

*James 1:2-8 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, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

The first thing to notice about this passage is that endurance is a product of the testing of our faith. So many times in the past when my faith has been tested I have questioned my commitment to the Lord to endure. I saw endurance as something I brought to the trial and when I failed self contempt would always follow. But James tells us that endurance is a product of our trials not something we bring of ourselves. Our intense individualism in this country and the idea of pulling ourselves up by our own boot straps has made us think that trials of faith can be overcome by sheer determination and nothing more. But this is not the message James is preaching. We can't just gut it out and expect to pass the testing of our faith.

So if endurance is a product of trials not the resource by which trials are overcome, what is? Wisdom. Wisdom is what guarantees success, it is what enables us to endure our trials. Trials are often nothing more than wake-up calls to the fact we need God's wisdom. Sure we can go through life not studying scripture, not meditating on God's word, not having daily devotions, but one day all that neglect will catch up with us. The result will not be pretty I can assure you. If we are going to endure a trial we must go to God in prayer and ask for wisdom.

Paul mirrors James' advice in Romans 5:3-5. He says there is a sequence of steps by which trials make a man whole. Trial, experience, hope are the steps to a life that is complete lacking in nothing. Why? Because it is a life that has proof of God's love in it. A man that seeks God's wisdom and endures a trial of faith will have the experience of seeing God work in his life and therefore proof God has reconciled him to Himself. Do you want to know if God loves you? Then seek his wisdom and endure a trial of faith and you will have proof of His love for you. What do you think that would be worth to you when life turns upside down?

God is not in short supply of wisdom and will give it to all men James says generously and without reproach. But there are some conditions to receiving this resource. We must be single minded and without doubt when we ask. This may seem like a vicious circle. We must have trust in order to have trust? But the real question here is not the simple fact of trust, but what we are seeking with our trust. Trusting God for wisdom and trusting God for finances say, or health issues, or relationship problems are different in quantity and quality. Trusting God for wisdom is a small step compared say to Job's trusting God for finances, health and family. But it is the first step in being able to endure all these other various trials.

James says consider it all joy when you encounter various, or diverse trials. There are many things in this life we lack and need to trust God for whether it be security, intimacy, self-image, any number of things. Our insecurities can come in the form of lack of finances, lack of healthy relationships, lack of physical health either ours or those we love. Intimacy could be the lack of connection with our wife or husband or children. A poor self-image, not seeing ourselves in the proper light of God's love, can drive us to seek the favor of men instead of God. But James says there is one area we must trust God in first if we are to endure any of these other various trials and that is a trust in God's wisdom. James seems to be saying that any time you are going through a trial you must always start with God's wisdom if you are to endure.

To put legs to this I would like to give a personal example and one from scripture. Two years ago my son was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Who was I going to trust? Really in this situation it became quite evident there was only one person I could trust and that was God. But there was incredible pressure on me as a parent to get the best medical help I could and to make all the right decisions in regards to his treatment. But ultimately I as a father had to admit it was in God's hands. What wisdom though could get me through such a frightening time. I thought about Abraham being asked by God to sacrifice his son. What wisdom did God give him that would allow him to endure such a test of his faith. In Hebrews 11:19 I found my answer, "[Abraham] considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead." That wisdom God gave Abraham was given only because of Abraham's single mindedness to trust in God alone. Can you see now why single mindedness is so important? Without it you will be tossed and turned by every circumstance of life. Abraham could have considered a thousand reasons why not to sacrifice his son and they would have been the very reasons God asked him to.

For months I agonized over which hospital, which doctor, which treatment should we pursue. Finally I accepted the fact that ultimately my son's life was not in any of these things, but was in God's hands. I did the best I could and then walked away from it trusting God. My wife on the other hand in this situation was like the man tossed by the waves of doubt. Every time someone would suggest a different doctor, or a different treatment, or a different facility she was again thrown into indecision and panic. Even after treatment she still agonized over was it the right thing to do. Her trust was in men, not in the Lord. It was very difficult to see. She would have moments of trust and then again be blown another direction.

