

- ***READ Psalm 1:1-3*** It would make sense that the longest book of the Bible would begin with a section that focuses on the good that comes from personal devotion to God's Word. The Psalmist begins by simply stating the man who delights in and meditates on the Law of the Lord would be a blessed man. He goes on to further state that this man would be like a firmly planted tree that is rooted by water that constantly strengthens it to be able to produce fruit that is a sign of its prosperity. The lesson for us should be crystal clear: The more time we spend in God's Word, the more blessed and prosperous we will be in our faiths. The more we read God's Word, the more we will come to know and that knowledge will only better us according to His will.
- This church constantly stresses the need for daily considerations of God's Word in many different ways. We have our daily Bible reading schedule that offers daily considerations in God's Word. We have lessons from the pulpit, like this one this evening, that go through texts from our daily Bible reading. We conduct Bible classes that simply go through a text and consider the good that can be learned from it. We even have outside studies that give a strong focus to different portions of God's Word so that we might come to know His will better. The hope of all of these efforts is for us to be a people who are following in the footsteps of the man in Psalm 1, so that we might be blessed in all that we do as disciples.
- Another benefit in daily consideration of God's Word is that we begin to see big picture ideas and concepts within God's Word. Instead of skipping from this partial text to another, we are able to take in whole books and letters at a time so that the big picture of those writings become more clear to us. Wes McAdams runs a website, radicallychristian.com, and one of his blog series centers around him reading through a particular book and then writing down those things that he noticed as he read. He has done this for some time, and I think this is an awesome way to approach our considerations of specific books and letters. Therefore, I want to use some of our daily Bible reading lessons this year to simply share some things that I noticed as I read through the different letters in our daily Bible reading for this year.
- We're going to begin this evening by looking at the Letter of James and some things I noticed as I read through it. As we're probably well aware, the letter of James is a very practical book. Some have even referred to it as the New Testament version of the Book of Proverbs. I am convinced at this point in my study that the key verses of this letter can be found in **3:13-18**. These verses speak to the need for disciples to become wise and understanding in all that they do.
- This wisdom and understanding isn't the wisdom or understanding of the world, but it is the wisdom and understanding that comes from above. It is the wisdom and understanding of God that far surpasses any earthly wisdom and understanding we might come to possess. (**Isaiah 55:8,9**) All throughout this letter, James is contrasting heavenly wisdom with the wisdom of this earth. James then goes on to state that our wisdom and understanding will be proven in the ways that we behave. Again, this is very practical in nature, and I believe that nearly everything found in this letter can be traced back to this key concept of becoming wise and understanding. As I read through the text, this thought continued to pop up time and time again as different topics and issues are raised by James. With this in mind, let's go through this letter and look at the key thoughts and ideas that I noticed as I read.

Becoming Wise & Understanding

I. The Profitable Nature Of Suffering (1:2-12)

1. Our natural inclination is to respond to trials with a negative perception. We see them as a purely negative events that only produce negative results. However, God's wisdom teaches us that we should be able to see the good that comes from our trials. *"Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete lacking in nothing."* (**1:2-4**)

2. What is the perfect result of sufferings? James indicates that the result ought to draw nearer to God during difficulties and trials. It might be that we don't know how to react to a particular type of trial. If this is the case then we ought to be pushed closer to God so that He might have opportunity to show us His true strength during our weaknesses. So many people see trials as opportunities to be pushed away from God, but James shows us that trials are opportunities to draw closer to God.
3. We are drawn closer to God by leaning more heavily upon Him for strength. James notes specifically that if we are struggling with a lack of wisdom then we should ask God who is willing to give us the wisdom we need if we will go to Him for such wisdom. Yet, we must be convinced that He will actually give us what we need or we will receive nothing from Him. **(1:5-8)** At the end of it all, James states that those who overcome will find approval with God and receive that which we all ought to all desire: the crown of life. We might naturally think of trials as being inherently negative, but the wisdom and understanding of God shows us the good they can bring about.

