

1. **Introduction:** James' letter appears to have been the first NT writing.
 - James may have become a believer only after the resurrection when the risen Jesus appeared to him and the disciples. But that does not mean James did not witness much of Jesus' ministry teaching.
 - There are sayings specifically attributed to Jesus in Matthew and Luke that are included in James' letter in different but related language. In other words, when James wrote this letter, he was familiar with Jesus' teaching.
 - N.T. Wright and Michael F. Bird in their book, *The New Testament in Its World*, Zondervan Academic (2019), give a list on p. 742 of 24 different sayings that are echoes of things Jesus (they provide corresponding references in Matthew/Luke).

Matthew 5:10-12 (Sermon on the Mount) corresponds to James 1:2

2. **(A.) James 1:2:** *"Count it all joy, my brothers,² when you meet trials of various kinds,³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness."*

(B.) Mt. 5:10-12: *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account."¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*

Matthew 21:21 corresponds to James 1:5

3. **(A.) James 1: 6:** *"But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind."*

(B.) Matthew 21:21: *"And Jesus answered them, "Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen."*

- There are at least 22 other examples. James knew what Jesus taught.
 - Viktor Frankl's true story shows that, even in bad circumstances, it is possible to choose an attitude of trust in God and to live in hope.
 - James says, *"count it all joy"* when beset by trials. Trials have both present and eternal outcomes. A trial may itself be dreadful, but God causes all events in our lives to produce eternal consequences that are to our benefit.
 - Sustained steadfastness leads to perfection and completeness, lacking in nothing in ability to stand fast in faith. To sustain steadfastness requires wisdom.
4. **James 1:5-8:** *"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."*

5. **Knowledge, Understanding, and Wisdom**: These are 3 related but different attributes. What distinguishes one from the other?
- Each one of the three are forms of knowing. All knowing is a consequence of accumulating facts in our mind and manipulating them in search of meaning.
 - Understanding includes and utilizes knowledge. Wisdom includes and utilizes both knowledge and understanding.
6. **Knowledge** is the result of gathering, accumulating, and categorizing facts from all kinds of experiences, good and bad. Facts acquired by observation, from others, reading, perceiving relationships, becoming proficient at tasks, etc.
- There are different types of knowledge. Two are: theoretical and practical.
 - To shed light on the difference, consider that theoretical knowledge is sufficient to write a descriptive article on how to milk a cow, but practical knowledge is necessary to be able to go to the barn, milk a cow, and return with a bucket of milk.
 - Knowing the theory of diesel engines is quite different from having practical understanding that enables diagnosing a diesel engine problem and repairing it.
 - Most people have the practical knowledge to punch the right buttons in the right order on a calculator to add and subtract.
 - Only a few have the theoretical and practical knowledge of mathematical and physical principles necessary to design and make a calculator.
7. **Understanding** is a higher level of *knowing* than factual knowledge. It includes the ability to see how individual bits of knowledge connect with one another and fit into larger pictures.
- Understanding enables isolated bits of knowledge to be integrated into a more meaningful larger picture.
 - Understanding enables new knowledge to be synthesized from bits and pieces we already know. Understanding enables knowledge to be organized and structured so that it has functional value.
8. **Wisdom** has to do with understanding the “big picture,” understanding the implications of assumptions and known facts, how the bits of knowledge interact, and how changing one bit of knowledge impacts the other facts.
- Like knowledge, there are both theoretical and practical aspects of understanding.
 - Wisdom enables finding the one knot that will unravel a messy situation, to separate the wheat from the chaff. Wisdom is vital in making good decisions.
 - Wisdom can identify points of leverage, pivot or tipping points, and draw accurate conclusions that enable the right decisions.
 - Wisdom discerns significance, value, and worthiness. Wisdom can put bits and pieces of knowledge and understanding together to form new insights.
 - Wisdom provides the framework for godly decisions. Hence, James says if you need wisdom in a situation, ask God.

- If wisdom for life's issues is needed, ask God for the ability to see through false pictures to know the truth. He gives generously.
 - It is sad but true that you can have knowledge in abundance but lack understanding and wisdom to apply that knowledge to living a godly life. It is possible to be wise in the ways of the world, but never be wise in the truths of God.
9. **Wisdom and Faith**: Steadfast faith relies on both wisdom and the right attitude. Both are necessary to stand fast without wavering during trials.
- When trials confront us, wisdom tells us staying “right” before God is the right path to follow (risk/benefit analysis). We are to willfully choose an attitude that honors God and pray for Him to grant wisdom. James says, pray believing firmly in God.
 - Wisdom is more than factual understanding. It has been said that knowledge provides the ability to take things apart, while wisdom provides the ability to put things together. That is part of the truth about wisdom but there is much more.
 - Wisdom enables discerning connections and seeing what is and is not important.
 - Wisdom is a quality of understanding that enables apprehension of eternal truths, discernment of moral obligation, and aligning with the path of righteousness in life. Godly wisdom enables the godly use of knowledge.
 - Wisdom enables one to both endure and benefit from events that try our faith.
 - James says God freely gives wisdom to believers who ask. He gives generously without reservation and without finding fault or counting cost.
 - God requires single-minded commitment to Him, sincere committed trust in who He is and in His overruling sovereignty in all circumstances.
 - We often have heard about the danger of putting all our eggs in one basket. But there is one exception. It is safe to “put all your eggs in God’s basket.”
 - James compares a doubting believer to the waves of the sea, up one moment and down the next. Believing one moment, doubting the next.
 - Paul uses a similar notion in Ephesians 4:14 where he urges believers to become mature in the faith ***“so we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, and by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”***
 - In Matthew 14:22-23, disaster comes to Peter when he doubted.
 - He was able to walk on the water until doubt caused him to sink.
 - A person who is double-minded toward God believes one moment and doubts the next. Such a person should not expect to receive what is asked.
 - Yet, the person may indeed receive from our gracious God exactly what is asked, even though as a double-minded person there is no basis to expect anything.
 - Double-minded means a wobbling commitment, one moment turning to God, the next moment turning back to the world – no patience, no steadfastness in faith.

