

INTRODUCTION >

Illustration: Our Relationship with a Genie

We know the story of the Genie in a lamp. And we know how it goes: a person in need finds a lamp and is given three wishes. And the challenge then is: what do I use my three wishes for from an all-powerful being? And we know the first two wishes never go well, because the requests are unwise, and they create more problems than solutions. The problem is that the Genie is not a Good being; he is simply an all-powerful being who has promised to fulfill our wishes.

So then...If God is an All-powerful, All-present, All-knowing God...then the question becomes...

Is God good?

And I'm not asking whether he does good.

I'm asking whether He IS good.

If He is NOT good, then we have a very big problem.

But if He is! Then we can all find great exhale, even when it seems all is lost.

This is the ancient question the enemy asks us.

In the Garden of Eden, the lie believed was that God was holding something good back from them.

- And they believed that lie, and in doing so, they were not simply doubting God, but much more; they were doubting His character, His goodness!

Which means they, and now we, doubt all of His intentions.

We see something that is good, something that is desirable; so why then would a Good God tell us not to have it?

- The logic and wisdom do not make sense, so then, our assessment is that God does not want us to have full life.

And this is the overarching question that James wants us to consider in this morning's text.

Last week we saw how the church is meant to count the various trials of this age as joy, because God will not waste them, but rather will flip them and use them to purify us as He makes us whole in Christ!

This week we see that part of being made whole is trusting the character of God in our prayers, even when our wisdom screams that the trials are going to undo us.

James 1:5–8

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Purpose Statement

We Ask God in Trust of His Will and Assured of His Goodness.

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Today, we will look at the following:

1. We Ask
2. In Faith
3. With Assurance

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I. WE ASK >

Summary Statement

We lack what God is intent to give!

The Assumption of our Daily Lack

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

James begins here by saying, " If any of you lacks wisdom!"

In the Bible, we understand wisdom as the understanding to live in a way that honors God!

- To seek Wisdom from God is to seek His will!
 - It's asking: how can and do I apply your Truth to my life?
 - It's saying, I don't just want to know WHAT you say; I want to know HOW to live it!

Asking Him is acknowledging your need.

As I thought about this, it hit me that I'm ALWAYS in need of God's Wisdom in every situation. Even when I face similar situations, I need to pray for wisdom on how to approach and handle them.

Remember when Saul told David, " You can't fight this Giant; you are just a kid.

- And David responded with, " When I kept sheep, a lion and a bear took one of the flock, and I tracked them down and struck them, and when they rose up against me, I grabbed their beard and killed them.
- David does not then say to King Saul, don't worry I have done this before; I know how to defeat big enemies; I am going to go grab Goliath's beard!
- No, he tells Saul, The LORD who has delivered me will deliver me once again.
- And he uses a sling against Goliath!
- But we don't read of David using that same weapon against all his future enemies.
- NO! His policy was to pursue and trust the Lord!

Also, think about Paul and Timothy, vs. Paul and Titus.

- Paul had Timothy circumcised so that it would not be a stumbling block to their ministry, yet we read in Galatians that Paul did not have Titus circumcized, because it would have been a stumbling block to the freedom of the Gospel.
- There are ethnic nuances between the two men, but what we see is that Paul did not have a rigid policy in these cases; rather, he walked in the wisdom of God and did what would be most helpful for the sake of the Gospel being proclaimed and seen.

And this causes me to pause in my daily life.

It's not that we shouldn't have ordinary modes of Gospel operation, but we are meant to walk with a continual realization of our need in all things!

- And this also doesn't imply that God's Word has different meanings; it means that the application of His Word, the living out of His Truth, can and will look different in various circumstances.

And we should see clearly that the tense of the verb for "ask" is present active.

That is, this is a continual and ongoing request, not just a one-time thing or an occasional activity.

- And so, each morning, each afternoon, each evening, we pray without ceasing for wisdom.
- We want to know how to image Him at all times and in all things!

The Immutabile Posture of our God

And what we read here in the breathed-out word of God is that He "gives generously to all without reproach!"

The word translated "generously" is not simply abundantly; it is a single-mindedness.

- It means that God gives with a sincerity that aligns with His character.
- His giving without shaming us for asking is in line with who He is.
- He knows our lack, and so He gives without frustration.

This is also the truth Jesus explains in the Sermon on the Mount.

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Jesus says this:

Read **Matthew 7:7–8**

- It's on the screen, because I really want us to see this.
- It's important to understand what James wants the dispersed people of God to fully understand.

What's the posture and character of the Father in these verses here in Matthew?

- Does this sound like a God who doesn't want to be bothered?
- Does it sound like a God who is distant?
- Does it sound like a genie in a lamp?
- Does it sound like a God who will withhold good things from you?

Brief Illustration: Info Desk

Why do you not hesitate to ask for directions from someone standing at an information desk who is making eye contact with you? Because you know that's what they want you to do! Ask them!

