughout Scripture.

Now, think about a little more of it, we lack wisdom. He lets us know that we don't have wisdom. Let's think more about what wisdom is exactly, biblically. I said wisdom is applying knowledge to life but biblically there are different ways that this is used in the Old Testament. Sometimes it means just being prudent in the affairs of life and prudent with your finances, prudent in your relationships, the way that you speak to people. Operate with prudence, that is, you know how in a given situation to act. Prudence and wisdom in managing money so that you manage your money well. Or wisdom in knowing how to respond to someone in a situation, to speak to them so that you actually diffuse their anger. A gentle answer turns away wrath. Learning how to do that is learning to be wise biblically. That's prudence.

But the word is also used of skill. In fact, the first uses in the Old Testament of the word "wisdom" all revolve around the idea of skill. It's used of the men that God gave wisdom to to build the tabernacle. He put his spirit of wisdom in them to do the skillful things they needed to do so it's practical problem solving. How are you going to make this tent so that it lasts? How are you going to make it beautiful? How are you going to make it where it stands up? He put his skill in them so they knew how to address a problem with knowledge and apply that knowledge to the problem. So it had the idea of skill, not just knowledge but skill in how to do things.

The third area, so prudence, skill and righteousness. Wisdom wasn't just about knowing how to apply the life and deal with issues, it was also how to do what is right before God. What is it that God wants me to do? That's wisdom.

So a person that has wisdom knows how to act in the circumstance. In the moment, they know what to do. That's a wonderful thing to possess. I mean, just think about this in life. I mentioned we did some renovation recently and whenever we were doing anything like that, even it's a small renovation like changing a light bulb, it can be a little bit tricky at times for me, but actually I'm pretty good at light bulbs. But beyond that, it's an adventure. You know, we actually had this, we were working on a drawer in our closet and our house is 13 years old so the drawer is 13 years old, and it wasn't closing right and it's like not opening and it's not closing, so it's an irritation that, "Hey, we need to deal with that." I'm the kind of person that I can let that go for a while. You get used to just, you know, opening the drawer above it or whatever. Patty, she's not as content. Pray for her contentment. Pray for her in other ways.

But anyway, so I was trying to figure out how to fix this thing and the wheel is messed up. We take the drawer out and I'm looking at it and the wheel is bent. Do you know the wheels that run along those drawers? They come in and out and I'm sitting there thinking, "Okay, what do I do with this? I could take my rubber mallet and try to hammer it back into place." I didn't think it was that bad of an idea. I could do that. I could unscrew it and then try to bend on it a little bit. So anyway, what ended up happening is I took it to the

cabinet guy that built the cabinets for us and I said, "What would you do?" which I was hoping he would just do it, and he did. He said, "You know, I think I've got one of those exact length pieces. It's not one we've used recently but I think...." So he goes back and he finds it and in about a minute he goes and he comes right back, he pulls out his screwdriver and he starts unscrewing screws that I didn't even know were there, that I would have had to be looking for. I would have done one. I saw these two but there were some underneath it and he's just like zip, zip, boomp, boomp, boomp. Puts it on, screws it back in. There you go. I'm gone. I'm like, "That is impressive." What is it? It's a man who has the skill and understanding to take a problem that was really a problem that was an irritant, a difficulty, but he knew exactly what to do. He had the knowledge. He had the wisdom. He had the skills. Everything necessary. He had the tools.

Well, wisdom is having the knowledge and the tools and the skill to act in a circumstance, to know what to do. It's not having knowledge that's sort of loosely out there and, "I think I sort of know," and you kind of wander around. No, wisdom is learning how to apply it in this circumstance. Here's a problem and I know what to do. God is saying this is what he wants to give us but he's going to put us constantly in situations where we no longer have the skills that we thought we did. This is the way he works so that he takes us to places and then he's going to give us the wisdom to deal with these things spiritually so that in circumstances where we feel overwhelmed by the trials that we're dealing with, we have to cry out to him for wisdom, he gives us the skill over time through prayer, we are able to address that and then we're going to go on a little ways later and we're going to find something that's even more complex, more difficult. Don't you wish that sometimes he can just give you the same thing. "Hey, we just did this. Let me have one of those like that guy." My drawer for him was nothing. He had the joy of just... But it's not like that in the Christian life and it's because the ways of God are not to give us formulas and systems for living that we then can live independently of him. His way is to lead those he loves into circumstances where we continually see how much we need him, how desperately we need him and that is the way of God.