II. What Is Given By God & Satan (1:13-18)

1. Further, the wisdom that is of this earth might lead us to believe that God is the one who sends trials and temptations our way, but James makes it clear that those temptations are a result of what the devil is trying to do in defeating us and our faiths. It is the devil who tempts people for ***"God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone."*** **(1:13)** The evils we face in this world are not a result of God's will for us, but they are of the evil one who seeks our failure.
2. Yet, God does seek to give to us in this life, and that which He gives us are all of the good things that we enjoy in this life. ***"Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is not variation or shifting shadow."*** **(1:17)** This is said to make sure that we know exactly who our God is. He is the One, as we have already seen, who seeks to aid us in our trials. He is the one who blesses us with the good things we enjoy in this life. And that is simply who He is. That is His character. He is a loving God who desires to bless His grand creation, and while earthly wisdom might not lead us to believe this, the reality is clearly seen and spoken to by the inspired writer James. God loves us and wants the best for us.

III. True Love For All People (1:19-2:13)

1. Just as God loves us and will do what is best for us, so ought we to be a people who possess a true love for all of those who we might come in contact with. James reminds us to be ***"quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger,"*** **(1:19)** We ought to be very thankful for the patience of God towards us, and we ought to have that same patience with others because of the love we have for them. Further, we ought to make sure that this is part of our character just as it is part of the character of God. There is no variation or shifting shadow with Him, and we ought to not forget who we are in Him. We are not to just know who we are in Him, but we ought to behave as if we have truly embraced that great calling. **(1:21-25)**
2. This means that we will always show a great love for all other people no matter who they are. We must show love for the orphan. We must show love for the widow. We must show love for the poor and lesser dressed person as we do the wealthy and nicely dressed person. Any sort of bias that we have in our lives is not according to the will of God, but it is of the world. Those who hold to worldly wisdom think that it is ok to mistreat those we see as lesser than we are, but that completely fails to fulfill the royal law that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. **(1:27-2:9)** Any showing of partiality will only result in our falling short of God's high standard. Just as He loves us, we are to love all of those who are around us.

IV. The True Nature Of Saving Faith (2:14-26)

1. In the world, simply saying that we love others is often seen as enough, but according to God's wisdom in James we come to see that true love and true faith must be proven through action. It is

in this latter section of James that the inspired writer takes time to focus on the true nature of a faith like Abraham's that would be pleasing to God. He has just finished talking about how we ought to show true love for all people by treating them well and serving them rightly, and he then takes that idea and uses it to illustrate this next section.

2. If we have a neighbor that is in need, and yet we only wish for them to be made better without actually putting forth any effort to aid them then James says that our faith is worthless. That person is not a person of saving faith, but he is a person that is no better than the demons who acknowledge the right thing to do, but fail to do anything about it. They know who God is. They even tremble, and yet they continue to serve their father the devil. **(2:19)**
3. Instead, we ought to be people who follow in the footsteps of the great character of faith such as Abraham and even Rahab the harlot. Both of these individuals came to know the truth of God and what He would have them to do...and they did it! It is only this knowledge that is accompanied by faith and works that will help a man to be justified before God. Anything less than knowledge, trust, and action will only result in a dead faith. **(2:17,20,24,26)** The world might tell us that words are all that matter, and yet God's wisdom tells us that our actions better back up our words.

