

The World According to Jim
"When the %\$#@ Hits the Fan...Pray"
James 1:5-8

Introduction

- Have you ever had a really good pickle? May I suggest the Toledo legend **Tony Packo's** pickles. In business since 1932 and made famous by a comment from Toledo native Jamie Farr's during a 1972 episode of M*A*S*H. Really good pickles.
- Speaking of pickles, last September **Reuters** ran a story about a Malaysian diplomat from Kuala Lumpur who mistook a gift box of sweet pickles for anthrax powder. Apparently, when the diplomat opened the box at his house he only saw white powder. Fearing it might be anthrax powder, he placed the parcel outside his house and called the police. When police examined the parcel the next day, they found it contained only sweet pickles. The powder was sugar sprinkled on top to preserve the pickles.¹
- Last week we talked about what to do when you face trials. What do you do when the you know what hits the fan? James' answer? **Verse 2**. *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds*. We're called to respond with joy when we fall into a bunch of trials. We talked about how "God permits what he hates in order to accomplish what he loves."² He has a purpose for our trials. They are spiritual opportunities. And the outcome of trials, rightly responded to, is completeness in all its parts, wholeness, and spiritual maturity.³ God says that if we turn to Him and respond with joy we'll end up *not lacking anything*.
- The problem is that it is totally unnatural to do that. It's totally unnatural to look at a trial and respond with joy. The natural thing to do is to freak out and mistake the pickles for anthrax. It takes incredible wisdom to stare your trial in the eye, respond with joy and see how God might use that particular trial for your benefit. *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything*. That kind of spiritual sight that sees trials the way James describes doesn't come naturally.
- So what do you do? What do you do when you stare your trial in the eye and there's no joy to be found? What do you do when you've been run through the ringer and the absolute last thing you want to do is say "yeah God, way to go God, a trial, just what I was hoping for." What do you do when you find yourself mistaking the pickles for anthrax? You pray. You pray. [Slide #3]

Proposition

- **When the pressing, gripping, crushing trials of life come your way you pray for wisdom**

¹ © Reuters, *The Man Who Mistook Pickles for Anthrax*, Monday, Sept. 24, 2007.

² Source Unknown.

³ Reinecker, p. 721.

- Trials plus no joy equals a call to prayer. Not seeing how your trial might benefit you means you lack wisdom. **Verse 5.** *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God.* From the Bible's perspective wisdom is something that leads to behavior that pleases God.⁴ It is not just knowledge. It is knowledge applied. It is understanding put into practice. From God's perspective if you're unable to respond to your trial with joy it's because you lack wisdom. It's a wisdom problem.
- If that's where you're at this morning, if you're unable to respond with joy to the trial you're facing then more than anything you need to pray. And you need to pray for wisdom. Why? Because prayer helps us take God's view of our trials—it's the key to rejoicing during the trial. Through prayer God grants the wisdom needed to see a particular trial as a cause for joy instead of a reason to panic. Through our prayers for wisdom we see the trial for what it is from God's perspective—sweet pickles instead of anthrax.
- That's the whole point of James 1:5-8 isn't it? *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. 6 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.*

Transition

[Slide #4] In these four verses James outlines...

Organizational Sentence

- **Two things to expect when you pray for wisdom**
- In the World According to Jim wisdom is what will see us through a trial. And we need to ask for it. Now the NIV is somewhat unclear on this asking business. *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God;* it's actually a command. *He should ask God* in the NIV is too weak. Not strong enough. Ask God. "In other words, lacking wisdom (in the midst of trials) does not give one the option of seeking God, but the obligation."⁵ We are commanded to ask for wisdom. We are obligated to ask for wisdom. Some of you need to pause right now and ask for wisdom to go through the trial you're facing. The application of all the divine benefits of trials we talked about last week will be perceptible only when wisdom is present.⁶

Transition

Again **verse 5.** *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.* The **first thing** you can expect when you pray for wisdom in the midst of a trial. [Slide #5] **Expect God to live up to his nature.**

Main Points

- Frequently the problem is that we too quickly forget what God is like. If he were like us he'd be stingy with his giving. His giving would be conditional. It would be fickle; you can count on him one moment but not the next. But that's not what God is like. It is in God's nature to

⁴ NDBT, p. 847.

⁵ Wallace, *Beyond Greek Grammar*, p. 486.