So if you're a child of God, understanding that is part of overcoming the obstacle to your joy. So you find yourself confounded and confused, in one sense that should be comforting. In the truest sense the Lord is reminding me how much I need him. Isn't it good that he's reminding me of that? I feel like the circumstance is overwhelming but I'm being reminded of how much I need him.

This is what Paul is talking about in 2 Corinthians 12 when he says that he's learned to glory in his weakness. Remember where he talks about how Jesus comes to him? He's praying that the thorn in the flesh that's some kind of affliction that he's dealing with and it's very painful, very difficult, and he entreats the Lord in three different times in earnest prayer asking the Lord to remove it and Jesus personally appears to him and says, "My strength is made perfect in weakness. I'm not going to remove this. My grace is sufficient for you for my strength is made perfect in weakness." So Paul then says, "Therefore I will glory in my weaknesses, for when I am weak then I am strong." So that the Christian life is learning to go from weakness to weakness and find in Christ sufficiency after

sufficiency. To experience grace upon grace, you must go through weakness upon weakness.

These are the ways of God so that we don't think like we're naturally prone to think that in the Christian life as we go and we grow in grace, we think we should get beyond certain things. Like, you know, "I will no longer struggle with issues of unbelief or with sin. I'll get beyond that." No, it's not true. The Christian life is one, you're going to progress. If you're truly born again, you're going to grow in grace, you're going to become more like Christ, but as you become more and more like Christ, one of the things that you will experience is you will become more and more dependent on Christ; that an essential attribute in becoming like Jesus is to become more and more dependent. In fact, it's actually the way that Jesus lived his life. Though he was the eternal Son of God, he lived a life of complete submission and dependence as a man upon the power and wisdom of his Father. The miracles that he did, he did by the power of the Holy Spirit. He did not use his own power. In fact, that's what Satan was tempting him to do. Remember in the temptation when he says, "If you're the Son of God, turn these stones into bread." Satan is trying to get Jesus to use his divine power to meet his human needs but, you see, Jesus had come to be true man. He had come to live a life of absolute dependence as a man, the same kind of life that we have the opportunity to live in this world, under the law. And what did he answer to Satan? He said, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." That is, "I'm living as man," and man depends upon the word of God. He did not fall to that temptation. So we're to live lives of complete dependence and submission and trials that confound us and make us know our weakness are the way of God.

Now, you think about the ways that these trials come. Let's talk about that for a moment still under this first point: the ways of God, know the ways of God. We encounter different kinds of trials, don't we? Different kinds of tests. Physical illness or suffering is one. And when that happens, when you are ill or someone you love is sick, we prayed earlier for Miss Helen, we don't know what's going on with her. We hope to find out soon but you imagine in her circumstance she's praying, she's lacking wisdom. And when we have something wrong with our body, we many times don't know what to do. "I don't know why I'm hurting like this." You go to the doctor and then he can't tell you. You still don't know why. In fact, that's one of the more discouraging things, isn't it, when you go to the doctor? You go to the doctor and you have a problem and you want them to be able to fix it and even if they can't fix it, you want them to at least be able to tell you what it is. But when they can't fix it and they can't tell you what it is, that's a real place where we have to pray and seek God. We should be praying all along, but that makes us even more aware. We don't know what to do. "I don't know what to do and I don't know how to do it. I lack wisdom."

