

**Becoming Unstoppable**

James 1:2-8

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I love grad Sunday. Graduation is a great opportunity where we can celebrate our graduates, all that they have accomplished, and everything that they've done to get to this point. It's a real time of Celebration. It's also a great time where we can look ahead, because we have all of these individuals who have so much potential to make a great impact for God's kingdom.

For many, the future can be intimidating because of all of the unknowns, the change, the obstacles and challenges and trials that lie ahead. We know those things are coming; We know that life is filled with hard things. Many have already experienced some really difficult trials, and so it makes the unknown, or the future, seemed a little bit uncertain, a little bit scary, when we think about what might be ahead. When I think about these graduates, or really all of us, there's one question that I think it's really important for us to all think about and it's **"Who do I want to be in the future?" "Who do I want to be in a year? Who do I want to be in 3 years 5 years?"**.

You see, in the working world, we're told that we have to think about where we want to be in life and set some goals. We want to think about where we want to be working, what kind of money we want to be making, what kind of relationship we want, and we set our goals for the future, and then we look at all of the different steps it's going to take to get us from here to there. Then we look at what specific actions can we start doing today, to get us from here to there. What can we **start** doing now to set us on that path, and what do we need to **stop** doing that's keeping us from getting us to where we want to be. Planning this way is really important and those are good questions to ask however the question that I said was important to ask, was not "Where do you want to be" or "Where do you see yourself", it's **"Who do you want to be in the future?"** Because I'm more interested in how we are growing as Disciples of Jesus Christ far more than where we work, or where we live. Because if our hearts are right with Christ; if we're more like Jesus in the future than we are today, then we will be better off in all of these other areas of our life. As believers who trust in Jesus, our identity is in Him, and He is the core of who we really are. Then everything we do becomes an expression of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. So the question is **"Who do you want to be - who do you want to become - if the goal is to be more like Jesus?"** From there we can ask ourselves **"If I want to be like Jesus and be perfect, complete, lacking nothing, what do I need to do, what steps do I need to take, to get me from here to there. And what kinds of things can I start doing today to set me on that path"**. Because God tells us what we need to do, and then he does the transforming work in us by His power.

So in today's passage in the Book of James (We will be reading from James chapter 1 if you want to go there now in your bibles), were given a couple of things in particular that I want to walk us through. The first is a change of perspective. A change of perspective that is easy for us to think about intellectually, but a very hard one to actually live out. The second is something that we can actually start doing today, that will help us figure out day by day how to move forward. So the first one is a change of perspective, and the second is something we can actually start doing today, something really practical.

Let's read the passage now James chapter 1 verses 2 to 8

<sup>2</sup>Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,<sup>3</sup> for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.<sup>4</sup> And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

<sup>5</sup> If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; <sup>8</sup> he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Let's start with the first one - a change of perspective. The way we view the world is actually really important when it comes to how we behave. For example, you know the saying, the grass is always greener on the other side *because you're too far away to see the dirt*. Our perspective affects our contentment, and our desire to act. James starts off here in chapter 1 verse 2 by saying "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds," counting trials as joy in your life is something that we can wrap our brains around, but living that out through trials is very challenging. And by joy, we say this often, but joy does not mean Happiness, joy does not mean you are going through tough times but yet smile through them and you take it like a champ. Joy is understanding that God has a greater plan. Knowing that through the hurt and in the pain and during the challenge of trials, you know that God is working all things for good because you love Him. So when you face different challenges trials and difficulties, you know that these are not just things that are stopping you, or getting in your way, but they are actually opportunities for you to bring glory to God. They are opportunities for your faith to really work and grow stronger.

