

## James 1:5-8

February 9, 2020

Life is a highway.

Or so sung Tom Cochrane in 1991. That refrain took greater hold of the American psyche—through the Pixar Movie—Cars. Rascal Flatts sang that version and that hit #7 on the top 100 billboard charts.

The lyrics say in part,

*Whoo um, yeah  
Life is like a road that you travel on  
When there is one day here and the next day gone  
Sometimes you bend, sometimes you stand  
Sometimes you turn your back to the wind  
There is a world outside every darkened door  
Where blues will not haunt you anymore  
Where brave are free and lovers soar  
Come ride with me to the distant shore  
We won't hesitate  
To break down the garden gate  
There's not much time left today*

[Chorus]

Life is a highway  
I want to ride it all night long  
If you are going my way  
I want to drive it all night long

Life is a road you travel on.

Last week, you might say, that James reminded us that Life is a Highway—and these lyrics would never sell—and you will have a lot of trouble on this Highway. But take heart, and rejoice. You have a destination. God is will make you complete and mature.

Excellent.

You might say. That is great to understand that I'm going somewhere meaningful and that no suffering will be wasted. But what about the road I'm travelling on now?

It is helpful to know that one day we will be perfect and complete lacking nothing, but what about today? What about now?

You might be saying—I am just having trouble getting out of bed, I need help now. I don't need to hear where I will end up but how to deal today!

I need resources to keep going. You might be feeling pain so intense that you feel like you are climbing a flight of stairs that has no end in sight. You might be saying—a destination is good—but I need something more right NOW to take that next step.

TODAY James talks about the next step. TODAY we are introduced to the help we have on the road we travel on until we are perfect, and complete lacking in nothing.

Last week we learned the purpose of trials, TODAY we learn the God-given method of making it through our trials.

HOW?

PROP: God gives wisdom to ALL who ask without guile.

WHAT?

God gives WISDOM to help all who ask.

But there is an exception—the double minded.

Those God Helps (by giving wisdom)

Those God Ignores (by leaving them alone)

I'm going to read beginning in James 1:2 so that we might be reminded of the context. It can be easy to think that verses 2-4 are about suffering and starting in verse 5, it is just the topic of wisdom in general. No.

Last week the point was: Take heart! God is building you through suffering.  
This week it is: Take heart! God can help you through suffering.

Let's read—

<sup>2</sup> Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, <sup>3</sup> for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. <sup>4</sup> And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. <sup>6</sup> But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; <sup>8</sup> he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. James 1:5—8

PRAY

### *1. Those God helps (James 1:5-6)*

Who does God help?

But that is what verse 5 says,

*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God*

Who? Any who ask.

Simple.

James is a man of few words. When he says, "*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God...*" we should hear this

If any of you lacks wisdom—about what to do when you meet trials of very kinds—let him (her) ask God.

In the scriptures, wisdom is always practical. The man or woman that is wise knows what to do in the moment to obey and honor God. And isn't that what we need when we are in the midst of hardship?

We need to know what to do.

You need to know what to do?

There are no magic formulations.

There are no special prayers.  
There is no religious tradition.  
There is no rite of passage.

Very simply, you ask. Ask for help.

You might think—that sounds all too simple. Ask for help.

Ask for help in ANY hardship.

Keep asking.

You might render this statement, "if any of you lacks wisdom, let him (or her) keep asking God..."

This means there is no hardship too small for him to give us wisdom in. It means you should NOT say, this really isn't a big deal I should know by now what to do, I can't really ask God. He will think I should be past this.

Keep asking.

This means that we must lean away from 'handling things' or 'being okay.'  
Christians must be people that understand that we all lack wisdom and need it from God.

Ask.

The means when things are so complicated and confusing and befuddling. This means you ask.

Ask.

This means when you think you know what you are doing and you have the way ahead mapped. You should ask.

Ask.

This even means when the tangle of troubles we are ensnared in is of our own making—we should get help.