But spiritually it's not just about fixing the physical problem, the problem is how can I honor God and glorify God in this circumstance? That's what I need wisdom for and that's the wisdom he's promised to give us. He's promised to give us wisdom that would help us to become more like Jesus, to become perfect and complete, lacking in nothing spiritually. "So, Lord, what should I be doing right now in this circumstance? I mean,

should I be trying to get a second opinion? That's dealing with it prudently. Is that right? What can I do to stop this grumbling and worrying, Lord, and being overwhelmed with fear?" That's where we're calling out for wisdom.

So trials come in many ways. Sometimes physical illness or suffering, sometimes even the battle with sin. There will be a sudden onslaught in the attacks of the enemy in our flesh. There will be a sudden experience of temptation in an unanticipated way or unprecedented way. You're suddenly struggling. All of a sudden you find yourself anxious in a whole new way or you find yourself tempted with lust or fear in a whole new way. Anger. Well, these are trials and experiences which we are supposed to be rejoicing in. We need God to help us.

If we find ourselves in those circumstances, what are you to do? Well, first of all, rejoice in the ways of God because the very fact that you're having to pray, "Lord, why is this happening?" is the Lord allowing you to see his goodness. We have difficult decisions or situations, what does God want us to do? These are all trials that we can run into and the first thing we need to do is know the ways of God. God has a way of putting his people in places of complete weakness.

Secondly, don't just know the ways of God but do the will of God. The second point is: do the will of God. He says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God." What is the will of God? It's to pray. It's an imperative. It's a command. "Let him ask of God." In the Greek, "let him ask of God," a s third person imperative form here. It is a command. If you lack wisdom, what are you to do? Ask of God. If you need wisdom, ask him.

Now, it's interesting, think about this for a moment: if you don't know what to do, you need skills, you need ability to handle a situation, you don't know how to deal with this particular sin that's now overwhelming you, this temptation has come upon you and you don't know how to get past the anxiety, you don't know how to deal with a physical illness or suffering, you don't know how to deal with a decision, what are you to do? Pray. But it's interesting, he says ask for wisdom. I don't know about you but the thing I would think first of all would be that if I lack wisdom, what I need to do is read the word of God. Read the word of God. Now he's not saying don't do that, but he doesn't start there. He started at "ask."

The word is essential in knowing what to do and knowing how to do it. The word instructs us. The word helps us to know what we're called to do. I mean, we talked about dealing with sin, think about how do you overcome sin? You have sin come into your life in a new way, you find yourself overwhelmed, what do you do? Well, the word says that the word is a path out of it. Psalm 119:9, "How can a young man keep his way pure?" How do you overcome sin? "By keeping it according to Your word." Or verse 11, "Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You." I mean, the word is essential in overcoming sin and overcoming trials but here he doesn't start with the word, he says pray. The first thing to do is pray. Now, it's not contradictory, it's complementary. What he's telling us here is, he's telling folks that are inclined Jews to look to the word. He says, "Don't forget to pray." Isn't it possible to start reading and studying and not

pray? "Don't miss this," he says. "The first thing you need to do is set your heart to pray." God wants you to cry out to him for help. He's going to say later in this same letter, "You don't have because you don't ask."

The first thing we need to do is pray. If we need wisdom, we need to ask God to give us wisdom. We don't need to independently start into his word without asking him. Now the right way is to ask him and to pray and to open our Bibles, and as we open our Bibles and study, we keep praying, "Lord, show me. What are you trying to teach me here?" So that it's prayer and it's the word. In fact, I think one of the things that some of the commentators point out that is going on here is James in having a view of wisdom that the Old Testament points out, is thinking in terms of the Holy Spirit as well.

When you look back, I mentioned the first three occurrences in the book of wisdom, in the Bible. I mean, the book of wisdom, the word "wisdom." The first three times it occurs in the Bible is in Exodus. You find it in Exodus 28:3 and a couple of other times and I want to read those to you. Exodus 28:3. The Lord is describing how he wants the garments of the priests to look and he says this, "You shall speak to all the skillful persons whom I have endowed with the spirit of wisdom, that they make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister as priest to Me." The people that have got to do the garments, I have endowed them with the spirit of wisdom. You see, wisdom is not something that's out here that's a commodity that you just seek. No, the Holy Spirit brings it.