Listen to what James says next: "for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.<sup>4</sup> And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." So what does that actually mean? First let's look at steadfastness. The word steadfastness here means to stand firm, to endure, patience through difficulties. But it does not mean to endure them in a way that is passive, or simply a submission to circumstances, where you just make it through them, but rather the word means to have a strong active challenging determined response of standing firm. So it says that when we endure trials, this endurance can be build up in us, and we will be able to take on more and more and more as we go. We can grow in our ability to endure through trials. This is one of the purposes of Trials and difficulties in our life – it is to grow endurance in us. **[Bodybuilder]**

Then James says, "let steadfastness (Patience/endurance) have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." So he says that our endurance that's built through trials makes us perfect and complete lacking in nothing. So what does it mean by that? Every year, I think I say this every Grad Sunday, I see students who graduate and they go off to University and inevitably it seems that there are some who experience the things of this world, and find it really difficult to reconcile the beliefs they have been taught and conflicting worldviews. These intellectual conflicts, these trials, are never anything new, but to the individuals, they feel massive. Others find themselves facing social challenges, trying to make good meaningful friendships, balancing what they have grown up believing with trying to impress others around them. Some feel loneliness in their search for significance through other people. Others, experience loss of loved ones. Financial difficulties, relationship troubles. And people feel that these challenges are too overwhelming and they fall away when their faith is tested - it doesn't hold because they don't build the endurance, and then their faith doesn't last.

However, for the true believer, for the disciple of Jesus Christ who has their goal set as becoming more and more like Jesus Christ, when they encounter Trials of what James says “**of various kinds**” meaning big ones and small little ones – they are enduring these trials and they are building and strengthening themselves through difficult times. As they learn to endure, and their faith becomes more and more complete, lacking less and less. They're not they're not **missing something**, or not **craving something**, not **looking** for some way to **fill the gaps** in their faith, because their faith is becoming more and more certain. James gives us an image of a mature Christian - follower of Christ - who understands and gets it. They are not lost or aimless in the midst of trial, rather they understand that God is using these things to strengthen them as disciples. **[BB]**

And imagine this - if your faith is not lacking, in other words if you have a growing understanding and dependency and an awareness of how your faith helps you through trials and how God works in you – and you know this because it has been put to the test – it is not just philosophical – **then you will not fear the trials that are to come**. You will have no fear. A mature Christian understands that no matter what the trial is, they will be okay. And this goes for any kind of trial - a big one like a loss of a loved one, or physical suffering, or breakdown of relationship - the mature believer knows they will be okay because God is with them. But it also goes for smaller trials that may seem like hurdles, like difficult social interactions, disagreements, advocating for yourself or others. You might feel like ‘oh I might be embarrassed. I might be rejected if I say this thing’ but ultimately the Christian should know that no matter what happens they will be okay. no matter what.

As humans we ask “**What if?**” all the time. We get caught up asking “*What if I'm going to face rejection? What if I say this thing and it fails? What if I embark on this journey and it's filled with difficulty and bumps in the road? What if I try to talk to this person about Jesus and they turn me down or they laugh at me?*” we get caught up with these ‘What ifs?’ but when we understand that our identity is in Christ and if he is building this endurance in us, using the different trials as opportunities for God to build endurance in us, then we will take risks for God. So if we take risks for the Lord and we step out in faith into something, we know we will be okay! We can stop asking “*what if*” questions. **Can you imagine your life if you stopped asking “what if” questions!** If you stop letting the fear of rejection, the fear of failure, the fear of difficulty, hold you back in your walk with Jesus, and you started taking risks for him because you knew that ultimately, even worse case scenario, you would be okay. Well this is part of why this change of perspective on your trials, can lead to joy. Understanding that God is building steadfastness in you, building endurance and patience in you, that will help your faith be complete not lacking anything. This will give you the **boldness to take risks** for the Lord. This will give you the **boldness to share your faith courageously** - because we know that His ways are best and He's got us covered. So graduates when you think about whatever lies ahead for you, know that whatever difficulties you face, God Is Bigger than those things. If your identity is in Him, if you understand that you are a disciple, a child of God, and if He is going to use the good things and the bad things for his glory, and to build you up, and test you, and strengthen you, and build endurance in you, then you have nothing to fear. Imagine a church that is not afraid of trials or suffering. A church that would boldly do whatever God calls her to do, and go wherever He calls her to go - the gates of hell would not stand against that Church!

