

II. The Trials of Life

September 23/25/26, 2019 James 1:2-12

OT: Pr. 2:1-6; Is. 40:6-8

NT: Mt. 7:7-11

Aim: To understand that God brings trials into our lives for our sanctification to make us more like our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Moo: After the initial epistolary opening most NT letter writers express appreciation for their readers in the form of a thanksgiving or offer a blessing to God for His abundant spiritual provision. Not so James. He launches directly into exhortation.

A. The Purpose of Trials (James 1:2-4)

Moo: By placing trials in this position of prominence in the letter, James suggests that the tough times the believers were facing were a key reason for his writing to them. As do Paul (Rom. 5:2-4) and Peter (1 Pe. 1:5-7) in similar passages, James reminds his readers that God brings difficulties into believers' lives for a purpose, and that this purpose can be accomplished only if they respond in the right way to their problems.... Implicit in what James says is a conviction that the suffering of believers is always under the providential control of a God who wants only the best for His people.

1. A Joyful Attitude (1:2)

²*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds...*

a) My Brothers (1:2b)

MacArthur: By addressing his readers as 'my brethren,' James makes clear that he is speaking primarily to Jewish believers, as he does throughout the letter (see also 1:16, 19; 2:1, 5, 14; 3:1, 10, 12; 4:11; 5:7, 9, 10, 12).

Moo: James' favorite address of his readers is 'my brothers' (see also 2:1, 14; 3:1, 10, 12; 4:11; 5:7, 9-10, 12, 19) or the variant 'my dear brothers' (1:16, 19; 2:5). Both Jews and pagans broadened the word 'brother' to describe fellow members of the same religion... When used in this spiritual sense, the word includes both men and women.

Morgan: Though James often comes across forcefully with his frequent admonitions and imperatives, his preferred address to these believers is warm: 'my brothers.' [Obviously, James' use of the masculine term 'brothers' was not intended to exclude the believing community's women, his 'sisters' in the Lord.] He uses this throughout the letter (2:1, 14; 3:1, 10, 12; 4:11; 5:7, 9-10, 12, 19). Sometimes he even addresses the community as 'my beloved brothers' (1:16, 19; 2:5). This designation, though common in the New Testament, should not be overlooked. It indicates several important realities. First, we clearly see that James is addressing Christian believers. Second, we should note that James is also stressing that he is united with them in the spiritual family of God. Third, the tone is undoubtedly affectionate, showing the oft-neglected warmth of James.

b) Count It All Joy (1:2a)

Morgan: Using a play on words (*charein*, translated 'greetings' in 1:1 is picked up by *charan*, translated 'joy' in 1:2), James urges his readers who face such circumstances to 'consider it all

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joy’ (the verb is an imperative). This is the heart of James’ exhortation in 1:2-11. In the Greek text, ‘joy,’ the object of the verb, is placed first for emphasis. ‘Consider’ (from *hēgeomai* – ‘a deliberate, calculated decision’) it ‘all joy’ (NASB), ‘pure joy’ (NIV), ‘nothing but joy’ (NSRV). Believers experiencing such trials are not told simply to ‘hang in there’ or even to be more detached, as a Stoic philosopher would say. Instead, James asserts that joy is the proper response and perspective for trials (cp. Rom. 5:1-5; 1 Pe. 1:6-7).

Moo: ‘Pure joy’ is a good rendering of the Greek phrase *pasan charan* (‘lit., ‘all joy’) since the word *pas* here probably suggests intensity (complete and unalloyed joy) rather than exclusivity (nothing but joy)... James does not, then, suggest that Christians facing trials will have no response other than joy, as if we were commanded never to be saddened by difficulties. His point, rather, is that trials should be an occasion for genuine rejoicing.

MacArthur: The Greek verb *hēgeomai* (‘consider’) is an imperative because joy is not the natural human response to trouble. Christians are under divine command not simply to be somewhat joyful in their trials but to look upon them with ‘all joy.’ That phrase is variously interpreted by commentators as meaning pure joy, unmixed joy, complete and total joy, or sheer joy. From the context, it seems that all of those meanings are fitting. James is speaking of a unique feeling of joy that the Lord graciously provides His children when they willingly and uncomplainingly endure troubles while trusting in Him—regardless of the cause, type, or severity of the distress. He will always use them for our benefit and for His own glory. It is not because of some sort of religious masochism, but rather a sincere trust in the promise and goodness of our Lord, that we can look on trials as a welcome friend.

Hughes: James is not ordering *all-encompassing joyful emotion* during severe trials; nor is he demanding that his readers must *enjoy* their trials, or that trials are *joy*. He knew, as did the writer of Hebrews, that “for the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant’ (Heb. 12:11)... Rather, James is commending the conscious embrace of a Christian understanding of life that brings joy into the trials that come because of our Christianity. James says, ‘*Count* it all joy,’ which means to make a deliberate and careful decision to experience joy even in times of trouble.

Dorani: ‘Consider’ means we must make a mental judgment about trials. From our vantage point, most trials seem like tragic accidents. Yet James says we should rejoice, for trials have a purpose. They can strengthen our faith. Human speaking, trials seem like random evils that fall on us. But our Sovereign oversees the trial itself and oversees us in the trial, so it strengthens and deepens our faith.... Nor do we comfort ourselves with the vague nostrum ‘Everything will work out in the end.’ Scripture promises that ‘for those who love God all things work together for good.’ It does not promise that everything works out for everyone (Rom. 8:28). Nor does James promise that everything will work out in this life..... We do not rejoice over the trial itself, nor do we feign indifference to pain. Rather, disciples should be like women who rejoice to learn that they carry a child. A woman knows she faces nausea and painful childbirth, but she rejoices because she looks past the adversities of the process and sees the end—the birth of her child. So it is with the Christian.

c) *When You Meet (1:2c)*

MacArthur: *Hotan* (‘when’) is in the subjunctive mood and carries the idea not just of possibility but inevitability. In other words, ‘various trials’ are certain to come and should be expected as

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part of living life on this present earth. *Periptō* (‘encounter’) has the literally meaning of falling into, usually unexpectedly (cp. Lk. 10:30; Acts 27:41).

Morgan: Notice that James does not say *if* you encounter trials, but *when*. Both the temporal construction (*hotan* with a subjunctive mood) and the verb ‘fall’ itself suggest the idea of unexpectedness, much like the man who ‘fell among thieves’ on the way to Jericho (Lk. 10:30).

d) *Trials (1:2d)*

Moo: The word that is translated ‘trial’ – *peirasmōs* – and its verbal cognate – *peirazō* – are important words in this section; we find *peirasmōs* in vv. 2 and 12 and *peirazō* in vv. 13 and 14. These words have two distinct meanings in the NT. They can denote either an outward trial or process of ‘testing,’ or they can denote the inner enticement to sin: ‘temptation’ or ‘tempt.’ The latter meaning is seen in verses such as 1 Tim. 6:9.... 1 Pe. 4:12, on the other hand, is a good example of the other meaning.... In verse 2, however, *peirasmōs* means ‘trial.’ The surrounding language makes this clear: believers run the risk of ‘falling into’ (*periptō*; translated ‘face’ in NIV) these trials, which have as their purpose the ‘testing’ of faith and need to be ‘endured.’ These same terms are used elsewhere in the NT when *peirasmōs* has the meaning of ‘trial’ (see esp. 1 Pe. 1:6).