In fact, that becomes even clearer when you turn over to chapter 31 and verse 3 when he's talking about the stoneworking, the woodworking, the metallurgy that needs to be done to make the tabernacle, all the different ornaments of the tabernacle. He says in chapter 31, verse 1, "Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship, to make artistic designs for work in gold, in silver, and in bronze.' I am the one who has given this wisdom to Bezalel and I've done it by giving him the Spirit of God.

You see the same thing in chapter 35, verse 31. The Lord says there, "And He has filled him," we're talking about Bezalel again, "with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding and in knowledge." So what he's saying is that you pray because wisdom comes from the Spirit of God. Wisdom isn't something that we can find just by reading our Bibles apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit so we need the word and the Spirit and that's why we pray.

So he says you don't know what to do, you're to pray. You don't know why you're overwhelmed with anxiety, what are you to do? Pray. Isn't it amazing how we can struggle with sin, talk about it with other people, fret over it, and yet not pray. He says, "Ask God."

I said it's a command but it's also important to note back in James 1:5 that when he says, "let him ask of God," it's a present tense imperative. The Greek present tense. In fact, the



present tense is there in both the verbs. "When you're lacking wisdom," that's the Greek present. The idea is you're in a situation and remember the Greek present is different than English present. English tense is all about the time of action. You know, past time, present time, future time. It was then, it's now, it's tomorrow. That's the English tenses but Greek is more about the kind of action. Not so much the time as the kind and the Greek present emphasizes not so much present time as it does continual action. Ongoing. So when he says, "If you lack wisdom," the idea is it's in the present, it's if you are in a state of ongoing lack of wisdom. You're in a state of being destitute. You don't know what to do. You don't know what to do and you don't know how to do it and that's the state that you're continually in, what are you to do? You're to pray and you're to pray continually. Every time you think about the fact that you don't have what you need or know what to do, pray and keep praying. Keep asking God for wisdom. You have not because you ask not.

One of the things that the Lord is doing in our hearts and lives is he allows trials to come so that we will pray until we persevere in prayer and then he gives it to us. An interesting illustration that Jesus uses in Luke 18 when he says in Luke 18:1 Jesus taught this parable so that men would know we ought always to pray and not to faint. He taught a parable. Jesus said, "Imagine a woman who," basically I'm summarizing this story, "a woman who is looking for justice. Some wrong has been done to her and so she goes to the judge and she asks for justice and the judge ignores her issue and he doesn't deal with it and so she's still not being treated right. She's being treated unjustly and so she goes again and she goes again," and he says, "She keeps going and she keeps going and she keeps going and she keeps going and she keeps going until finally the judge says, though he's an ungodly man and doesn't really care about justice, 'I'm going to stop this. I'm going to do what she wants just so she'll leave me alone.'" Jesus says, "Pray like that."

Now isn't that amazing? Okay, it makes sense with an unjust judge that you ought to pray like that. I mean, you ought to go to him over and over and over until he's finally going to do what's right. But Jesus says, "You and I need to pray to our Father who loves us just like that, to go with an earnestness and a persistence and a continual persevering in prayer," because there is something about asking and asking and asking and asking that the more that we ask, the more the heart is laid upon God. That's what he's teaching us. The more dependent we are. Pray and keep on praying. "Lord, what do I do? Help me. Help me with this concern." How much have you prayed? If you are surrounded by trials and you're not walking in joy, you're not progressing and growing in the trial, is it because you've stopped praying?

So understand the ways of God, do the will of God, thirdly, trust the heart of God. Our third point is: trust the heart of God. We're to see that it's normal for us to find ourselves in the midst of trials and to not know what to do, to know the ways of God. In fact, I forgot to mention the verse, I love 1 Peter 4:12 where the Apostle Peter says, "Don't be surprised at the fiery ordeal which has come upon you as though some strange thing were happening to you." That's realism right there. Don't be surprised when a fiery ordeal comes upon you. Don't be surprised when you find yourself in the fire as though

something strange was happening to you. This is what you should expect. That's what Peter is saying.

