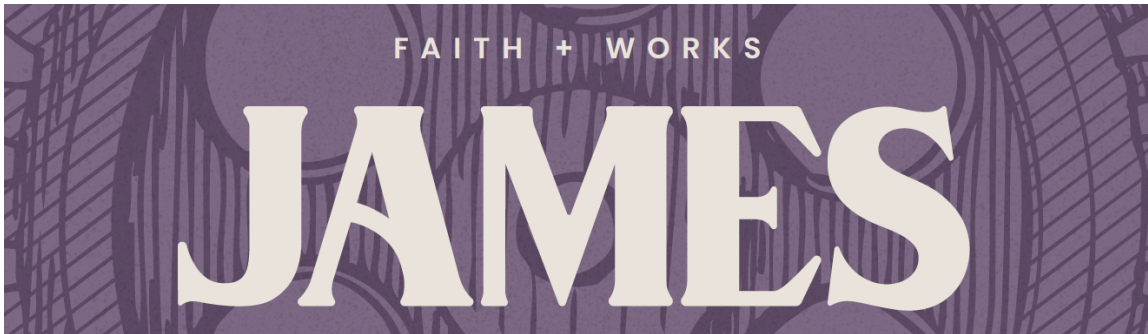


## **Week 2: James: True Wisdom**

### **Hook**



**Main Point:** Real wisdom comes from God and God alone.

Have you ever found something you love on Amazon.com but don't have the funds to make the purchase? Amazon Wish List might be the answer to your problem! This feature gives you the opportunity to stock your list with the items you want most and share that list with potential gift givers. At the time of this writing, here are the most wished for items in various categories:

**Most wished for electronic item:** DoHonest Baby Car Camera. This rear facing car monitor allows you to see your baby from the front seat.

**Most wished for appliance:** Mojoco Portable Clothes Dryer. Camping at the Grand Canyon and missing your electric dryer? Mojoco has you covered.

**Most wished for sports & outdoors item:** Sperax Walking Vibration Pad. This 22-pound treadmill is easily stored, is low noise, and offers a vibration mode.

Teacher, give your group 60 seconds to scan Amazon and come up with one item that they would love to receive as a gift.

**Q: What are the best gifts you have ever received?**

**Q: What gifts has the Lord given you that you are most grateful for?**

**Transition:** One of the most incredible gifts that God offers us is wisdom, and all we have to do to receive it is ask.

**RECAP:** In our first lesson, we were introduced to the book of James, covering:

- Author and audience
- Genre (Wisdom Literature)
- The supposed “conflict” of James and the writings of Paul (faith and works)

This week we will begin a verse-by-verse study of the book of James. Because it is wisdom literature, many topics are covered, some in long sections and some in short proverb-type epithets. But generally, the book covers practical wisdom – applying the truth of God’s Word to our everyday-life situations. This is what the introductory section of the book is about – what true wisdom is and how we find it.

## **Week 2: James: True Wisdom**

### **Book**

**Main Point:** Real wisdom comes from God and God alone.

**James 1:2–4, 12 and Romans 5:3–5 [Read]**

**Talking Point 1:** Trials test our faith, building endurance and spiritual maturity.

**Q: Why did James say we should count trials as joyful things in our lives?**

**Q: What does it mean to be complete, lacking in nothing? How do we get there?**

The first thing James said was to “count it all joy” when walking through trials of all kinds. This may feel like an unusual thing to say at the beginning of the letter, and yet, when he explained what he meant, we can see how foundational this attitude is to a life of godly wisdom. Because thinking this way is the complete opposite of the wisdom of the world.