MacArthur: ‘Trials’ is from *peirasmōs*, which has the basic meaning of trying, testing, assaying, or proving. The word itself is neutral and can have negative or positive connotations, depending on the context.... The verb form of the word, in fact, is rendered ‘tempted’ or ‘tempt’ in James 10:13, where the idea is clearly that of solicitation of evil. In the present text, however, James obviously has in mind the idea of testing through trouble that is caused by any sort of hardship, problem, or difficulty.

Morgan: ‘Trials’ comes from the Greek *peirasmōs*, and can carry either of two connotations: one, a testing or refining to prove one’s character, and two, an enticement to evil. Clearly, the first connotation is in view here in 1:2-3 while the latter is the idea later in 1:13.

e) *Of Various Kinds (1:2e)*

MacArthur: ‘Various’ translates *poikilos*, which has the literal meaning of variegated, or many-colored, and came to be used figuratively of things that are diverse or varied. James’s point is that the trials we encounter will come in many shapes, shades, and degrees. It is not that every individual Christian will suffer every kind or degree of trouble, but that Christians in general are subject to troubles of every kind from every possible source.

Morgan: ‘Various,’ rendered ‘divers’ in the KJV, is a ‘colorful’ term. It comes from *poikilos* and means variegated or multi-colored. The LXX uses this word to refer to Joseph’s coat of many colors in Genesis. Christians can expect challenges to their faith to come in many unexpected shapes, forms, and colors.

Moo: What were the ‘trials’ that James’s readers were enduring? Poverty must certainly have been prominent among them. James’s letter is filled with references to poverty and wealth (1:9-11; 2:1-7; 2:15-17; 4:13-5:11) and he makes clear that at least the majority of his readers are poor. James 2:6-7 makes pretty clear that religious persecution was one of the causes of the poverty the believers were experiencing.... Contributing to the readers’ poverty as well was their situation as exiles, forcing them to establish themselves in a new and strange situation. And this in turn suggests that the ‘trials’ James mentions include more than religious persecution. BY stressing that the trials were of ‘many kinds,’ James deliberately casts his net widely, including

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the many kinds of suffering that Christians undergo in this fallen world: sickness, loneliness, bereavement, disappointment.

f) Application

(1) Trials Are Painful

Morgan: James is not offering advice as some self-help or positive thinking guru. He is not saying: ‘I know you are hurting, but be positive. Smile. Don’t worry; be happy.’ Further, James is not offering glib advice that too often comes from well-intentioned but unwise people at times such as funerals. Nor is James saying that suffering is good.... So, what does James intend then? As he does so often in this epistle James here echoes the teachings of Jesus on suffering and persecution in the Sermon on the Mount (cp. Mt. 5:10-12)... When you are persecuted on My behalf, Jesus says, rejoice, for you are blessed.

MacArthur: We are not just to act joyful, in reluctant pretense, but to be genuinely joyful. It is a matter of will, not of feelings, and should be the conscious, determined commitment of every faithful believer. And because God commands it, it is within the ability, under the Spirit’s provision, of every true Christian.... The more we rejoice in our testings, the more we realize that they are not liabilities but privileges, ultimately beneficial and not harmful, no matter how destructive and painful the immediate experience of them might appear.... Our Lord Himself, ‘for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the same’ (Heb. 12:2). He looked beyond the trial to the joy that He knew would be His when the trial was over and it had accomplished the glorious work it was divinely ordained to accomplish.

(2) Trials Are Inevitable

Morgan: It is important to note that trials can and do come to faithful Christians and healthy churches. The proponents of the health and wealth theology need to read afresh passages such as James 1:2-12 and 5:1-8, as well as Romans 5:1-5, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, 1 Peter 1:5-8, and 2 Timothy 3:12. Christians should not be surprised when they face trials. Trials will come, and God aims to use those trials to mature His churches and His people.

2. An Understanding Mind (1:3)

³...*for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.*

a) For You Know That (1:3a)

Moo: Why can believers react to trials with so strange and unexpected a response as joy? Because we know that God uses trials to perfect our faith and make us stronger Christians. So runs James answer in vv. 3-4.... Both Paul (Rom. 5:3-4) and Peter (1 Pe. 1:6-7) say much the same thing that James says here.

MacArthur: *Ginōskō* (‘knowing’) carries the idea of full understanding of something that is beyond the merely factual and that comes from personal experience.... As Christians, we know from our own experiences, as well as from God’s Word, ‘that the testing of [our] faith produces endurance.’ We have learned that His promise is indeed true, for, after we have endured suffering, affliction, or testings, we have discovered that our trust in the Lord is not only intact but is all the stronger for the testing.

Morgan: Do not miss the fact that James here associates trials with the testing of faith.... James asserts that God is at work using the suffering as a testing of the faith of His people.

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b) *The Testing of Your Faith (1:3b)*

MacArthur: ‘Testing’ is from *dokimion*, a completely different term from *peirasmos* (‘trials’) used in the previous verse, but one that carries much the same meaning. Both have the basic idea of testing something in order to prove or disprove its genuineness or validity.

Moo: ‘Testing’ translates a rare Greek word (*dokimion*), which is found elsewhere in the NT only in 1 Pe. 1:7 and in the Septuagint only in Ps. 11:7 and Pr. 27:21.... The two OT occurrences both denote the process of refining silver or gold, and this is the way James uses the word. The difficulties of life are intended by God to refine our faith: heating it in the crucible of suffering so that impurities might be refined away and so that it might become pure and valuable before the Lord. The ‘testing of faith,’ here, then, is not intended to determine whether a person has faith or not; it is intended to purify faith that already exists.

c) *Produces Steadfastness (1:3c)*

Moo: Testing produces, first of all, *perseverance*.... The picture is of a person successfully carrying a heavy load for a long time. The NT repeatedly emphasizes the need for Christians to cultivate this quality of perseverance or steadfastness when facing difficulty (see, e.g., Lk. 8:15; 2 Th. 1:4; Rev. 2:2; 13:10). But James suggests that trials can also produce this quality of endurance. Like a muscle that becomes strong when it faces resistance, so Christians learn to remain faithful to God over the long haul only when they face difficulty.

Morgan: *Hupomonē* has been translated as perseverance, endurance, steadfastness, fortitude, and patience.... The etymology of *hupomonē* paints a picture of successfully carrying a heavy load for an extended period of time. Like a muscle that becomes strong when it faces resistance from a weight, so Christians develop spiritual strength and stamina through facing trials. It is hard to imagine how perseverance could be developed in any way other than by such resistance, since it seems that perseverance presupposes a pressure to endure.

MacArthur: ‘Endurance’ is from *hupomonē*, which is frequently translated ‘patience,’ but here connotes more the product, or consequence, of patience, which is ‘endurance.’ Patiently enduring trials while trusting in the Lord develops endurance, which has a lasting quality. Patience is needed only as long as the affliction or trouble is present, for, when it is over, patience no longer has a purpose. But ‘endurance’ is a permanent inner quality of strength, which increases each time a trial is patiently and trustingly endured.... Perseverance is inseparable from holiness. A life that is consistently immoral and unspiritual cannot possibly persevere because it does not belong to God, does not have His divine protection, and has no real desire to persevere to the end.

Dorani: Endurance...is no passive thing. Perseverance is strong and active. To persevere is to continue in the right path when continuation is difficult. In fact, true virtue does not exist without perseverance.

Hughes: The rationale for such joy comes from knowing that the various trials we face have spiritual value. James says there is a two-step process through which our trials elevate us. The first step is to understand that ‘*the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.*’ ... James is talking about toughness—‘*the testing of your faith produces toughness.*’ Here is how this works: we develop toughness or fortitude by repeatedly being tested and *prevailing*. The more tests we pass, the tougher we become.