So understanding the ways of God because we need that. Now do the will of God, pray in that moment. And thirdly, trust the heart of God. For us to pray as we ought, to pray in a way that's going to receive the blessings, we need to do what he says. "Let him ask of God who gives to all generously and without reproach." As you pray, trust the heart of God. God is not like that wicked judge. I'm to pray like the woman who is dealing with the wicked judge but God is not like that wicked judge because this verse tells me that he gives to all men generously and without reproach. His nature is to give. God is a giving God. He's not a stingy God. He gives good gifts to all people all over the world. He gives good gifts to people who hate him and despise him.

He's a giving God and he gives to all and look at the adverb, he gives generously and without reproach. The King James says "liberally." The idea, though, behind this word is interesting. It's hard to translate it well into English. Generously certainly a pretty good translation but the root of this Greek adverb translated "generously" really means "single." It means in that sense of simple as unmixed, unalloyed. It's single. God gives in a single-minded way.

So what that sort of implies, there is no reservation when God gives. You know how you've had someone maybe give something to you and you can tell, you know, they're not really giving it freely. Maybe there is some concern, "Should I really give this to you?" Maybe the first time your dad lets you borrow the car when you were 16. The keys are given to you but this didn't feel quite as enthusiastic as you might have liked. There's some wisdom in that. But this is not how God gives. When we pray for wisdom, he doesn't give it begrudgingly. There is no sense of reservation or wavering. The Lord gives it without any hesitation, is the idea.

This is the God that we're asking for wisdom so we thought we don't know what to do, we don't have a clue what we're to do, we look around us and we see our circumstances and, "I don't know what I should do or even how to do it." Good news: God knows and go and pray and pray and pray and as you pray, look at the one you're praying to. You're praying to a God who is good and kind, giving, who delights to give, who is completely loving and has demonstrated his love.

And he says not only generously but he adds the next phrase, "without reproach." When you go to God for wisdom, you go to a God who delights to give. It's like you have an experience, I can think in my life when my grandmothers or something gave me something. I never felt like if it's like, "Hey, there's only one pork chop left." I'm 15 years old. You know how, guys, when you're 15 you feel like you could eat and keep on eating forever. So when my grandmother says, "Now I want you to eat it," I didn't think she was wanting to eat it herself. You know in the South how we sometimes say, "You take it," when you really don't mean you take it? We mean maybe let's half it or maybe I'd rather you not take it but I'm just offering it to you because I have to. We've got some issues in the way we do things, but when she said, "Ty, take the pork chop," I had no doubt she

wanted me to take the pork chop because it seemed like my grandmother, she wanted me to be happy more than she wanted anything.

God is much more generous than our grandmothers. When we ask him for something we need, he is delighted to give. We find ourselves perplexed, overwhelmed, it is the nature of his heart to be delighted. "I put you in this moment so you would know how much you need me. I have let you experience some time of asking and asking and asking so you would grow to understand truly how much you need me and now at the moment when the right time is there, I'm going to delightedly give to you. The only reason I'm waiting at all is because it's going to be better for you for me to wait. It's not to make you prove something, it's because it's better for you to wait."

You know, this "without reproach" carries forth that generosity of God. The idea here is there is no sense of chastisement, no sense of negativity. When we find ourselves in circumstances, when we should, you know, "I can't believe I don't know what to do. I should know what to do." Do you ever feel like that? I've been a Christian long enough that I ought to know what to do in this circumstance. Isn't it funny too how you'll find yourself struggling in an area that you just recently talked to somebody else about and you counseled them, "Listen, why are you being anxious? I mean, if God is sovereign, and he is, and God is good, and he is, and God is wise, and he is, then there is no reason for anxiety." And you found yourself saying that and quoting Scripture to someone and you helped them to gain a measure of freedom in that moment and then a few weeks later you find yourself overwhelmed with anxiety.