Ask.

We must ask and keep asking for wisdom. You might render this statement, "if any of you lacks wisdom, let him (or her) keep asking God..."

When you don't know what to do—ask.  
When you aren't sure what to do—ask.  
When you think you know what to do—ask.  
When you are sure what to do—ask.

And he PROMISES to give to ALL how?

Without reproach. Did you see that?

Look again at verse 5,

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

How does God give? According to who he is. He is never stingy, miserly or tight-fisted. He is generous ready to give bountifully to ANY who ask for help.

He will give without reproach.

Do you know what that means?

When you ask he is NOT going to say—but you are such a sinner.

He is not going to say: You don't really deserve my help. You have such a bad day, heck you have had a bad week, month and life. Who are you kidding? Your thoughts have been particularly twisted and tainted. You are broken.

No. He gives without reproach.

When you ask he is NOT going to say—you should know better by now.

He is not going to say—You should know better by now. Really? Again? I thought we are past all of this. How long have you been a Christian and you can't handle this?

No. He gives without reproach.

When you ask he is NOT going to say—Finally you took long enough to ask. Now ask nicely and you might get some help from me.

He gives no reproach. In other words, he generously gives very differently than any of us do. He gives wisdom to any who ask without saying—

I told you.  
Finally.  
It's about time.  
You should listen.  
Insert Lecture.

He does not give like us because he is not like us. The truth is that he has good reason to reproach (rebuke) us, but he does not. We fall short. We are frail. We wander. We fall. We are broken. We make the same mistakes again and again.

In short, we sin.

But our sin does not cause him to withhold good things from us. He is generous.

He does not treat us as our sins deserve. We know that he gives generously. He has given us something that we would NEVER dare to ask. Not one of us would have the guts to say to the Living God—You know I am a treacherous, treasonous sinner. You know I am going to die and spend eternity apart from you. You know I am without hope.

Why don't you send your son to die—to become sin—for me so that I might have the righteousness of God?

That thought would not occur to us, but that is what we have. He is generous beyond what we could ask for. He has given his son, anything else is less precious.

Do you see this?

Listen how simple verse 5 is,

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

Ask for wisdom and you will get it. Period.

God promises to give us wisdom to help us in the midst of our hardships.

What he promises he will give. He promises wisdom to any who ask.

Notice what he does NOT promise—

Deliverance.

Change of circumstances.

You won't lose control.

An escape.

Understanding.

He promises to give us the wisdom to navigate in and through our hardships. Wisdom doesn't always seem like good news. He is not going to give us an escape plan, but he is going to help us understand what to do next. The wisdom he provides is next step wisdom.

Some of you just want out.

Others of you want to know how it will work out.

Some of you just want to know, "Why?"

He doesn't promise those things. He promises wisdom to be able to honor and obey him one step at a time.

Ask for help and he will give you the wisdom you need.

And that is usually how it goes following Jesus. He is much more apt to help us through something instead of lifting us out of something. And the choice is—do we want wisdom or not?

It is better to take what he promises instead of wishing he promised something else.

When you are in the midst of troubles—ask. Ask for help.

He helps those who ask in faith. Did you see it?

Verse 6,

<sup>6</sup> But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

James doesn't give us the words to say but tells us HOW to ask. We are to ask in faith with no doubting.

You might disqualify yourself right there. No doubting! I have never had a day in my life that I did not doubt.

I doubt.

I wonder.

I'll admit that right now.

Is James saying that we shouldn't bother to pray if we can't cleanse ourselves of every scrap of doubt? Is he asking that we clean ourselves up before we come to him?

No.

Perfect faith is never the prerequisite to answered prayer; authentic faith is.

In other words...

God knows doubt is inevitable—authentic faith in God is never perfect.

So what is he saying? What kind of doubt are we being warned against here?

James is not speaking of instances of doubt but of a settled doubt of God's goodness. There is a difference from wondering, "how can a good God let me go through this?" Or "How can this catastrophic situation be used for good by God?"