The world would never tell us to rejoice at the trials. The world tells us God wants us to be happy, that He wants to make our lives easy. That He wants to give us nothing but health, wealth and prosperity. That suffering is a sign of a curse, not blessing from God. And it’s not just what the world says; it’s what most Americans who call themselves Christians believe, even though it’s not what the Bible says about suffering and blessing. A recent study from Lifeway tells us that 76 percent of American Christians now believe that God wants to prosper them financially. That number is even higher among younger generations (81 percent of 18- to 34-year-olds and 89 percent of 35- to 49-year-olds).<sup>1</sup>

But Scripture teaches us the opposite. Material prosperity isn’t a sign of God’s favor, nor is suffering the sign of His displeasure. Scripture warns us not to set our hearts on riches (Psalm 62:10) and teaches wealthy believers not to trust in wealth (1 Timothy 6:17). Material prosperity is often a snare (Luke 12:15), and persecution for Christ’s sake is a blessing (Matthew 5:10–12; 1 Peter 3:14). The goal of our faith is not material prosperity but fellowship with God and spiritual growth, which often comes through suffering (Romans 5:3–5). The Christian life is not all prosperity. There will be times of prosperity and times of suffering, but in Christ we can find contentment in all circumstances (Philippians 4:12–13).<sup>2</sup>

James didn’t tell us that trials are necessary evils in our lives that we just have to get through. He said we should rejoice about the trials in our lives. We should thank God for them. Because trials are what make us stronger. They build our faith and endurance.

They are what grow our spiritual maturity – being “complete, lacking in nothing,” which we will continue to grow toward but won’t arrive at until heaven (Philippians 3:13–14). Just as the pain of lifting weights builds physical muscles, so the pain of suffering builds our spiritual muscles.

This may seem like a strange way to open a letter, but as wisdom literature, it makes sense. Understanding that God can use even suffering for our good to make us more like Jesus is a foundational truth. If we don’t get that, we won’t develop godly wisdom; we will still think like the world. This doesn’t mean that joy is our natural first response when we go through trials. He tells us to “count” it joy. That means we may not *feel* joy right away, but when we evaluate our situation, we can count it as joy, because we realize that whatever hardship we are enduring will result in spiritual growth. Just as we may not feel happy about exercising, we do it because we know it’s good for us. We find joy in it even if we don’t feel happy about it.

This is why the prosperity gospel is the opposite of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. Worldly “wisdom” links happiness to external circumstances such as success, wealth or pleasure. When things are going well in life, we feel happy. When they aren’t, we feel frustrated, angry, sad or disappointed. Those who think this way can see joy only in material prosperity. It’s all about that feeling of happiness. But those who have the Holy Spirit have shifted their thinking to see things the way God does. They find joy in trials because they know what trials do for them. This is why joy is so much deeper and more abiding than the feeling of happiness. We can experience joy in every circumstance because joy comes from the Holy Spirit within us. It’s a spiritual reality, not a feeling that comes and goes with the circumstances.

**Q: What would our spiritual maturity level be like if we never went through any trials, if we only ever had everything handed to us on a silver platter?**

**Q: How have trials you have experienced helped you grow spiritually?**

**Q: In what ways might prioritizing financial gain hinder our spiritual growth and keep us from becoming the person God wants us to be?**

**James 1:5 and 1 Kings 3:5–9 and 4:29–30 [Read]**

**Talking Point 2:** We can ask God for wisdom, and He will give it to us generously.

**Q: What should we do if we lack wisdom? How will God respond?**

**Q: Why did Solomon ask God for wisdom above all else?**

After building the foundation of that shift in perspective from prosperity gospel to joy in suffering, James very practically said if we are lacking in wisdom, we are to ask God for it. This is simple, straightforward, practical advice. Scripture teaches that God is the source of wisdom, so if you need wisdom, just ask Him and He will give it to you generously, without reproach.

This is what Solomon did when he became king. When God appeared to him in a dream and said Solomon could ask for anything he wanted, Solomon asked for wisdom. Solomon was young and felt overwhelmed by the responsibility of ruling God's people. He knew he didn't have the wisdom to do it himself, but he knew where wisdom came from, so he asked God. And God gave him wisdom beyond measure.