- Augustine once prayed, *“O God, make me pure – but not now.”* That was a double-minded request. Just so, we might be inclined to pray *“Save me O God, but don’t change me.”* That too is double-minded. Salvation is change.
- A believer is to strive for unreserved commitment to God and to living the way He intends believers to live.
- Don’t think it is possible to be two-faced with God, e.g., turning to Him in need but turning back to the attractions of the world when everything is rosy.
- Godly wisdom, and the insight it provides, enables seeing beyond the trials of life or the pleasure of worldly wealth to the true riches found in Christ.

10. **James 1:9-11:** *“Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation,¹⁰ and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away.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.”*

- In these verses, James gives us an illustration of two contrasting life situations.
- What Christians are permitted to boast about is severely limited. James says we are to value our relationship with Christ. The rich is humble before the glory of Christ, and the poor is exalted by being “in Christ” in all His glory.
- In Galatians 6:14 Paul says, *“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*
- In Jeremiah 9 there is a statement from God about the proper subject for boasting.
- It has nothing to do with earthly achievements that we tend to laud.

11. **Jeremiah 9:23-24:** *“Thus says the Lord: ‘Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in this earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord.’”*

- James’ statement about boasting is consistent with God’s instruction in Jeremiah.
- Knowing our God and knowing His wonderful promises enables one who is poor in worldly goods to count their riches in Christ as greater than all earth’s trials.
- Likewise, knowing God and His promises enables wealthy believers to see that their only lasting security is through their relationship with Christ.
- For poor and wealthy believer’s alike, true wealth is riches “in Christ.”
- Neither wealth nor poverty in and of themselves is sufficient to keep a person on the straight and narrow path of godliness.
- Not material resources but spiritual resources are needed to remain steadfast in the faith in the face of trials and suffering, or through the temptations of wealth and pleasures, or anything between.

- The extreme circumstances of both severe poverty and great wealth can divert a believer from the path of obedience. Both “too much” and “too little” tend to generate problems of faith. Sufficient is best.
- A strong desire for the things of the world when coupled with poverty can create grievances against God in a poor believer’s mind.
- On the other hand, pleasures associated with things of the world can detract a wealthy believer from an obedient walk with God.
- Lust, greed, covetousness, anger, and other sins are universal problems for both those poor and the wealthy in worldly goods. A wealth of spiritual maturity, understanding God’s Word, and wisdom from God is the best safeguard.
- The poor and wealthy in worldly goods both face the same future of death and judgment. It is not the world’s view of us but God’s view that is vital.
- If God grants wealth, it is to be used in a godly manner. If God decrees poverty, it is to be faced in a godly manner.
- God’s wisdom, given generously to committed believers who ask, will enable them to walk in obedience in all circumstances – wealth, poverty, and all positions in between.
- God gave us both physical and spiritual life and overrules all our circumstances.

12. **James 1:12:** *“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.”*

- Trials create conditions in which a believer is tempted to do things that displease God.
- “Test, trial, and tempt” are all translations of the same Greek word.
- James says that blessed is the one who stands steadfast in the faith, refusing to yield to temptation to do something that appears it will make the trial go away but is known to be displeasing to God.
- Genuine love and respect and confidence in God’s sovereignty provides the spiritual motivation for choosing to trust and obey even in dreadful circumstances.
- The reward for steadfastness is the crown of life.
- James uses the metaphor of an athlete who participates and wins an athletic contest, winning a laurel wreath that symbolizes honor and glory.
- A winning athlete implies the athlete has done the necessary training to succeed and is obedient to the rules during the competition (2Tim 2:5).
- In a similar way, a believer must practice “steadfastness” to be able to stand fast in the faith during difficult trials.
- By always practicing “steadfastness,” a believer develops steadfastness as a settled character trait. Their steadfastness is a part of who they are.
- When a difficult trial comes along, it is then in their nature for the believer to be steadfast. The reward for a steadfast believer, rather than a laurel wreath, is a crown of life. For spiritual success in life, the reward is eternal life with God.