Well, the ways of God tell you this is exactly where God wants me, to see that I am going to live my life continually in dependence upon him. You never outgrow your need of grace. In fact, the more you grow, the more dependent that you realize that you are. The more you realize how much you need wisdom. The more you pray and the more you get to experience the loving heart of God. It's like the Lord is teaching us, "I want you to walk with me and as you walk with me, you're going to learn like a little child walking with his dad how much you need me and how much I love you. And the farther along you go," though you're really growing to look more like Jesus, "what's happening is you're not becoming more independent, you're becoming more dependent and more connected to me all along the way." That's the Christian life.

So when you come to him and ask him, there is no sense in which he says, "I'll give to you but you should know better." There is no sense of reproach. There is no sense of negativity. "Really, you don't know how to deal with this?" There is none of that from God. The fact that you're asking him for wisdom, there is no sense in which he's withholding anything from you or chastising you at that moment. When you truly see your destitute nature, you see your poverty of spirit, oh, how happy you should be. Blessed are the poor in spirit. When you see how much you need God, the Lord is delighted that you're at that moment.

So as you keep asking him, keep looking at who he is. "Lord, I know you haven't answered my prayer yet, you haven't given me victory in this area, you haven't given me

direction in this area, you haven't given me an understanding of what's going on with my body, my health, you haven't done that and I'm still anxious about it, but I'm coming to you and I'm coming to you and I know that you're good and I know that you love me and I know that even the fact that you're creating this desire in me is you loving me and delighting in me and that you will give me only good things." As we keep looking at him, trusting his heart, we are becoming, that's actually the character is being built through that. That's the process that turns into faith producing endurance, and endurance having its perfect result, being perfect and complete and lacking in nothing. It comes through that kind of prayer.

I shared last week, Romans 8:32, a verse everyone, the Bible should be committed to memory, the whole thing, of course, but Romans 8:32: if God did not spare his Son but delivered him up for us all, how will he not together with him freely give us all things? The Gospel proves on a continual basis that I go to a God to ask for something, I'm going to a God who wants to give me good things and I know it because he gave me his Son. Jesus died on the cross and his love proves the Father's benevolence. It proves his goodness. It proves his desire to do good things for his people.

Now, if we know the ways of God and we do the will of God, we pray and we trust the heart of God, we keep looking at him and, fourthly, we will receive the gift of God. We will receive wisdom. He will show us how to honor him in this circumstance. He will show us how to have joy in the midst of these trials. He will show us how to walk in a way worthy of the Lord in the circumstance. He won't always take it away. We don't believe in a name it, claim it theology. "Lord, if I lack wisdom, I'm to ask of you and you're going to fix everything in my life." I mean, he may not give you somebody that's going to fix that drawer and he may have to give me the grace to learn to live with that drawer that never works again rightly. That may be the way he wants to do it. But the gift of God is wisdom and how to apply what I believe to my life and he's going to do it in his time and in his way. He's going to do it. We keep asking him, he says, "I will give. It will be given to him." Do you see that in verse 5? "Who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him." If you knock, it will be opened to you. If you ask, you will receive. That's the promise of Jesus. You will receive wisdom. This is something he wants me to have. He wants me to know how to walk in a way that is godly.

You know, it's amazing how this works out too. I was talking to Jeff and Emily that left last week that we sent off with prayer last Sunday. If you weren't here, that was their last Sunday. Emily played the piano and we had them all come forward at the end. They're moving to Greenville. About three weeks ago she was telling me right after their house sold in six days, they put it on the market and it sold in six days, she was telling me about the process of what had happened. You know, the trial that they had gone through, 18 months ago they decided they needed to move to Greenville to take care of Jeff's mom and his grandmother, both having some health issues and they needed to move to Greenville. They had already bought a house up there that needed to be renovated and so the plan was: we're going to move to Greenville, we have the place but I've got to get a job that will travel. He does computer stuff that he can work remotely and work from Greenville. I remember when he told me 18 months ago, that was like a major depression

moment for me right there. It was a trial for me. Your trial is now my trial. Thank you very much. Oh no, you guys are leaving.