God gave more wisdom to Solomon than anyone before or after him, but James said God gives wisdom generously and "without reproach" to all believers who ask. In their culture, to reproach someone was to publicly shame them, which took away some of their honor or social standing. But when God gives us wisdom, there is no shame involved. We will not feel stupid or less than. He will not guilt us for asking. He simply gives out wisdom generously. Regardless of our past mistakes, current dilemmas, or future uncertainties, God is ready to provide us with the guidance we need, without shame.

God will give wisdom generously to all believers, not just the Solomons of our world. By having the Holy Spirit dwelling inside us, we already have an advantage over Old Testament believers. The Holy Spirit can speak directly to our hearts and minds, speaking spiritual wisdom with spiritual words (1 Corinthians 2:10–16). We have the source of wisdom dwelling within us, yet we still need to ask God for wisdom in prayer because the act of asking is significant. Something happens in the asking.

Asking God for wisdom is a spiritual discipline that goes beyond a typical prayer. It's a posture of the heart, a profound expression of humility and dependence on God. By asking, believers acknowledge our limitations and demonstrate our trust in God's infinite wisdom. We join Solomon in admitting we don't know how to "discern between good and evil" on our own apart from God (1 Kings 3:9). This very intentional wording comes from the story of the Fall, when Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. They wanted to decide for themselves what was good and evil. Every time we ask God for wisdom, we are saying the opposite of what Adam and Eve said in the Fall. We are saying we trust that God is the source of all wisdom, that He is the One who knows good from evil, and that we can trust what He says is right – above what we think or feel.

Every believer has access to the wisdom of Solomon and more. All we have to do is ask. This was especially significant for the people of James's day because false teachers (Gnostics) were teaching there were different levels of Christianity, and only those who reached a certain level got "special knowledge" from God.<sup>3</sup> There are churches that teach similar things today. But James assured us that the wisdom of God is available to every believer, not just an elite group. It takes studying His written Word faithfully (Psalm 119:98) with the guidance of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:13), seeking wisdom from Him rather than the world.

**Q: Can you recall a situation in which it was difficult to discern good from evil? Where did you go for answers?**

**Q: How can we help each other grow in godly wisdom?**

**Q: How should knowing we have access to God's wisdom inform our actions?**

**James 1:6–8 and Proverbs 3:5–6 [Read]**

**Talking Point 3:** When we ask God for wisdom, we must trust that His wisdom is right.

**Q: What does the image of being tossed by the wind tell us about doubt?**

**Q: How is trust related to submission? How is trust a choice to submit ourselves?**

James said when we ask God for wisdom, we have to ask in faith with no doubting. This doesn't mean we can never have doubts in our Christian life. We will all have doubts at times. This is specifically talking about when we ask God for wisdom. We cannot ask God for wisdom with doubt, because if we do, we won't trust His answer. The whole posture of asking God is an admission that we don't know for ourselves what is right; we have to trust Him. We don't need to test God's answers against the worlds when He speaks clearly.

James described it like a wave that is tossed about by the wind. In a storm, the wind blows waves back and forth. The wave doesn't decide where it will go; it is simply blown around by the wind. If we doubt what God says is true, we will just get blown around by whatever the latest "wisdom" of the world is. And when the "wind" changes to something different in a few years, we'll believe that new "wisdom." For example, the food industry used to say eggs were bad for you, and now they say they're good. The world seems to be constantly changing their "wisdom" about healthy foods, like a pendulum swinging back and forth. In a similar way, there are ever-changing beliefs about spirituality, morality and truth in the world. If we allow ourselves, we can be

blown about from belief to belief, depending on what year it is or what news station, podcast, pastor or teacher we listen to.

But God's wisdom is unchanging. It's steady. From generation to generation, place to place, and culture to culture, it remains the same. When you trust in God's wisdom, you don't get blown around by every wind of teaching (Ephesians 4:14). When you study God's Word diligently, build a firm foundation on the rock, and grow in spiritual maturity, you will have the strength to stand firm even as the winds blow around you. But it requires trusting God's Word above all the competing voices of the world, standing firm on His truth even when the whole world tries to say something else.