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3. A Mature Christian (1:4)

⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

a) And Let Steadfastness (1:4a)

MacArthur: The only way out of a trial is through it. The Lord promises no bypasses, only that He always will see His people through the trials without their suffering spiritual harm. But God cannot do His ‘perfect and complete’ work in and through us without our willing submissiveness. When we learn to rejoice in our trials and come to understand that our gracious heavenly Father uses them not to harm us but to strengthen and perfect us, then we are motivated to embrace them as beneficial.

Moo: Valuable as it is, perseverance is not itself the final goal of testing.... The benefits of testing come only to believers who respond to them in the right way: Christians must *allow* endurance to do its intended work

b) Have Its Full Effect (1:4b-d)

Moo: What is this ‘perfect work’ that perseverance is intended to achieve. The phrase could denote the full extent of the perseverance itself.... But James’s deep concern throughout the letter that believers respond to God’s grace with sincere obedience suggests that the word ‘work’ [‘effect’] here summarizes the many dimensions of the ideal Christian character.

(1) That You May Be Perfect (1:4b)

Hughes: The rationale becomes even clearer when we observe the second step: *perseverance produces maturity*.... Spiritual perseverance or toughness produces a *dynamic maturity*. ‘Perfect’ refers to a personality that has reached its full development.

MacArthur: ‘Perfect’ is from *teleios*, which does not connote moral or spiritual perfection or sinlessness, but rather refers to that which is fully developed.... The word is therefore better rendered ‘mature,’ referring to spiritual maturity fulfilled in Christlikeness, which is the goal of endurance and perseverance.

Moo: The Greek word here is *teleios*, and its meaning can go in two slightly different directions. In Greek moral philosophy, this word usually had the meaning ‘perfect.’ But in the OT and in Jewish literature, *teleios* is colored by its Hebrew background and comes to mean ‘complete’ or ‘mature.’

Morgan: Perseverance, that unswerving tenacity to endure under pressure, will fashion in us: 1) ‘perfection’ or maturity. The term does not suggest that we will be faultless and flawless; rather, we will experience the reality that life’s trials help us by grace to reach a level of maturity we would not otherwise attain.

(2) And Complete (1:4c)

MacArthur: ‘Complete’ translates a form of *holoklēros*, which carries the idea of being whole, entire. The prefix *holo* is the term from which we get *holograph*, a 360-degree, three-dimensional depiction of an object.

Morgan: 2. ‘Complete’ indicates a fully developed character; ‘entire’ is a good sense of the word.... He develops us into ‘complete’ believers. This word comes from *holoklēros*, ‘whole,

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fully furnished.’ ... Together the words describe a well-rounded believer who is mature beyond the norm in Christian growth.

Moo: The difference between ‘perfect’ and ‘complete’ is not large. For the Christian who has attained ‘completeness’ will also be ‘perfect’ in character. James, we must remember, is presenting this as the ultimate goal of faith’s testing; he is not claiming that believers will attain the goal. But we should not ‘lower the bar’ on the expectation James sets for us. Nothing less than complete moral integrity will ultimately satisfy the God who is Himself holy and righteous, completely set apart from sin.

(3) Lacking in Nothing (1:4d)

MacArthur: To allow no possibility for misunderstanding, James adds ‘lacking in nothing,’ reinforcing the comprehensiveness of his point. That is the end result of trials: maturity, completeness, not lacking in anything of spiritual importance and value.

Morgan: What does God mean by ‘lacking nothing’? In the midst of trials, we have received full spiritual endowment to endure any trial which comes our way. We lack nothing because we have received ‘all spiritual blessings’ (cp. Eph. 1:3).

Moo: When endurance is allowed to run its course and attain its goal, believers will be *mature and complete, not lacking anything*. ‘Mature’ translates *teleios*, and we would argue again for a stronger rendering. The word ‘complete’ suggests the idea of wholeness and soundness, in contrast, for instance, to ill health (see Acts 3:16). Testing, James suggests, is intended to produce, when believers respond with confidence in God and determination to endure, a wholeness of Christian character that lacks nothing in the panoply of virtues that define Godly character. This concern for spiritual integrity and wholeness lies at the heart of James’s concern, and he will come back to the matter again and again (see esp. 1:7-8 and 4:4-5).

c) Application

Dorani: God *can* use all of life’s sorrows—and all its joys—to bring believers to maturity. But it is misleading to use James 1 as the first word in grief counseling. When Jesus met Mary and Martha, after their brother Lazarus died, He did not say, ‘God has a purpose in this’—even though He knew God did. First He comforted them, then He wept with them (Jn. 11:19, 34). To use James for grief counseling is to miss its primary intent. When James says believers should rejoice in trials because they test our faith and develop maturity, he addresses more than the hour of crisis or sorrow. James wants the church to live out its faith in the crucible of life, in all its test.... As James sees it, God fashions maturity and endurance by means of the trials that befall us. Do we take responsibility and endure, or doubt and blame God? Our response to trials reveals our heart condition.

Morgan: Trials in believers’ lives do not represent their spiritual levels; rather, they provide the opportunity to reveal their levels and then exercise spiritual attitudes in the situation. Endurance is a work that matures us. Accordingly, God uses trials that build and repair us where we have breaches in our spiritual life. Part of working out our salvation is the enduring of trials that mature us when we approach them with the proper attitude.

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B. The Prayer for Wisdom (James 1:5-8)

MacArthur: A fourth means to perseverance in trials is a believing heart, a comprehensive phrase that summarizes these four verses.

Hughes: James...instructs those who are suffering on how to get the wisdom necessary to plow victoriously through life's many trials. James, brother of one whose life was filled with trials and who died at the hands of murderers, is telling us how to lasso the bucking, uncontrollable trials of life and ride them to wisdom and triumphant spirituality.

1. Ask for Wisdom (1:5)

⁵*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.*

a) *If Any of You Lacks Wisdom (1:5a)*

MacArthur: The first requirement for such belief is godly understanding. Especially when they are going through trials, believers need a special measure of understanding to help them through and that need should drive them to 'ask of God' to supply that understanding and 'wisdom.' Strong, sound faith is not based on feelings but on knowledge and understanding of the promises of God's truth, which is spiritual wisdom.

Morgan: James states that we need wisdom, *Sophia*, not just knowledge, *gnosis*.... Real-life trials require real-life answers, and James has little interest in speculative, philosophical notions about wisdom. Here, without question, he speaks of wisdom as the practical use of the knowledge we have, the ability to respond to life's challenges from God's perspective.

Moo: James' exhortation to his readers to ask for *wisdom* echoes widespread OT and Jewish teaching. 'The LORD gives wisdom,' proclaims Proverbs 2:6, and the importance of wisdom is the central theme of this OT book. Wisdom is the means by which the godly can both discern and carry out the will of God (e.g., Pr. 2:10-19; 3:13-14; 9:1-6). Wisdom will therefore keep a person from immorality and enable him or her to be acceptable to the Lord. Finding wisdom, claims Proverbs, means finding life and receiving favor from the Lord (Pr. 8:35).