The language of “generously**” in **James 1:5** communicates that God's heart is not divided by competing interests.**

- He is not weighing and wrestling with, should I or shouldn't I.

He is full of perfect INTENT to hear and answer us in our prayers for wisdom to walk in His will!

He is NOT ONLY very near, but He is also spring-loaded to give us what we need in our lack!

As I thought about this beautiful truth, I immediately thought: So then, therefore!

We go to Him in prayer for provision in our day, in thanksgiving for our meal, in request for our forgiveness, in hope of our eternity, in joy of our salvation, in need at work, in the confusion of our suffering, in need of wisdom for parenting, in longing for protection for those we love, for healing of our parents, for gospel multiplication in our neighborhoods, for laborers in the fields that are ripe for harvest, for opportunity to testify as a witness of His beauty to our

colleagues, for patience when we drive, for kindness when we are treated with disregard, for love when we are slapped, for self-control when our flesh screams in desire, for those who are being persecuted for the sake of Christ, for the countries far away that are closed to the good news, for the hearts in our cul-de-sac that are also closed to the good news, for the diagnosis that feels like it will consume us, for the promotion that could also consume us, for the financial need that could lead us to sin, for the financial abundance that could also lead us to sin, for the help to understand His truth, for the power to live it out, for the continued healing of a church, for the teenage orphan without hope, for the child who is being trafficked, for the girls who feel their value is in the mirror, for the boys who feel they will never live up to their parent's expectations, for friends who loves us enough to wake us from our spritual blindness, and on and on...

And in all of these things, our Father who is in Heaven is undivided in intent. He is at the door of all those who knock.

- His ear is inclined, and His mercy and grace have no end.
- We cannot empty His account.
- We do not have three wishes to use in our own wisdom.
- We cannot overask of His attention.
- He knows our frame.
- He looks to give.

And as we pray, we abide with Him in Jesus' name.

Walking with Him in the cool of the day, and the dark of the night.

Summary Statement

We lack what God is intent to give!

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II. IN FAITH >

VERSE - [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.

BUT - In Faith

We read BUT, let him ask in Faith!

Does that mean a trust that God will do what we ask, how we ask, when we ask?

- Are we meant to believe that if we name it, then we ought to claim it by faith?
- That if our “faith” is big enough, then we will get whatever we want in this life?

By no means!

So then what is the “FAITH” we are meant to have, without doubting, when we pray?

- We can go back to the same section of the Sermon on the Mount to better understand what this means.

Matthew 7:9-11

[9] Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? [10] Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? [11] If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

The Faith we are meant to have when we go before the Father is the trust that He is Good.

That is, He is not only All-Powerful, All-Knowing, and All-present; And He isn't just intent on giving; He is Good!

So then, therefore, all that He gives to His children is indeed good!

Unstable

This week in our Bible reading plan, we read about Noah and the Ark.

As Noah built the Ark over many decades, it wasn't enough to simply believe that God existed. **Noah had to trust God's goodness!**

- God was accomplishing something through Noah, even when it looked very foolish to a lost world.

- I can't imagine the whispers in Noah's heart that questioned the wisdom and word of God to build the ark.
- Day after day, and year after year, giving his life in trust of God's character.

This is the great danger for us in the wilderness.

That even if we have faith that He exists, we doubt His intentions.

And His pruning shears feel like we're being cut off.

His discipline feels like punishment.

His silence feels like negligence.

- And we read His commands and think, are they good?
- **Are they good or evil for me?**
 - Is it good or evil for me if I follow Christ and pick up a cross of self-denial every day (Luke 9)?
 - Is it good or evil for me if I renounce all that I have to follow Him (Luke 14)?
 - Maybe it is good for me to simply know His word and not do it.
 - Because it sure doesn't sound "good."
 - To my flesh, to my knowledge of good and evil, it sounds more like death than it does life.
 - Can I trust the one who calls me to count others as more significant than myself?
 - That sure seems like an upside-down way to flourish.

And the enlightened culture tells us to reject any truth that's uncomfortable and against MY truth.

And so we pray, and God answers, and we assess the results.

Was it worth our time?

- What was our return on investment in prayer?

And unlike our God, who is SINGULAR in His Goodness and intent, we are double-minded and unstable in all our ways.

Illustration Reminder: On the Boat Dock

A few weeks ago, I used the illustration of standing on a dock with one foot and in the boat with the other. We must transfer our weight to one or the other; otherwise, we will end up being split apart and in the water!

We are meant to pray in complete trust that He is Good!

- When all we can see feels like He and the universe are against us.
 - Will we transfer our weight away from Him?

- Will we then LEAN on our own understanding, or will we trust Him with our whole heart, and acknowledge Him in every single way?

Summary Statement

So again, first - We lack what God intends to give!

And Second- we must trust that God is Good.

Transition:

And third, how can we know?

How can we be so sure that He is Good, if it sure feels like we asked for bread, and He gave us a stone?