All of us have honest doubts. Remember the poor father in Mark 9—who cried out, "I believe, help my unbelief!" James is not saying that man should have expected nothing.

The Psalms are full of people going to God with their doubts. This is what we are to do with our doubts. Go to him.

So, what kind of DOUBT is James warning us against here?



This is a person who doesn't wholly follow Jesus. This is a person who sometimes follows God and sometimes does not.

This is the sort of doubt that is not so much measured by what a person says as how they live. The doubt James is assaulting here the person that is not wholly committed to following the Lord.

What is this person like?

for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

This is the kind of doubt that causes a person to always change, like a wave tossed to and fro by the wind. Let's see if we can understand what James is saying here—

When you watch the ocean you see that it is never at rest. You can see this and hear the crashing waves. Constant and never ending. The water is always churning and roiling and stirring.

It is never peaceful. Never still.

All of this movement is compounded when the wind starts blowing. As the gales rise the water dances all over.

Here is the idea—

Just the water is always moving and never at rest, the doubter is constantly restless. He is constantly moving to God then away from him.

To and then away.

To and then away.

To and then away.

To and then away.

James is NOT describing instances of doubt but a division of loyalties. Just as the seas do not maintain their shape for more than a moment so this kind of person is constantly shifting to God then away.

To and then away.

To and then away.

To and then away.

To and then away

What does this lifelong back and forth fueled by doubt do to a person?

They become someone God ignores.

We've seen that authentic Christians have the offer of help from our generous God—he gives wisdom.

The condemnation for imitation Christians gets more intense. We go from Those God helps to

## *2. Those God Ignores (James 1:7-8)*

The kind of person who can expect NO help.

Verse 7,

<sup>7</sup> For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;  
<sup>8</sup> he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

James' words are simple, but hard.

Verse 5 Ask—and it will be given.

Verse 6 Don't doubt or it won't be given.

More than that. The doubter is double-minded unstable in ALL his (her) ways. Whatever double-mindedness is it is bad news. Double-mindedness infects people with utter instability.

What is double-mindedness?

The words literally means double-souled.

We Christians we follow Jesus in an often hostile environment. We are citizens of the Kingdom AND of earth. There is a sense in which all of us live in two worlds.

That is NOT what James means by double-minded. The double-minded person is someone who tries to be two different people.

This person has a split allegiance. A dual loyalty. A Fractured devotion.

The Double-minded person sometimes follows God and sometimes does not.

This is the kind of person that God ignores. This is the kind of person that can expect NO help from the Lord. This the kind of person that the Lord leaves to founder in the waters of life to get battered about.

A picture might help.

Janus

**Janus** is the god of beginnings, gates, transitions, time, duality, doorways, passages, and endings. He is usually depicted as having two faces, since he looks to the future and to the past.



The Double-minded person does not look to the future and the past like Janus, they look both to and away from God. The double-minded lives a split kind of life—sometimes following God. Sometimes not following God.

It is a constant back and forth.

We cannot look two ways at once. We cannot be of two minds. We cannot have split allegiances. A split allegiance to Jesus is not allegiance at all.

The Double-minded is split.

The person who has split loyalties has no loyalties at all.

Sometimes the double-minded the Lord for help, guidance, solace and strength. And sometimes this person look s to money for help, guidance, solace and strength. Sometimes the double-minded follows the direction Jesus gives; and other times he follows the direction his family gives. Sometimes the double-minded care about the things Jesus cares about; sometimes they care more about what her dad thinks. Sometimes the double-minded will want to obey the Lord; other times the double-minded will want to obey their lusts. Sometimes the double-minded thinks it is worthwhile to sacrifice anything to Jesus; and other times the double-minded thinks it is worthwhile to sacrifice anything to be right. Sometimes the double-minded sing in church; and other times the double-minded cuss out their kids. Sometimes the double-minded follow Jesus and sometimes they don't.