Hughes: What is this wisdom for which we are to ask? The idea becomes clear when we see what it is *not*. It is *not* knowledge. Wisdom is far more than the accumulation of information and intellectual perception.... Wisdom, therefore, in distinction to knowledge, is understanding for living. And *Biblical wisdom* is understanding for living that surpasses earthly wisdom. It is temporally and eternally practical, ... 'the practical use of knowledge.' ... The Scriptures teach that this practical wisdom is rooted in the fear/reverence of God (cp. Ps. 111:10; Pr. 1:7; 9:10).

b) *Let Him Ask (1:5b)*

MacArthur: 'Let him ask' translates an imperative verb in the Greek. James is not giving personal advice but a divine command, and therefore our calling on the Lord for wisdom is not an option. It is mandatory. And if a believer who is being tested is not driven to the Lord and does not develop a deeper prayer life, the Lord is likely to keep the test active and even intensify it until His child comes to the throne of grace.

Morgan: Knowing that we need God's wisdom so that our trials will not be wasted, how then do we receive this needed virtue? Quite simply, 'Let him ask from God.' Here is another of James's imperatives; it is the present tense of *aiteō* and could be understood as 'let him keep on asking.'

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Moo: The combination of exhortation and promise in the second part of verse 5 – *he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given to him* – is an intentional echo of Jesus’ pithier “Ask and it will be given to you” (Mt. 7:7a). Jesus goes on in this section of the Sermon on the Mount to ground God’s response to our prayer in His character.... James follows the same pattern.

c) *God (1:5c-e)*

Morgan: James makes three affirmations about this promise.

(1) Who Gives Generously to All (1:5c)

First, James 1:5 literally reads, ‘Let him ask *the giving God.*’ It matches the final statement ‘and it will be given to him.’ James labels the Lord ‘the giving God.’ When God gives, He acts according to His nature or character. Second, James says God gives to all ‘generously.’ The word literally means ‘simply.’ Simplicity is generous in this sense: the simple gift is a pure gift. It neither returns a favor previously given nor expects a favor in return. The simple gift neither pays back nor expects a payback. That is, God’s gifts do not become debts. He delights in giving; it is His nature to give without calculating the return. Third, the Lord gives ‘to all.’ That is, He does not play favorites. God is generous to all His children.

Hughes: In the original, the phrase ‘God who gives’ graphically emphasizes giving as a grand characteristic of God. It reads literally, ‘let him ask the constantly giving God.’ ... God is like a pitcher tilted toward His children, just waiting to pour wisdom over the trial-parched landscape of their lives, if they will but ask.

Morgan: First, God will give this wisdom ‘liberally.’ This adverb (*haplōs*) occurs only here in the New Testament and its precise connotation is unclear. Some commentators think the idea is that God gives ‘simply,’ with no ulterior motives. Others say, and we agree, that it refers to the abundant and unconditionally generous way God gives.

Moo: God gives us wisdom when we ask because He is a God who *gives generously*. The NIV translation ‘generously’ reflects the dominant tradition in English versions (the Greek word is *haplōs*). This certainly seems to be the meaning of the cognate word that Paul uses in his discussion of giving in 2 Cor. 8:2; 9:11, 13 (cp. also Rom. 12:8). Yet another possibility should be considered. The Greek word involved is found only here in the NT. It comes from a root whose basic meaning is ‘single,’ ‘simple.’ ... The evidence suggests that James is not so much highlighting God’s generosity in giving as His single, undivided intent to give us those gifts we need to please Him.

MacArthur: James assures us that, far from being miserly in dispensing that gracious gift to His children, He ‘gives to all generously and without reproach.’ It is the Lord’s loving desire to impart divine understanding abundantly to His faithful saints. That is surely one of the most beautiful and encouraging promises in all of Scripture.... ‘Generously’ translates *haplōs*, which carries the idea of singleness of heart, doing something unconditionally without bargaining. The only condition is that we ask. When we simply come in our trials to God asking for His help and wisdom, He immediately and single-mindedly gives it to us ‘generously’ (cp. Mt. 7:7-11).

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(2) Without Reproach (1:5d)

Morgan: Second, we can ask confidently because God will not ‘upbraid’ or ‘rebuke’ us for asking. The word is graphic: ‘to cast in one’s teeth.’ We are assured that God will not chide or scold us for asking, and for asking often!

MacArthur: ‘Reproach’ translates a participial form of a verb that means ‘to upbraid, to severely reprimand.’ ... But the Lord will never cast even the mildest ‘reproach’ on a child of His who comes seeking wisdom in time of trouble and testing. He will not remind us of how undeserving and unworthy we are, obvious as that might be. Nor will He chide us for not asking sooner, fully understanding that ‘the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak’ (Mk. 14:38).

Hughes: Notice how James says God gives—‘who gives generously to all without reproach.’ God will pour wisdom over us without putting us down or demeaning us. It is easy to wear out our human benefactors after they have repeatedly given to us, but not so with God. We will never encounter divine irritation, like ‘I gave you a head, why don’t you use it?’

Dorani: Fourth, God gives ‘without finding fault’ (NIV), or, better, ‘without reproach’ (ESV). It is possible, even easy, to give and to add a reproach. We can say, ‘Yes, I can loan you more money, but what happened to the money I gave you last month?’ ... That is giving *with* reproach. But God gives without adding a rebuke; He simply gives.

(3) And It Will Be Given to Him (1:5e)

Morgan: Third, we have the simple and sublime promise that God *will* grant what we ask when we see His wisdom.

MacArthur: Without hesitation, reluctance, or reservation, His divine wisdom will be given to us.

2. Ask in Faith (1:6-8)

Moo: In v. 5, James called on us to ask God in prayer for the wisdom we might lack. But he now makes clear in vv. 6-8 that we must ask with the right attitude. Indeed, our asking must coincide with the way in which God gives: He gives with singleness of intent; we must ask with singleness of intent. Specifically, James calls on us to *believe and not doubt* as we come to God in prayer. James, of course, has been speaking explicitly about asking God for His wisdom. But James does not return to the topic of wisdom in vv. 6-8, ... so we are probably justified in taking his teaching in these verses to apply to any prayer. James refers to faith, or to believing, fourteen times in his letter.

a) No Doubting (1:6a)

‘But let him ask in faith, with no doubting...’

Hughes: Is there any condition we must meet in order to receive wisdom in our trials? Our text reveals the affirmative: *faith*.... We must believe in the immense, omnipotent, holy God of Scripture and that He is equitable in giving to His own. In terms of our present passage, if we are in trials and *ask* for wisdom, truly believing, God will give it to us. It is as simple as that!

MacArthur: James next turns from the willing Father to the waiting child, making clear that the Lord requires the right kind of asking, which must be ‘in faith without any doubting.’ In other words, it must be a request backed by genuine trust in God’s character, purpose, and promises.... A request that does not take God at His word, that doubts either His ability or His trustworthiness, is presumptuous and worthless and is an affront.

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Morgan: If we want to receive [wisdom], we must ask ‘in faith.’ ‘Ask’ is another third-singular imperative, identical in its present tense to verse 5 and could be translated: ‘Let him *keep on asking*.’ Here we have an insistence to perseverance in prayer. The opposite of asking in faith is to ‘doubt.’ ‘Doubt’ is from the verb *diakrinō*, meaning ‘to judge between.’ To doubt is to have a divided mind that draws us in two directions. In verse 8 we will see another related word that describes this condition: ‘double-minded.’

Moo: In both Matthew and James, the opposite of *believing* is *doubting*. This word means basically ‘differentiate,’ and is often used in the NT in the sense of ‘create distinctions’ (James 2:4), ‘judge’ (1 Cor. 14:29) or ‘dispute’ (Acts 11:2). But in the middle voice a reflexive idea is sometimes introduced: ‘dispute with oneself.’ Hence the idea of ‘doubt.’ But as the word’s basic meaning suggests, James is probably thinking of a strong kind of doubting: a basic division within the believer that brings about wavering and inconsistency of attitude toward God... James is not, then, here claiming that prayers will never be answered where any degree of doubt exists – for some degree of doubt on at least some occasions is probably inevitable in our present state of weakness. Rather, he wants us to understand that God responds to us only when our lives reflect a basic consistency of purpose and intent: a spiritual integrity.