⁶ Moo, p. 57.

give and to give generously—all the time and without reservation. We just need to come to him and ask for what he longs to give. It is God's nature to give generously; sincerely "without hesitation or mental reservation."⁷ He doesn't find fault with our asking or turn us away because our requests are petty or silly. When you are going through a trial and need wisdom in order to respond with joy and you pray—**expect God to live up to his nature.**

- Proverbs 2:6 reminds us that *the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding*. God is the source of all wisdom. And he's more than willing to share. Jesus taught his followers in Matthew 7:7-11 *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. 9 "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!*
- Seriously, when was the last time you prayed for wisdom when going through a trial? We pray for release. We pray for deliverance. We pray for mercy. We pray for grace. But what about wisdom? We might have a different view of our trials if, first of all, we just prayed, and second of all, if the focus of our prayers was a request for wisdom. God's promise is that *he gives generously to all without finding fault*. God's not like "okay, here's some wisdom for you. And you. And you. But not you." Ask and *it will be given* without . God never tires of doing good. The more we come the more welcome we are, the more he gives. And He wants to know this morning why haven't you come to him in prayer. What are you waiting for? Why haven't you prayed for wisdom? "Don't restrict God in your thinking: *open wide your mouth and I will fill it* God says in Psalm 81:10. God's hand is open, but our hearts are not open."⁸ Will you let him fill you up this morning? That trial you're facing? If you have your list of trials from last week pull it out. Don't you want to see that trial from God's perspective? *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.* **Expect God to live up to his nature.**

Transition

[Slide #6] Now for the **second thing** we can expect when we pray for wisdom in the midst of a trial. **Verse 6.** *But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.* **Expect nothing if you ask with insincere, wavering intentions.**

- **Verse 5** reminds us of God's sincerity in giving to those who just come to him. He wants to see us flourish in the fire of trials. But **verses 6-8** raise the question of our sincerity. Or as one commentator says, "Do we want to go forward with God? Are we whole-heartedly committed to his way of seeing things and his ambitions for our future? Or are we keeping a door open for the world? Are we trying to have a foot in each camp? God's mind is clear; but are we double-minded?"⁹
- Let me qualify things a bit because none of us are perfectly free from doubts when we pray. James is not saying that in order for God to give us wisdom during our trial we need to pray

⁷ Davids, p. 73.

⁸ Manton, p. 31.

⁹ Motyer, p. 39-40.

with perfect faith. That's not what he's saying. If that were the case then none of us would be able to pray and receive God's wisdom. James has something a little bit different in mind. The word for *not doubt* in [verse 6](#) means not having stability, unsettled, unstable. It's a word used to describe both political disturbances and individuals who are unstable in character. It means vacillating.¹⁰ I think the phrase **wavering intentions** captures what James has in mind better than *not doubt*.

- For just a minute let's imagine a person who prays with insincere, wavering intentions while going through their trial. What does that look like? Let's say the trial is financial troubles; money problems. Maybe this person has lost a job and things are really tight. They know God takes care of his followers. And they realize the trial is a spiritual opportunity. They know God will use the trial to bring completeness and maturity. They've committed James 1:2-4 to memory and they want to respond with joy but they just can't figure out how this particular trial can be for their good. And so they turn to God and pray for wisdom. They want to respond to their trial with joy. They want to be a witness. So far so good.
- But there's a half-hearted sincerity to their prayers. On the one hand, they want God to work through their trials but on the other hand they just can't see how he will. And so they start to enact their own plan to get through their mess. On the one hand, they want God to work through their trial but on the other hand they just can't wait for him to work. James is warning us about our sincerity when we pray. Are we really willing to stick with God through the trial or are our prayers just lip service to him? How sincere are we in really wanting to find all we need for our trial in a sovereign and generous God? When we pray for wisdom, and we ask with insincere, **wavering intentions** James says we can expect to receive nothing from God. No wisdom.
- The attitude James calls for is as [verse 6](#) says *believing and not doubting*. It's what Romans 4:20 says of Abraham *Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God*.
- If our prayers are wavering insincerities James says that during our trials we'll become nothing more than tossing, blowing waves. *He who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind*. Not a crashing wave but a wave at sea that's never the same. As [Doug Moo](#) says, "The picture here is not of a wave mounting in height and crashing to shore, but of the swell of the sea, never having the same texture and shape from moment to moment but always changing with variations in wind direction and strength."¹¹ When push comes to shove we say we want wisdom but what we really want is a way out—our way out. And we're blown about, tossed about from one quick fix to another.
- And that's a recipe for instability. James says in [verse 7](#) *that man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does*. Have you ever tried to stand in a canoe? Talk about instability; imagine standing in a canoe in three foot swells. When you pray with wavering, insincere intentions during your trial it's like standing in a canoe in three foot swells. Widespread instability during the trial.¹² Too many of us are like shape shifting unstable waves during our trials because our prayers are wavering and insincere. We may pray during our trials but how trusting are those prayers?

¹⁰ Reinecker, p. 722.

¹¹ Moo, p. 61.

¹² Motyer, p. 41.

- In 1 Kings 18:21 it says *Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." But the people said nothing.* God knows your trials. They are sovereignly ordained for your good. It's totally unnatural to look those trials as a source of joy. Do you trust God for whatever has been brought into your life? Not seeing how your trial might benefit you means we lack wisdom. If we lack wisdom, it's a call to pray. Prayer helps us take God's view of our trials. Through prayer God grants the wisdom needed to see a particular trial as a cause for joy instead of a reason to panic. Are you ready to pray with sincere trusting hearts? God's more than willing to give. *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.*

Conclusion

- [[Show video](#)]