James called it being "double-minded." This means trying to listen to both the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God or somehow fusing them together. So many Christians try to do this, but it doesn't work. They're opposing voices. You can't believe "good people go to heaven" and the Gospel at the same time. Those are contradictory statements; they can't both be true. You can't believe "people are inherently good" and that we are all sinners in need of a Savior. Those are fundamentally, diametrically opposed to one another. You cannot believe both the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God. You will be "unstable," trying to have a foot in each of two different worlds. The only way to keep from being blown over is to stand firm on God's wisdom as the truth.

This doesn't mean we can't ever have feelings of doubt. But when we feel that doubt, we choose to stand firm on God's Word rather than allowing ourselves to be blown about by the winds of the world. When we hear a competing truth, we choose to believe what God says. When we ask God for wisdom, we have to trust that the wisdom He gives is true. We can't only half believe it or somehow combine it with the wisdom of the world, because then the winds of the world will blow us over. What happens to a boat at sea that gets blown about by the waves? It will eventually sink! We can't hope to stay afloat if we let the world blow us around from "truth" to "truth."

**Q: Describe some "truths" being taught in our culture that are contrary to the Gospel, but many Christians believe. How do people try to blend the two ideas together? Why doesn't it work? How does it make them "unstable" in their thinking?**

**Q: How can we stand firm on God's wisdom alone? How can we know what God's truth is?**

**Q: How can you be an encouragement for others around you towards the wisdom of God?**

## **Week 2: James: True Wisdom**

### **Took**

**Main Point: Real wisdom comes from God and God alone.**

The Dunning-Kruger effect is a psychological term that is used to describe the phenomenon of someone with low ability but extreme confidence in their capability.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps you've experienced this when teaching a child to drive who has never operated a car; an overconfident teenager with no experience is a recipe for disaster. Doing life well, as God intends, demands much more capability than driving a vehicle. Teacher, lead your LifeGroup in a moment of reflection – in what areas of life have they been leading out of their own wisdom? Provide a time of silent prayer for repentance and request for God's wisdom.

### **CHALLENGES**

**THINK:** What spiritual disciplines will help you discover the wisdom of God? How can you tell the difference between the wisdom of God and the "wisdom" of the world? How have you seen people try to mix the two? What has been the result of that? Why is it impossible to believe both the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God at the same time? What would it look like for you to stand firm on the wisdom of God in your daily life?

**PRAY** for God to reveal His wisdom to you. Pray for the strength to stand firm on His wisdom and not be blown around by the "truths" of the world. Pray for the discernment to know the difference between the "truths" of the world and the wisdom of God. Pray for the Holy Spirit to help you understand His written Word. Ask God to bring you friends to help you come to a greater understanding of His wisdom. Ask Him to pour out His wisdom generously on you.

**ACT:** Study. Choose one question you have about God's wisdom, what He says is right or wrong about a particular topic. Search His Word for His answer to that question, for His wisdom. Seek the Lord's wisdom in prayer and listen for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> Relevant Staff, "Three Out of Four Christians Now Believe in the Prosperity Gospel," *Relevant*, August 23, 2023 - <https://relevantmagazine.com/faith/church/three-out-of-four-christians-believe-in-prosperity-gospel/>



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<sup>2</sup> David W. Jones, "5 Errors of the Prosperity Gospel," *The Gospel Coalition*, June 5, 2015 -

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-errors-of-the-prosperity-gospel/>

Ligonier Editorial, "What is the Prosperity Gospel?" *Ligonier*, July 10, 2023 -

<https://learn.ligonier.org/articles/field-guide-on-false-teaching-prosperity-gospel>

<sup>3</sup> Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> <https://thedecisionlab.com/biases/dunning-kruger-effect>