Doriani: As James does so often, here he harkens to a teaching from Jesus, who says, ‘If you have faith and do not doubt ... you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer’ (Mt. 21:21-22; cp. Mk. 11:22-24).

b) *The Doubter (1:6b-8)*

(1) Wave-Tossed (1:6b)

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

MacArthur: The believer ‘who doubts,’ however, ‘is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.’ His request is not really a request at all, because he foolishly and disdainfully does not believe it will be honored by God. Among other things, such a person is terribly immature, like a child, ‘tossed here and there by waves.’ ... When God is not trusted, the only course is to go from bad to worse and worse still.

Morgan: This person could be likened to a cork floating on a ‘surge of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind,’ drifting first this way and then that. ‘Surge’ is different from the normal word for ‘wave.’ The only other occurrence of the word is in Luke 8:24 when the disciples and Jesus are in a storm at sea and the waves are ‘surging’ against the boat. That story serves well to show us a vivid picture of this spiritual condition of doubting.

Moo: 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 the variations in wind direction and strength.... So, the *doubter*, not possessing an ‘anchor for the soul’ (Heb. 6:19), does not pray to God with a consistency and sincerity of purpose. Prey to the shifting winds of motive and desire, he wants wisdom from God one day and the wisdom of the world the next.

Doriani: The doubter asks God for aid but before he finishes his prayer, he thinks, ‘This will never work.’ He vacillates, tossing from one idea to the next, with no more stability of direction or purpose than a wind-whipped wave.

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(2) Unanswered Prayer (1:7)

⁷*For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;*

Moo: The NIC *that man* is better rendered in modern English with ‘that person,’ since the underlying Greek (*anthrōpos*) almost certainly includes reference to both men and women. James, of course, alludes back here to the doubting person that he has described at the end of verse 6. A person like that should know better than to expect his or her prayers to be answered.

MacArthur: Such a person cannot ‘expect that he will receive anything from the Lord.’

Morgan: Let not that man think he will receive anything. God answers prayer, but prayer that honors Him by our complete trust. The kind of divided, seasick praying described above cannot expect a divine response. God delights in the person who, with confident faith, ‘believes that He is and that He rewards those who seek Him’ (Heb. 11:6).

(3) Double-Minded (1:8)

⁸*he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

Moo: The Greek word behind *man* is not now *anthrōpos*, as it was in v. 7, but *anēr*. This latter word normally denotes a man or a husband (as opposed to a woman or wife), but this seems to be one of the few places where it has a generic reference. The Greek word for *double-minded* is *dipsychos*, which is literally translated, ‘double-souled.’ This is the first time in Greek literature that this particular word occurs. James, who uses this same word again in 4:8, has probably coined the term in order to accentuate his concern that believers display a wholehearted, consistent, and integral faith commitment to God. However, while he may be the first to use this particular word, he is certainly not the first to enunciate the concept (cp. Ps. 119:2; 12:2; Hos. 10:2).

Morgan: ‘Doubting’ in verse 6 turns to ‘double-minded’ and ‘unstable’ here in verse 8. ‘Double-minded’ translates *dipsychos*, a term perhaps coined by James and found in the New Testament only here and in 4:8. Literally, it means ‘two-souled’ or ‘divided soul.’ We can gain some sense of the idea with our derogatory adjective ‘two-faced.’ This is akin to John Bunyan’s ‘Mr. Facing Both Ways’ in *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Doubting, wavering praying arising from a person with a divided heart, wavering between confidence in a prayer-hearing God and whether it does any good to pray at all. This ‘straddling the fence’ person is also ‘unstable,’ an unsteady, fickle, staggering soul who is vacillating not only in prayer but also in his daily walk.

MacArthur: Simply put, he is ‘a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.’ Although he claims to be a believer, his action reveals he is an unbeliever. When he goes through a severe trial, he turns to human resources rather than singularly trusting the Lord for answers and for help. Or he becomes bitter and resentful and seeks no help at all. He does not renounce God, but he acts as if God doesn’t exist, doesn’t care, or isn’t capable of delivering him from trouble. He knows something of God’s Word and of God’s love, grace, and providence; but he refuses to avail himself of those divine resources. As James points out later in the letter, that person’s problem, of course, is sin.... [In 4:8,] the double-minded are called ‘sinners,’ a term used only for unbelievers.... Regardless of how he may view himself, the double-minded person is trying to serve two gods, which, as the Lord declares, is impossible (cp. Mt. 6:24).... In his classic allegory, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, John Bunyan calls such a man Mister Facing Both Ways. That feat is just as impossible spiritually as it is physically.

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Hughes: In mentioning the double-minded man, James is not referring to one who is wrestling with doubt, but one who has two minds. He looks to God; he says he has no need.

Moo: *Unstable* translates a word that occurs only in James in the NT (cp. 3:8) and only in Is. 54:11 in the LXX, where it refers to the effects of a violent storm. James may therefore be carrying on the imagery of the raging sea from v. 6, although evidence falls far short of proof.... It is what we might call ‘spiritual schizophrenia’ that James criticizes in these verses explicitly and implicitly throughout this letter: a basic division in the soul that leads to thinking, speaking, and acting that contradicts one’s claims to belong to God.

C. The Picture of Humility (James 1:9-11)

1. The Lowly (1:9)

⁹*Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation...*

a) *Let the Lowly Brother (1:9a)*

MacArthur: James first addresses ‘the brother of humble circumstances,’ that is, the saint who was economically poor and who represented most of the scattered and persecuted Jewish believers to whom he wrote.

Moo: The *brother* describes a person (man or woman) who belongs to the family of God through faith in Christ. James’s description of this brother conjures up a rich biblical tradition. The word he uses could be translated ‘lowly,’ ‘poor,’ or ‘humble.’ The LXX, especially in the Psalms, uses the word to depict a person who is of little significance in the world’s evaluation, even one who is oppressed by the world (see, e.g., Ps. 10:18; 18:27; 34:18; 81:3; 102:17; 138:5).... Usually included in these lowly circumstances is poverty, and so the word can at times virtually be equivalent to ‘poor’ (e.g., Amos 2:7; 8:6).... But the word can also focus less on status or outward circumstances and more on attitude, in which case the opposite of the word is ‘haughty’ or ‘proud’; see especially Pr. 3:34, quoted in both James 4:6 and 1 Pe. 5:5 (cp. also Mt. 11:29; 2 Cor. 7:6; 10:1).... Since the contrast in this context is between ‘humble’ and ‘rich’ (v. 10), James is clearly using the word to describe the believer’s socio-economic situation. If, as we think, the Christians to whom James writes have been forced to leave Jerusalem and establish new homes in Syria and northern Palestine, most of them would be facing tough financial situations as well as social dislocation and even ostracism.

Morgan: Two words stand in contrast here. ‘Lowly’ is *taopeinos*; ‘high position’ is *hupsos*. The first means ‘humble; of lowly status.’ The latter means ‘height, high or exalted station.’ The ‘lowly’ brother is of low position, poor, undistinguished in position, power, and esteem. Most of the Christians in James’ day faced difficult economic conditions. A vast number were slaves. They were ‘lowly,’ and thus likely poor, oppressed, and seemingly unimportant individuals.