Anyway, it took 18 months before they actually left, though, which didn't make sense. I mean, Jeff is a very talented guy, a computer guy. I think you can probably find jobs wherever you want to but he didn't. He went through several interview processes all the way down and didn't get it and didn't get it and didn't get it. Emily was telling me, she said, "You know," I said, "It's really something how the Lord delayed this move for you guys." And she said, "You know, one of the things that Jeff has said is it's totally transformed his prayer life. Going through those interviews and the disappointments and the confusion has totally transformed his prayer life." And Emily said, "Now for the first time since the kids were born, I'm having devotions with him in the morning every day, or almost every day, and it's all because of this burden that we had. We didn't know what to do. We needed wisdom. We needed to know how to deal with this circumstance. Lord, it feels like you're telling us to go but you're not allowing us to go." So they kept praying and they kept praying and they kept praying and before you know it, this was exactly what God was doing in them.

It's kind of like the old movie, some of you will remember the old movie "The Karate Kid." Remember that movie where the kid is going to be taught karate but he wants to be taught karate and he's taught by this karate guru who he comes to his house and he says, "Okay, paint the fence." And he's painting the fence and the next thing he says, "Okay, wax the car." He shows him how to wax it. "This is how you wax it on, this is how you wax it off." And he has him doing all these things and he's like, "Hey, when does the karate training start? I mean, am I just a sucker here to do work for you?" And remember Mr. Miyagi says, he shows him, he tries to punch him and the kid goes like this and he says, "Paintbrush." And then he tries to do something else and the kid does like that, "Wax on."

So in that circumstance he was giving him the skills he needed though it didn't appear to be. How much more the ways of God and how much more perfect is his wisdom? He's going to make us like Jesus and he's going to do it in the very best way. He never misses the perfect plan. He knows what to do. He knows how to do it. He knows how to do it most efficiently, most graciously, most lovingly. And if you belong to Jesus Christ, that is what he's doing in your life right now. That's what he's going to be doing tomorrow. That's what he's going to be doing next week until Jesus returns or you go home to be with him. That is what he's doing and what we're supposed to do as we get confounded with circumstances is we're to do what he tells us to do. Know the ways of God. This is how he works.

This is how he worked with David. I mean, with David, David kept going from confounding circumstance to confounding circumstance. You think about it. He's told he's going to be king, he's a young man, "You're anointed king." "But nobody has given me a crown." "Yes, because Saul is still king." "Why did you anoint me king?" Then he slays Goliath. He's still not king. Marries Saul's daughter. Things are going okay. Then things start going from bad to worse. They go from good to bad to worse. Saul is trying to

kill him and for a dozen or so years he's on the run for his life. Trials, trials, he's surrounded by trials continually. Then things get better and he's surrounded by trials again. Some of his own making and some not. Why? It's the way of God. If those things did not happen, we would not have half of the Psalter. The Psalms are David crying out for wisdom. David is saying, "I don't know what to do. This circumstance is too much for me." So he cries out to God and we see even in those Psalms, some Psalms start off as laments and at the end he's praising. This is the way that God works.

So when you find yourself confounded, you find yourself surrounded by trials, know the ways of God, do the will of God, pray, look at the heart of God and just wait, you will receive the gift of God. He will give you the wisdom you need and you will find that beyond your imagination that you are able to do today that you weren't before. Our God is good.

Let's go to him in prayer.

*Father, we thank you for your faithfulness. We thank you that you are the same yesterday, today and forever Jesus and you told us that you do not change, O Lord, therefore we're not consumed. The ways that you have dealt with your servants Abraham, Moses, David, are the ways you're going to deal with us. And Lord, we just confess right now though we in our sinfulness we grumble, we complain, we are like the man who said, "I believe, help my unbelief," but right now we know from your word that your ways are always best and so we ask you, Lord, to do what is best, not what we think we want in the moment, but what is truly best and give us wisdom as to how we can honor and glorify such a wonderfully good God and such a glorious Savior. We pray this in his name. Amen.*