

Martin Luther didn't like the epistle by James. He called it an "epistle of straw," for it entirely lacks any clear teaching about God's grace and our saving faith in Christ.

That's why we're going to look at few of the key passages of James during Lent! It's a challenge to read this little book and to not feel at least a little guilty for our lack of progress in discipleship.

I want to talk about James' instruction for the Christian, about how we should walk with God and with one another in light of the Good News of Easter.

OPENING PRAYER

JAMES 1:5-8

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸*being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Let's see a show of hands: Who among us is wise? Well, if we would like to become wise, we might pay heed to James' instruction. He wrote, **"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (v.5).**

I'm pretty sure all of us have asked God for wisdom. But consider how James framed his statement: He said, **"If any of you lacks wisdom."** Was he assuming that there were some who were indeed wise? I don't think so. For in the preceding verses he wrote, **"Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."**

James was saying that if we're to find relief from our trials, that if we're to find help when we are tested, we will find it in the wisdom of God. This kind of wisdom was not about choosing the right car or spouse; it wasn't about making a decision about where to send your kids to school or what book to read. This is about experiencing the presence of God in our minds and spirits when confronted with temptations, and then finding the will, the courage, and the power to resist them.

Thus we ask God for wisdom; we pray that his thoughts would become our thoughts; we pray that instead of falling into temptation and sin that we would endure and that our faith would grow.

Sounds easy enough. That is, until doubt begins to creep up on us. One of the church fathers said that the cause of doubt may be one's "biting conscience," that we doubt we'll receive anything from God because we don't believe he has ever answered our prayers, which may be true. For, he wrote, we may've already succumbed to the pleasure of sin in our double-mindedness, and the Lord does not hear such prayers.

Let me draw a picture for you. Imagine sitting in your easy chair at home, and you're watching a movie. In your lap is a box of See's chocolates. And as you gaze into that box of chocolates, you pray, "Dear Father in heaven, help me to give up chocolate for Lent." It's not going to happen. This is a silly example of double-mindedness, but we do it all the time. We gossip because we're already hating on the person we're about to slander. We sabotage a person's work because we're already calculating how we can get even with them. We're meanspirited and cross because we've already been stewing about how the world owes me something.

The point is this: We want God to transform our hearts and take away our sinfulness while we still revel in it! The church father noted that to make matters worse the devil will be extra angry with you for your prayers to God and he will attack you even harder than he did before!

But here's the Good News: Jesus said, **"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸For everyone who asks**

**receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened”
(Matthew 7:7-8).**

In his grace and mercy, Jesus knew what we needed before we did, and he gave it to us: He gave us himself crucified on a tree and risen from the grave so that the Father could hear our prayers and answer them.

The church father wrote that God isn't interested in perfect people. Rather, God needs WISE people! For the wisdom God pours into our hearts and minds leads to perfect actions by his people.

During Lent let us ask God to reveal our sin, that we would be stricken in our consciences for what it does to our relationships with the people around us and with God himself.

During Lent let us claim Christ's promise to answer our prayers, and let us ask him for wisdom to overcome everything that stands between us and a pure relationship with our Father in Heaven.

And during Lent let us share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.