Hughes: The initial paradox of the *rich poor*...powerfully emphasizes that *the low are high* because the first part of the verse reads literally, ‘the brother, the lowly,’ and ‘his exaltation’ corresponding reads, ‘in his height.’ So, we can translate it, ‘The lowly brother ought to boast in his height!’ The low are high! Who are the low? The context demands that we understand them as poverty-stricken Jewish Christians who were poor because of their faith. And because they were economically low, they were low in the eyes of the world and, no doubt, in most instances low in their own eyes. Their poverty produced a lowliness of mind.

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Doriani: Nearly everyone agrees that poverty is a trial. The poor man has a humble position, James says.... Their poverty might have been their responsibility, but it might also have been the result of oppression—the rich withheld wages while the official channels for justice might never have heard the protests of the poor, who cry to God alone (5:1-6).

b) *Boast in His Exaltation (1:9b)*

MacArthur: Despite that circumstance, however, such a believer was to ‘glory in his high position.’ *Kauchaomai* (‘glory’) is often translated ‘rejoice’ or ‘boast.’ James is speaking of a legitimate form of pride that even the most destitute Christian can have in his ‘high position’ as a child of God and in the countless blessings that position brings.... The believer who is deprived in this life can accept that temporary and insignificant deprivation because he has a future divine inheritance that is both eternal and secure.

Moo: But James wants them to look beyond their ‘worldly’ situation and *take pride* in their *high position*. ‘Take pride’ translates a single Greek verb that is used widely by Paul but by no one else in the NT except James (here and in 4:16). The trajectory of the term is set decisively by the famous exhortation in Jer. 9:23-24.... From this text, it becomes clear that ‘boasting’ is not in itself always wrong; it is a matter of what it is that one is boasting in, or taking pride in. Christians, however difficult their circumstances in this world, can always take pride in their ‘high position,’ or ‘exaltation.’ ... James’s point, then, is that believers must look beyond the world’s evaluation to understand who they are and look to God’s view of them.

Morgan: But the humble brother is actually rich – rich in Christ. He is exalted spiritually. He has a heavenly dignity. He can glory in his high position with Christ. James says, ‘So, you do have something to ‘boast’ in and that is your position in Christ.’

Hughes: But James paradoxically says such a person ought to ‘boast in his exaltation.’ James’ reasoning for this is implicit in the words of this verse: the man is a ‘brother.’ He is part of God’s family, one of God’s children. ‘And if [we are] children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ’ (Romans 8:17a). This lowly brother is in fellowship with God, his people, and even His angels (cp. Heb. 12:22-24a; 1 Pe. 2:9).... The low are truly high! The lowly must not only grasp this, but must also see that a mighty reversal is coming in which the low will be made high and the high low.... James is so sure of the grand reversal, and so sure that the low will become high, that he encourages the humble brother to ‘boast’ in it. This is to be a joyous boasting. Paul uses the same word in Romans 5:2 speaking of rejoicing in the hope of glory and in Romans 5:11 to refer to rejoicing in reconciliation. Here James orders the lowly to paradoxically and cheerfully boast in their height.

2. The Rich (1:10-11)

a) *Who Is the Rich Man?*

Moo: The heart of the paragraph is a contrast between ‘a brother in humble circumstances’ and ‘one who is rich.’ Each is exhorted by James to ‘take pride’ or ‘boast’: the humble brother in his ‘high position’ and the rich person in his ‘low position.’ What makes the interpretation difficult and contentious is the problem of identifying the ‘one who is rich.’ About half the commentators on James think this person is a Christian/. They think that James is encouraging this brother not to take pride in his wealth, but in his identification with Christ – what would appear in the eyes of the world to be a ‘low position.’ Verses 10b-11, then, ground that command by reminding the brother that wealth and social status are transitory. The other view, equally supported in the

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literature, is that the rich person is a non-Christian. James would then be using scornful irony in v. 10, as he exhorts the rich person to ‘take pride in’ the only thing that will be left to him in the judgment: his condemnation, described in vv. 10b-11.

Moo: James is influenced in v. 9 by a biblical tradition that associates the godly person with humble circumstances and poverty. As we might expect, then, opposing terms such as ‘rich’ frequently take on negative connotations. The antithesis is particularly evident in the teaching of Jesus in Luke’s gospel. According to Luke, Jesus pronounces a blessing on the ‘poor’ but utters a woe upon the ‘rich’ (Lk. 6:23-24); note also the contrast between the ‘rich man’ who suffers condemnation and ‘poor’ Lazarus who finds blessing in the afterlife (Lk. 16:19-31). James, perhaps because of the environment in which he writes, seems to echo this tradition. He mentions ‘rich’ people in two other paragraphs (2:1-6; 5:1-6), and in each place they are presented as wicked oppressors of the people of God. This being the case, we can understand why so many interpreters think that *the one who is rich* must be a non-Christian. However, this conclusion is not certain. The word ‘rich’ in fact occurs quite rarely in the OT as a synonym for the wicked.... The word ‘rich’ in itself does not settle the matter of the spiritual status of the person James here addresses.

Dorani: James calls the poor man a brother, but the second man is simply ‘one who is rich.’ Does James intend to distinguish between the poor believer, whom God blesses, and the rich unbeliever, whom God judges, so that he will ‘fade away’ (1:11)? If the rich man is an unbeliever, then 1:10-11 sarcastically declares that the proud rich man can look forward to just one thing—his fading away, his judgment, on the last day. But this is unlikely for two reasons. First, while James does use irony on occasion (2:19), he does not use harsh sarcasm. Second, the words translated ‘pass away’ and ‘fade away’ never refer to the final judgment of sinners elsewhere in the New Testament. More likely James regards the rich man as a believer.

Morgan: Linguistically, it is not necessary to view the rich as a believer, because the word ‘brother’ (used for the poor in verse 9) is not repeated. Theologically, it is wiser to interpret the rich as unbelievers because their fate is destruction and ruin. Plus, James’ warning seems to echo Jesus’ counsel to the rich fool in Luke 12:13-21 as well as the parables of reversal (e.g., Luke 16:19-31).

[DSB Note: Morgan is the only commentary that views the rich man as an unbeliever; the rest view him as a rich brother, a rich Christian.]

b) *Humiliation (1:10a)*

¹⁰...and the rich in his humiliation...

MacArthur: James then presents the other side of the principle. Just as the material poor believer should rejoice in his spiritual riches, the material ‘rich man [should] glory in his humiliation.’ The idea is that a believer who is materially well-off, healthy, and otherwise physically blessed should rejoice when trials come, for they teach him the transitory nature of those material things and their inability to give inner and lasting satisfaction or help especially spiritual help.

Hughes: But what about rich Christians, the small minority who in James’ day had not suffered deprivation of wealth—at least not yet? Did their wealth present a problem? Of course it did, just as it does for rich Christians today. Material wealth lures the possessor to focus his or her attention on things. Jesus warned against ‘the deceitfulness of riches,’ which strangles spiritual growth (Mt. 13:22; cp. Mt. 6:24; Rev. 3:17; 1 Tim. 6:17).... The entire New Testament, as well

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as what we see in people's lives, suggests that riches are a potential danger to spiritual life. Jesus views them as a spiritual liability rather than an asset. His beatitude goes to the poor, not the rich.... Realizing this, James' paradox of the poor rich makes good sense.... In other words, the rich Christian is to cultivate the poverty of spirit he experienced when he came to Christ. He is to work at this lowliness, focus on it, and make it his boast.