Which leads us to our last point!

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III. WITH ASSURANCE >

VERSE - [8] he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Summary Statement

Jesus is our Assurance of the Goodness of God

How Can We Know

Remember the Children of Israel in the Wilderness?

They doubted God.

Now, of course, they did not doubt His existence; they saw His presence in the plagues, in the parting of the Red Sea, and in the pillar of cloud and fire that led them.

- The enemy knew it would do no good to try to convince them that God did not exist.
- They saw firsthand that God was all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-present.
- So then what was the lie and the doubt?
- They doubted His goodness!
- They even concluded that a good God would have left them in Egypt where they had food.
- And so their time in the wilderness was spent continually testing God to decide if He was Good.

In Romans 8, while explaining the groaning and suffering Christians walk through in this age, Paul does NOT tell them to have faith or trust in something unproven.

- He is not asking them to have BLIND faith.
- He tells them to open their eyes.
- To be rational.
- To gaze at what they have seen and know.
- He wants them to have FULL ASSURANCE in their daily lives of suffering and hardship.

Illustration: Pick me up late at the airport and therefore another slice of bread.

So when I was staying there, I had no hesitation in asking for small things.

I had seen the scope and measure of their hospitality, and so I was not hesitant in asking, in trust of their character, if I could have a fifth slice of bread.

So then, Paul writes this logic in Romans 8:32

[32] He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

If God did not even spare His own Son!

- If that is what he gave!
- How could we doubt that He will not give us all things we need!
- What more could God possibly do to convince us of who He is?

And this is the answer to the enemy's lie when you are beginning to think, but is God good?

- When our wisdom says, this thing I see, these things I am walking through, sure, they feel less than beneficial.

And so we say, Depart from me - He didn't even spare His own Son!

He is So Very Good to us, to me!

- What looks like chaos and destruction is actually a tapestry being woven together for our Eternal Good!

The Wisdom of God

And we read this is 1 Corinthians 1:22–24

[22] For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, [23] but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, [24] but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Christ is the Wisdom of God!

- BUT see that there was a little while when it sure seemed like the Wisdom of God, that is Christ, was not a good path.
- So much so that His closest friends and disciples did not follow Him.
- Instead, they leaned on their own understanding and abandoned and denied Him.
- Peter was double-minded and unstable as he went from declaring that Christ was the Son of God to claiming he didn't even know him.
- Because how could a cross be Good for anyone?

But the power of God raised Jesus on the third day, and what the disciples assessed as death was actually their path to life.

And so it is for us!

Ultimately, what we are trusting is the Goodness of God as revealed in Christ Jesus on a Cross!

- He is the teacher that seems foolish to the Gentiles who see intellect as the power to avoid a cross.
- And He is a scandalous grace to the Jews whose wisdom trusts in the law over the lawgiver, and cannot confess that they lack a righteousness of their own.

But by the grace of God, through the Work of His Holy Spirit, we say and see that He is the way and the truth of Life.

- The power that turns the greatest trial into the greatest Joy!
- And in doing this, He became the Amen to every prayer we pray.
- The Assurance of All Things Hoped for, and the Goodness of our God!

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CONCLUSION >>>

So then it seems that it all turns on this question: Is God Good?

And I know we know what to say, just like Peter confessed to Christ before the trial.

We know the correct answer.

But what happens when the trial starts?

This last Wednesday at our Treasuring the Word Gathering, I asked the class to summarize Genesis 2-6 in one sentence.

And someone said the simple and very powerful confession, “God has a plan.”

- And I can’t stop thinking about that.
- I have a constant and continual lack of that wisdom in my daily life, I want to KNOW that in the deepest recesses of my being!

And now, after spending a few LOTS of hours studying this passage in James...

- I’d like to add to “God has a Plan” with, “and it is Good”
- We affirm that He is all-present, all-knowing, and all-powerful, sovereign over everything, and in all things, He is Good!
- He has made that very clear in Jesus Christ.

SO THEN, THEREFORE!

When we pray, are we looking for options or His Will?

Do we want to weigh what He has to say as good or evil, or obey what He has to say?

Is He our God or someone whom we consult?

May it not be so! May we obey what He has called us to!

In that posture, we know the command to love others.

- And so we pray, Father, help me love others.
- BUT we MUST go even further; we say, Father, I lack the wisdom, the understanding of how to do this well!
- To do it in a way that glorifies you and not me!
- Father, I lack the wisdom and need your help to know how to love my others - please help me to see and understand what this looks like, and then help me to walk in obedience!

May we be zealous in our prayers!

And may we continually seek HIS Wisdom and Will and trust Him in all things and ways.

And all of this in the name and power of His Son, Jesus our Christ!

Let’s Pray Now!

Consider

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Questions to consider:

1. Where am I seeking wisdom?
2. Do I trust that God is Good?

Consider the Cross

Benediction