I too could have trusted the wisdom of men instead of God about what to do with my son's health, but the fact is often we got contradictory advice. Also working in the medical field myself I had no illusions as to the infallibility of medicine. Only the wisdom of knowing God could raise the dead allowed me to endure and ultimately have some sense of peace. I found peace in my experience that God loved me and my son. My wife though only found constant worry and torment. God's wisdom allows us to endure trials, but we must be single minded and without doubt committing ourselves to His wisdom completely.

If you look at the last thing James says about this commitment to God's wisdom you will find the term double-minded. It is very important that you understand what it means to be double-minded when it comes to seeking God's wisdom. All doubt really is having two seemingly viable choices. I say seemingly because there really is only one choice, we are just not aware of it. The problem is that we are often too afraid to question our faith and take the choice that seems not to be of faith leaving us with two seemingly viable choices. Our fear keeps us from being single minded because we are too afraid to contemplate choices that are not of faith and as a result remain double-minded. This may sound all wrong to you but I think it is why James reminds us that God gives wisdom to us without reproach when we ask Him for it. God will never reproach a man who is honestly seeking and that means even dead ends.

What choices did I have concerning my son's health? I had the choice that we are just machines that will one day quit running and cease to exist returning to the earth. This choice would mean my only hope would be in men educated in taking care of this machine. But it is a choice that makes my love for my son meaningless, his courage an illusion and life without purpose. Machines can't love, can't show courage, and certainly a world created by time and chance alone can't provide purpose for our existence. My other choice was to believe that my son is a creation of a purposeful, personal God who has a plan for his life. Even if that plan means only a short period here on earth. I came to this single mindedness because in my past I have let myself follow the path not of faith and found it to be a dead end. I thoroughly examined my other option and found it was not a viable choice to live in a world of time, chance and matter alone. Not only in a sense of hope, but in a sense of reality. Don't we as humans really love, really show courage, really need a purpose to survive. One could say water does not exist, but the very fact we thirst refutes such a claim. Our need of purpose then should also refute the fact we live in a world created but such things that are incapable of giving us purpose. Only a living, personal, purposeful God could provide for my need of purpose, which has left me single minded in my pursuit of his wisdom.

Trials of faith produce endurance by forcing us to seek God's wisdom. My journey to explore other options of faith as I just described was not academic. It was the result of a real crises of faith, but one God was faithful in supplying a generous amount of wisdom and without reproach. As James says he did not look down on me for my exploring other options, He just continued to give me his wisdom without condemnation and in larger and larger quantities as I needed it. It is that wisdom then that now allows me to endure another test of faith. The more testing we undergo the greater our understanding goes and the more complete Christians we become. With patience we are made perfect, because we gain the experience that God loves us when we endure. The problem is though we can also decide to step out of a trial, to give in to it and remain immature in our faith.

I have written here somewhat critical of my wife and her struggles, and I must admit wrongly so. James also tells us not to judge our brothers. I really don't know what is going on in my wife's heart. Talking to her about her struggles she reminded me that the joy of trials is not in the trial but the end of a trial. Her response was as Job's, "though He

slay me still I will trust Him.” The writer of Hebrews also reminds us that “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.” Hebrews 12:11 The book of Job also teaches us we cannot judge a man because of his trials either. Only God knows why certain people experience such hardships in their lives and the wisdom that gets us through those trials is often not an answer to why either.

The wisdom Abraham was given to get him through his trial of faith was not an answer to his trial. It really didn't answer why he was asked to sacrifice his son. We know after the fact that it was to show he revered God more than anything else, and that it was to be a foreshadowing of Christ, but Abraham didn't know that at the time. He and many people today even say it is totally contradictory to God's nature to ask him to do such a thing. We may never know why we are being tested the way we are and in the areas we are, but God will provide us with wisdom to endure, but the wisdom may not answer the question, “Why?”. Job never received an answer to his question, “Why?” but he was made complete in his testing by understanding who God was and therefore able to endure.