V. The Serious Power Of The Tongue (3:1-12)

1. This of course isn't to say that words are not important or significant. In fact, the following section of James puts great emphasis on the importance of our words. James starts the next chapter by saying, *"Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment."* **(3:1)** James words are clear...when you take on the responsibility of teaching others then you opening yourself up to an even higher standard because we are now speaking for God and what his word reveals.
2. And yet, it isn't only those who teach who must be very cautious with their words. The reality is that we must all be cautious with what we say for there is great power in the little tongue that is in each of our mouths. Worldly wisdom doesn't demand that we use our words wisely. Instead, we are told that we can say whatever we want to and others just have to deal with it. Such a sentiment is found nowhere in Scripture, especially here in **James 3:1-12**.
3. Instead, what we find are three illustrations to help us understand the power of our tongues. Just as bits and rudders control large horses and ships, and just as how a small flame can ignite a massive forest fire, so can our words do a great deal of damage if we are not careful with them. Whereas we are expected to bless God and encourage others with our words, the reality is that we can just as easily curse God and cut down others with our words. Yet, it is at this point that James emphatically states that those who are wise and understanding according to God will show it by their actions. What type of person are we? Are we wise according to God? If so, then we will only use our words for good and never to hurt others. However, if we fail to use our tongues wisely then we will be like the one described in **1:26** who's religion before God is worthless.

VI. Our Battle Against Fleshly Desires (4:1-5:11)

1. Our battle in controlling our tongue is only part of the larger war we are fighting against the desires of the flesh that Satan seeks to lead us to act upon. Again, it is God who leads us into difficulties, but it is Satan who seeks to lead us into quarrels, conflicts, lust, and adulteries. **(4:1-4)** He seeks to have us caught up in the sin of this world so that we might leave our faith and the Lord all together.
2. Yet, it is God's will and wisdom that should lead us to want to have God's Spirit dwell within us so that we might realized the need to submit and draw ourselves near to God. In doing so, we will resist the devil and only find ourselves in the presence of God where He will exalt us, and strengthen us to do as we ought to do. In the presence of God we will speak well of and to our brethren. We will only make future plans with God's will in mind. We will be willing to do the right thing when we become aware. **(4:5-17)**

3. This is true regardless of who we are or the position we find ourselves in in this life. If we are rich then we will make sure that we are using our riches rightly for the Lord which means realizing they are not the focal point of our lives. **(5:1-6)** If we are poor then we will be content with our portion in life and be patient for the glory that awaits us in the life to come. Worldly wisdom would push us to seek glory here and now, but God's wisdom teaches us to be as Job and endure the temporary sufferings for the eternal glory where we will enjoy the fullness of God's compassion and mercy. **(5:7-11)**

VII. The Value Of The Disciple's Prayers (5:12-20)

1. Worldly wisdom would tell us to simply rely on ourselves to get through struggles, but God in His mercy and goodness seeks to aid us through our ability to pray to God. This was seen at the very beginning of the letter, and now we see it show up again at the conclusion of the letter. God's wisdom would tell us that it is always a good time to pray and focus on God, and that is exactly what we see here in this text.
2. Are you suffering? If so, pray to God. Are you joyful? If so, then give thanks to God through song. Are you sick? If so, call for the elders and let them pray over you. Regardless of whether you see this as physical sickness or spiritual sickness, the principle is still true. Prayer to God never hurts! This is a blessing that is invaluable to the disciple of Jesus, and God is ready and willing to do great things through our prayers.
3. James even give the prayer of Elijah as an example of prayer doing great things when he prayed for rain to stop and it did, and then he prayed for the rain to return and it did, as well. And yet there is no greater use of our prayers than when we pray for the spiritual well being of others. We ought to be prayerful for the lost to turn or return to God, and when we do so there ought to be great rejoicing! Surely there is great value in the prayers of God's saints, and His wisdom and understanding only leads us to such a conclusion.

Some might look the Letter of James and see it as a letter than randomly deals with different subjects, but it is my hope that through our reading and study this evening that we will see that there truly was a purpose to the efforts of God through James. It all revolves around our willingness to seek out and embrace the wisdom and understanding of God. In doing so we will be like the man mentioned in the first Psalm. We will be like trees who are planted by water and firmly established in our efforts to bear fruit for the Lord. May God be with us and strengthen us as we continue to read and consider the truth, wisdom, and understanding that is found in His Word, specifically the New Testament Letters in 2019.