Dorani: The 'low position' of the rich believer is the same low position every Christian shares. We all bow to request mercy and forgiveness of our sin. The rich believer knows the ground is level at the foot of the cross.... Unlike the trial of poverty, the trial of wealth might well appeal to many people. Indeed, the life of the rich is trouble-free in some ways, but as possessions multiply, so do cares and temptations. The rich are prone to pride and self-sufficiency.... By reminding the wealthy of their weakness, he corrects the pride that is their bane.

Moo: If the *one who is rich* is a Christian, the James's encouragement to that person to *take pride in his low position* will mean that the rich believer is to boast not in his wealth or his elevated social position, but in his identification with Christ and His people, a matter of 'humiliation' in the eyes of the world.... If, however, *the one who is rich* is an unbeliever, then James will be using irony to depict his condemnation. Go ahead and boast, James is saying to the rich; all you really have to 'boast' about is the eschatological humiliation that is coming to you in the judgment (cp. Mt. 23:12; Lk. 14:11; 18:14). Judging between these two options here is difficult. We do find lexical evidence that the word James uses here can refer to judgment. But the irony need to make this interpretation work is not as evident as it might be.

Morgan: On the other hand, the rich should boast in his humiliation. The Greek is a bit disjointed here. The main verb is not repeated but the meaning is clear: God measures wealth and poverty in a very different way from us (cp. Lk. 14:11).... The rich (*plousios*) man is admonished to consider that he too is a sinner and is no better in the eyes of Christ than the poorest of people. And besides, the rich should remember the fleeting nature of human wealth.

c) *Pass Away (1:10b)*

...because like a flower of the grass he will pass away.

Hughes: James...reaches back to the rich treasure of Old Testament illustration, especially Isaiah 40:6-8.

Moo: James backs up his warning to the rich person with a reminder of the transitoriness of all human wealth and status. The annual death of vegetation provides a natural metaphor for this purpose, and James draws on a rich biblical tradition when he uses it here. The most famous example is Isaiah 40:6-8 (see also Ps. 103:15-16).... And so, James asserts, the rich person *will pass away like a wild flower*. Those who think this 'rich person' is a non-Christian whom James is condemning usually take the imagery of 'passing away' to refer to judgment. But the verb 'pass away' is never used in the NT to denote judgment. Rather, it typically has the idea 'cease to exist' (cp. Mt. 24:35; Mt. 5:18; 1 Pe. 3:10).

MacArthur: Both he and his possessions are 'like flowering grass' and 'will pass away' (cp. 1 Pe. 1:24; Is. 40:6-7).... Because men, including believers, have a natural tendency to trust in material things, James gives special attention to the dangers of wealth.

Morgan: The familiar imagery of a burning east wind from the Syrian desert as it dries and withers the grass of the field provides a picturesque description of the temporal nature of human riches.

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d) *Fade Away (1:11)*

¹¹*For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.*

MacArthur: Expanding on the temporariness of physical things and emphasizing the danger of trusting in them, he adds [verse 11].... This is a picture of the flowers and grasses of Israel, which flourish in February and dry up by May. James borrows this imagery from Is. 40:6-8 (cp. Ps. 102: 4, 11; 103:15). The loss of material things is meant to drive the rich person to the Lord and to greater spiritual maturity, blessing, and satisfaction. And at that point, the rich and poor are exactly alike. Neither material possessions nor lack of them is of any ultimate consequence. What *is* of significance is a trusting relationship to the Lord, who showers all of His children with spiritual wealth that will never diminish or fail to satisfy.

Hughes: In Palestine, it is called a *sirocco*. Hot winds rush relentlessly off the desert for a period of several days so that even at midday the bare ground becomes so hot one cannot walk barefoot on it. The heat is so intense that plants must be watered at night or they will burn.... As the original literally says, ‘the beauty of its face is destroyed.’

Morgan: The humble believer has eternal riches, but the rich fade away like cut grass on a scorching hot windy day.... ‘Scorching’ translates *kausōni* and refers to the dry, easterly sirocco. It withers the grace and the flowers fall off.... ‘Beauty’ translates a word found only here in the New Testament: ‘*eupeprēs*, meaning ‘good or lovely appearance.’ ‘Appearance’ is literally the word ‘face.’ A rose is a beautiful flower, but it is pitiful when it withers and its ‘face’ loses its life and color.

Moo: ‘Fade away’ continues the vegetation imagery of the verses, since the word was used to depict the dying of grass and flowers (Job 15:30; 24:24; it does not occur in the NT). But it can also refer to the death of human beings. Here James depicts the rich person suddenly dying even in the midst of his or her business undertakings. This language might support the view that the rich person whom James addresses in these verses is a non-Christian. For the phrase *in the same way* makes clear that James is now introducing the point of the imagery he has used; and the point seems to be the utter destruction of the rich person. Again, however, the point is not decisive. Destruction of some kind is plainly intended, but James may just as well be thinking of the death of the rich man as of his condemnation.

3. Application

Moo: While the evidence does not all point in the same direction, we think that the balance shifts toward the view that James in these verses addresses two Christians, a poor one and a rich one. He exhorts each of them to look toward their spiritual identity as the measure of their ultimate significance. To the poor believer, tempted to feel insignificant and powerless because the world judges a person on the basis of money and status, James says: take pride in your exalted status in the spiritual realm as one seated in the heavenlies with Jesus Christ himself. To the rich believer, tempted to think too much of himself because the world holds him in high esteem, James says: take pride not in your money or in your social position – things that are doomed all too soon to fade away forever – but, paradoxically, in your humble status as a person who identifies with the one who was ‘despised and rejected’ by the world. The point of the passage is, then, that Christians must always evaluate themselves by spiritual and not material standards.

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Moo: ‘Trials’ introduced the larger section to which these verses belong (vv. 2-4); and James will return to this topic in the very next verse. So, James may intend us to see poverty and wealth as a, or perhaps even *the* greatest ‘test’ for Christians.... Money and the things money can buy, James well knows, are a tremendously powerful lure to compromise one’s whole-hearted commitment to the Lord. And so, his thoughts move naturally from the need to approach God with a consistent and unwavering faith (vv. 6-9) to one of the chief threats to that kind of faith (cp. Mt. 6;24).

Doriani: The poor are prone to dishonor God by breaking His law, if necessary, to obtain the next meal. But the rich are prone to trust their wealth and power and so to forget God. The rich are also tempted to insult and abuse the poor (2:6-7), to live for themselves, and to exploit whomever they can (5:3-6).... Riches and poverty are indeed both trials. The poor man is little noted in this age, but he knows God. He is an heir of the kingdom; he possesses eternal life (cp. 2:5). He can learn to take proper pride in that. The rich believer, however, knows he must take no pride in his social position, his worldly status. He may ‘fade away,’ that is, die, in the midst of the business that makes him prominent. He knows he is no greater than any other man. He is a sinner, saved by grace alone. He boasts in God, not in his wealth (Jer. 9:23-24).

Morgan: It is all too easy to lose sight of the transient worth of riches. They may seem to offer security, but James reminds us that to those whom they become a ‘god,’ they will perish like a flower in the scorching heat. Why does James include this? How does this relate to the believing community? As he does in 5:1-6, James’ goal is to encourage the believers (who are largely poor) by reminding them that rich oppressors will not escape God’s just judgment.

Hughes: This has monumental implications for Christians today who live in western affluence. *For a believer, an immortal soul, to build his or her life on perishable riches is a debasement beyond description!* ... It is a delusion to suppose that once we become Christians we are to outgrow the initial salvific poverty of spirit. Never! Rather, this ought to become more and more pronounced.