The Double-minded person is split.

Being Double-minded is much more than honest intellectual doubt or questions. Saying—I don't understand is VERY different than saying—You aren't trustworthy.

The Double-minded goes back and forth

Again And  
Again And  
Again And  
Again And  
Again And

The Double-minded person tries to be two people at the same time.

Some of you might be alarmed. What is the difference between being double-minded and struggling against remaining sin?

Christians will always have remaining sin to battle—and they continue to battle. The double-minded don't fight against sin as much as try and manage and cope with it. They aren't aiming to kill sin as much as not be embarrassed by it.

- The double-minded hide sin and don't repent of it.
- The double-minded blame others for their sin and don't repent of it.
- The double-minded ignore sin and don't repent of it.
- The double-minded excuse sin and don't repent of it.
- The double-minded often hide a double life.

Do you see the difference?

The double-minded person is duplicitous. They try and be two people at once. The struggling, weak Christians is one person and is honest with their struggles. The double-minded person is a hypocrite. The weak Christian is the same person all the time even if that is weak.

The double-minded person is duplicitous.

One sign of the double-minded. He/she is not the same everywhere they are. Around Christians and on Sundays, they are one way. At work and the rest of the week, they are something different.

Are you the same wherever you are? Whatever you doing?

A divided devotion to Jesus is no devotion at all.

What can we do?

First, we must grasp that being double-minded is not an event in someone's life but a settled characteristic. Double-mindedness is a consistent inconsistency toward following the Lord. One of the reasons James sounds this warning so loudly is because the double-minded have the ability to hide in plain sight.

A double-minded person will probably say all the right things. The double-minded person could live a life with many good deeds. The double-minded man

may be convinced at some level of the veracity of Christian doctrine. The double-minded person might even resemble other followers of Jesus. Double-mindedness cannot be recognized in a choice, a word, or a day, but in a pattern and in a lifestyle. The double-minded person is known by his vacillating commitment to following Jesus.

NOTICE the effect that double-mindedness has—

Vs. 8,

<sup>8</sup> he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Unstable in all his ways.

There are two promises in our passage today—Christians who need help getting through life—the LORD will bless you with the wisdom necessary. The double-minded—the LORD will ignore you and let your life becomes completely unstable.

Complete instability might be a sign that you are double-minded.

The danger is that double-mindedness is not always obvious.

The peril of double-mindedness is particularly timely for church goers in the United States. We live in a country where it is easy to say you follow Jesus but be hypocritical. Legions of people may think they are okay with the Lord just because they believe the right things, go to church and are generally good citizens.

Double-mindedness engenders a holistic instability that can be more difficult to discern than financial instability, psychological instability, and familial instability.

One book says that the double-minded might look the part, but they are those “who refuse to let God interfere with their daily lives and goals.”

There are two kinds of people here—

Those God helps

Those God ignores

Which are you?

Christians—

Ask for help.

Life is a highway that we need the Lord's help to travel on. We need him to give us wisdom for the next step. Ask. Ask the Lord.

Don't make it harder than that. Don't expect the skies to part and God to deliver his wisdom to you via angelic messenger. Rather,

- Pray
- Read the Bible
- Ask the counsel of Godly friends
- Pray with friends
- Live to please the Lord
- Get counseling

May we be the opposite of double-minded—be fixed on Jesus.

What are you facing—ASK for help.

Pray. I'm going to pray for you as we close.

What if you think you might be double-minded and that God is ignoring you?

Double-minded—

He will not ignore those who confess their dual allegiances, their split lives, their one foot in one foot out and ask for help and forgiveness. We've seen he is a generous God who gives to all.

He can and will give you forgiveness.

God has sent his son who came with a single-minded purpose. To live and die and rise and ascend to God so that sinners—even duplicitous ride the fence kind of people might be able to come to him.

Ask for help without guile.

PRAY

"May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." 1 Peter 1:2