

Good and Perfect Gifts

Amid its descriptions of trials and testings, the book of James reveals the bestowing of God's wisdom and grace for every circumstance

The 1970s were a decade of significant breakthrough in my personal relationship with God. As a young wife and mother who had been saved at age 9, I found myself hungry for God, His presence, His voice, and the personal knowledge of Him that produces intimacy.

The decade had brought brokenness and blessing, but as I approached the threshold of the 1980s the Holy Spirit began to address deeper issues related to my perception of abundant Christian living. I found myself faced with a deep inner struggle over a call to public ministry.

During a day of prayer and fasting I sought God's will. I was happy in the shadows and shunned the limelight. Tenaciously I clung to the security and comfort of the background, but God wanted to take me to a new place in Him.

I could identify with Moses and his burning bush experience (see Ex. 3:1-4) as God worked to expand my understanding of relationship and obedience.

Moses pleaded: "But I'm not the person for a job like that. O Lord, I'm just not a good speaker. I never have been, and I'm not now!" (See Ex. 3:11; 4:10.)

Even with God's encouragement and promise of faithful help, he still cried, "Lord, please! Send someone else!" (See Ex. 4:11-13.) I understood.

Then Exodus 4:14 arrested my attention: "Then the Lord became angry" (The Living Bible). The New King James Version reads, "So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses."

In the fear of the Lord I wept bitterly and repented. I did not want His anger, only His mercies! The challenge was to arise from the back side of the desert that had become the place of intimacy.

God was changing the format. From the joy of private relationship, a call was sounding out for public duty, and God was looking for only one answer: yes, Lord.

Before the day was over, the Holy Spirit had given me a new assignment—to begin teaching interdenominational Bible studies in our area, something I had never done. Throughout the next six years of committed obedience, my life was forever changed. And it was particularly the study of the book of James that activated this transformation.

A Book of Blessing

My perception of this short book was simply that it was a hard teaching, nothing to entice me to embrace the message—a book that spoke mostly of what needed to be taken away. But because this had been selected for our course of study, I had to confront the truth James held. I was the appointed teacher!

As I prayed for God's help, something happened. The Holy Spirit brought this illumination: "You are looking at the book of James all wrong, seeing only what is to be taken away or overcome. Look again, for this book is about what I, as your heavenly Father, am waiting to give to you and any who will receive."

This comment changed my attitude toward the study, my personal ability to learn, my desire for change and my aptitude for blessing. Also, it changed my prayers, and one seemed to rise above all the others: "Lord, increase my capacity to receive good things from You!"

Each chapter in the book of James defines specific blessings God has for us. Each chapter also identifies the ploys of Satan and self that can separate us from the blessings.

As a whole, the book speaks of trials, testing, temptation, the struggle to control the tongue and the challenge to move from double-mindedness to a stable faith visibly validated in every area of our lives. It acknowledges that difficulties surface in life, even for believers.

But it also offers us encouragement to “Count it all joy when [we] fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of [our] faith produces patience” (James 1:2-3, NKJV). We may look at the trials that arise through everyday circumstances and feel overwhelmed.

But God sees His gift of joy, which is released as we endure and prevail. While we are often thinking about how hard some of the conditions and circumstances of life are, God, in His wisdom, is seeing the value of these situations.

God knows we need His wisdom to see the value, too. And He is willing to fill this need “liberally and without reproach” (James 1:5). In other words, He doesn’t remind us of our own unworthiness or ineptness concerning victorious living just so we can feel bad about ourselves. Instead, He lovingly calls us to come up higher.

He waits to lift us out of the mire of our own devastation to the grandeur of His excellence. He waits for us to move past our lack of wisdom into the provision of His wisdom, simply by asking for it. He wants us to refuse to be hampered by the feebleness of intellectualism or human speculation. God’s wisdom opens the eyes of our understanding, securing our faith and thrusting us into the safety of His holy purposes.

Through this process of exchange—asking for godly wisdom so that we can lay hold of understanding— we will find ourselves needing to move past a dependence on understanding itself. There is a place in God where even the desire for answers to our questions does not rule.

As we confront trials and tests, calling on God for His wisdom, the enemy will inevitably tempt us. James challenges us to persistently resist not only Satan, but also the roots of evil that lie within our own hearts; for “the heart is desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9). He speaks of a reward for those who overcome:

“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12).

Doers of the Word

The approval of God and a crown of life are given to those who persevere. This is the gift of God, and it includes the privilege of abundant living now. Yet, to receive the reward, the motives of our hearts must be confronted by the truth of God’s Word.

The temptation is to believe that God’s Word steals away our liberties, when actually just the opposite is true. What God offers is the wonder of divine blessing to anyone “who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work” (James 1:25).

God is waiting to bless us. However, we must answer a question: “Are we willing to receive according to the conditions He has chosen?” We cannot simply read or listen to God’s Word and think that is enough; we must be doers, also.

Our salvation is the gift of God in all its majestic facets of grace for daily Christian living. It will propel us toward high-level obedience while steadily increasing our capacity to receive more from God. It is not necessarily a life of ease, but it is a life of glory.

I encourage all believers who want the abundant Christian life to read the book of James to discover what God is offering to give. Pray that your heart will be increased in its capacity to receive good things from the Father, for every good and

perfect gift comes from Him (James 1:17). Become a blessed recipient continually. It is His delight for every child of His.

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