D. The Prize for Perseverance (James 1:12)

Moo: With this verse, James returns to the opening topic of the paragraph: trials. Verbal similarities reveal the connection (e.g., ‘trial,’ ‘persevere’/‘perseverance,’ ‘test’/‘testing’).... Now he promises a reward for those who successfully endure trials by remaining firm in the midst of testing.

1. Blessed (1:12a)

¹²*Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial...*

Morgan: Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial (1:12). As he does so often, James sounds much like Jesus with his beatitude *markarios*, ‘blessed.’ ... We can translate *markarios* as ‘blessed, spiritually prosperous, happy, joyful.’ The blessedness is linked to persevering under trials. Some translations such as the NKJV render *peirosomos* (‘trials’) with a negative connotation (‘tempt’) here in verse 12, but it is more likely that it still carries the more neutral notion of ‘testing or trial.’ The negative sense will be James’ focus beginning at verse 13, and he is using verse 12 as a transition. The spiritual prosperous man perseveres under trial.

MacArthur: *Makarios* (‘blessed’) is the same word with which each of the Beatitudes of Matthew 5 begins, making this verse itself a beatitude. ‘Blessed’ means much more than the

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mere happiness of a carefree life that has little conflict or trouble. It rather carries the idea of profound inner joy and satisfaction, a joy that only the Lord Himself is able to bestow on those who, for His sake and in His power, faithfully and patiently endure and conquer trials.

Moo: In v. 4, perseverance was said to produce a settled and complete Christian character. Her also it is perseverance that brings God's blessing. This blessing, of course, something that Christians can enjoy in this life, as they experience the goodness of God and the spiritual joy that He brings us.

Hughes: Perseverance, fortitude, toughing it out through the various trials of life that come to both the low and the high brings the divine compliment and prophecy 'Blessed.' Oh, the bliss of the man or woman who so perseveres.

2. Approved (1:12b)

...for when he has stood the test...

Morgan: James calls us blessed, or happy beyond measure, because we have been 'approved.' This is the same word used for 'testing' in verse 3. It is *dokimos*, meaning 'approved by testing, tried and true, genuine.' We have passed the test and persevered through the pain to glorify Christ in our trials and suffering.

MacArthur: The 'man who perseveres under trial' is the man who never relinquishes his confident trust in God. He is a true believer, who perseveres and becomes the man who 'has been approved' (by passing the test with faith intact). The principle is simple, clear, and marvelously gracious: perseverance brings God's approval, and His approval brings 'the crown of life.'

Doriani: This confirms that James's first theme is the trials of life. We face short-term temptations and long-term tests. Some, such as illness, are obvious. Others, such as prosperity, are not. Yet God uses trials to reveal our spiritual flaws and to test our love for Him. So then, in time of trial, let us seek not simply to escape, but to find godly maturity.

3. Crown (1:12c)

...he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

Moo: But James's attention here is on the future culmination of that blessing, as the final part of v. 12 indicates. Christians who stand up under the test *will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.* The word *crown* conveys to most of us a gen-studded headpiece worn by kings and queens. But people in the Greco-Roman world would probably have thought more often of the laurel wreath given to the victors in athletic contests (cp. 1 Cor. 9:25)... James probably...has this imagery in view, since the victory of a trained and disciplined athlete in a race is a fitting image for the reward that God bestows on those who remain faithful to Him over the often long and difficult race of life. If James, then uses the *crown* to refer to the idea of reward, then the word *life* following *crown* will indicate what the reward is (cp. Rev. 2:10).

MacArthur: The term for 'crown' is borrowed from athletics rather than royalty. It was the wreath placed on the victor's head in athletic events, symbolizing persevering triumph. And a more literal translation could be 'the crown which is life,' that is, eternal life. Consequently, a more accurate statement of the principle is this: perseverance attests to God's approval, for it

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gives evidence of eternal life (salvation). In other words, perseverance does not *result in* salvation and eternal life, but is itself *the result* and evidence of salvation and eternal life.

Morgan: God will honor our faithfulness with the crown (*stephanos*) of life when Jesus comes (cp. Rev. 2:10)... The crown spoken of here was a head wreath or garland that was given as a victor's prize in the Greek Olympic games.... Here it is a 'living crown' in contrast to a fading, perishable crown. It is the crown of life. The crown that consists of eternal life is contrasted with the fading away of earthly prosperity and fame.

4. Application

Moo: Clearly, James's overall purpose in this verse is to encourage believers to endure trials faithfully so that we might receive the reward that God has promised.... Keeping our eyes on the prize can help motivate us to maintain spiritual integrity when faced with temptations and sufferings of earthly life.

MacArthur: James clearly associates faithful perseverance 'under trial' with genuine love for God, perseverance being one of the surest evidences of 'those who love Him.' That phrase, in fact, is a biblical definition of a genuine believer—a person who truly loves God.... A genuine Christian is not someone who at one point in time made a profession of faith in Christ, but he is a person who demonstrates true faith by an ongoing love for God that cannot be damaged, much less destroyed, by troubles and afflictions, no matter how severe or long-lasting. Like obedience to God's will (Jn. 14:15; 15:9-10; 1 Jn. 2:5-6; 4:16; 5:1-3), love of Him is certain evidence of true faith.

Dorani: We may look to Christ in two ways as we pursue this goal. First, Jesus...endured the trial of crucifixion before God the Father raised Him to life and to glory. Thus, He became the prime example of 'the man who perseveres under trial' and then receives 'the crown of life.' Second, if we fail to persevere in trials and do not deserve to receive the crown of life, the gospel remains. Indeed, when we fail to persevere and we honestly take our failure to the Lord Jesus, confessing our sin, He will 'give us birth through the word of truth'—that is, the gospel.

Morgan: We should prepare ourselves for future trials through building up our faith in the present. A fertile prayer life, memorizing Scripture, living in community with faithful believers, and reading the biographies of great Christians who have gone before us – all of these help us to be grounded when the storms of life come.

5. Summary

Dorani: The Jewish Christians who first read James needed to hear this teaching, and so do we. Many are strong in *knowledge* of the faith, but weak in the *life* of faith. James brings a corrective. The trials of life test our faith, pushing us to act, not just to think. If we withstand the tests of life, we see that our faith in Christ is genuine. Then, when God has confirmed our faith, he will grant us the crown of life eternal. Then we who love Him and grow in maturity toward Him will dwell with Him forever.

Morgan: The exhortation in James 1:2 to consider it all joy, as well as the emphasis in 1:12 on the blessedness of those who persevere through the tests, echo and reiterate Jesus' encouragement to this hurting believing community. So, consider it all joy, James asserts, because, *first*, God blesses those who persevere under such pressure. *Second*, not only does James stress the proper response of joy because of the future blessing for those who endure, but

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he also points to the good by-products of trials. Perseverance, completeness, and blamelessness are worthy effects that come as a result of people having faith in the midst of suffering (1:3-4). *Third*, it is important to note that James uses an eschatological contrast to encourage this believing community to consider it all joy even though they are faced with persecution and exploitation by the rich landowners. The rich exploiters will lose and God's people will win (1:9-11; cp. 5:1-8).

Morgan: In sum, while the suffering in view in 1:2-12 is a result of human evil, these believers can rest assured that God providentially guides all history and that they will be faced with no circumstance that He ultimately will not use for their good and His glory. Because of this, the believing community are obligated to consider it all joy when they encounter persecution.

For next time: Read James 1:12-18.