Now the second part of all this, is that James gives us more – something practical that we can implement immediately. In verse 5, it says If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. 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. <sup>7</sup> For that person must not suppose that

he will receive anything from the Lord; <sup>8</sup> he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways So he starts off and says if any of you lacks wisdom, so the question is – **by show of hands - how many of you lack wisdom?** (if you have your hands down that confirms it!) Yes we can all use more wisdom! And this is a promise that God gives us if any of us lacks wisdom (that's all of us!), then we simply ask God, and God will generously give it to us without reproach. There's no shame in seeking wisdom. You may sometimes feel like you know a lot of things, and if you need advice or help, that it reflects poorly on you, but there's a difference between knowing things and wisdom. Knowledge is knowing information and wisdom is knowing how to apply that knowledge into right action. My favorite way I've heard it explained, is that knowledge is knowing that tomato is a fruit, and wisdom is knowing to not put it in fruit salad. Anybody can ask for wisdom. There's no requirements aside from asking the Lord for it. So this simple promise is actually quite profound. As we face our future and we strive to become what Jesus wants us to become - to be more like Jesus - we have to trust in his ways. We have to ask God for wisdom and then we actually need to do it.

It doesn't help to have the knowledge of what we are supposed to do, but then choose not to do it - that makes us unwise. Far too often we might seek God and ask what is the wisest thing for me to do in this situation, and God tells us what's the wisest way forward is, and then we decide **“No. That's too hard. I'm going to do it my way instead”**. **[CONFLICT]** From there, they stay stuck in their cycle of foolishness and wonder why things never go their way. If you feel like you are struggling, spinning your wheels in life, and you are not seeking God's wisdom and applying it to your life, **how's that working out for you? Living in your own way by your own strength and you're doing things the best way that you know how to do?** He says someone who asks for wisdom, but doesn't do it with faith in the one who gives wisdom, is like a wave tossed in the sea-going this way or that way or person who is double-minded and unstable in all their ways because they don't know who to trust. They ask for God for wisdom, and God delivers that wisdom to them, but then they don't know what to do with it. They don't know whether they should trust it; they don't have faith in the one who gave it. They lack Faith that God is going to be the one who is leading them into the best way forward, and then they don't trust that wisdom. They're just like this – unpredictable; tossed to and fro; unstable. You don't want to be unstable. You want to be certain when you ask in faith and you say “God what is the best way” that God is going to lead you to righteousness; that God is going to shape your character. With faith that has been put to the test, you can trust that wisdom and move forward with full confidence in the wisdom that you have been given. **Imagine that you had confidence in the decisions that you made because you're trusting in God's wisdom.** *Do you want to have confidence in the decisions that you're making - in the choices you are making and the ways that you're living? Simply ask God for wisdom and put your faith in the one who's giving it to you and do what God tells you to do – no matter the cost.*

To seek God's wisdom, we must be students of God's word. We have to be reading it, and learning to understand it. We have to be an active participant of God's plan and really understand what he wants to accomplish in the world. We have to spend time with God in prayer, sharing and listening, and growing in intimacy with Him. And we must be in community with other believers who are growing closer to Jesus, and help hold us accountable. And then there is of course the Holy Spirit. Now this is something that you can't really explain to a non-Christian in a way that they're ever going to understand. But as a true Christian, you have the Holy Spirit dwelling inside you. This is God inside you. This Holy Spirit leads you internally. As you trust in him, he guides you, and as a Christian we experience the Holy Spirit. But you can't and understand that, or know what that's like, unless you have the Holy Spirit in you. So if you're a Christian you have direct access to the Holy Spirit, and we need to ask Him for wisdom, and He will lead you.

As you trust in his wisdom you live out your purpose, what you were created for: to bring glory to God in everything that you do. Imagine if you asked for God's wisdom, and you did what he said. And you were not afraid of the trials ahead because you knew that by God's strength, you would be able to endure. Imagine that you boldly did what God called you to do, and you strove to be who God called you to be – walking with Godly integrity – living by His wisdom, instead of seeking the approval from others or keeping up with the Joneses. Living in God's wisdom, helps us speak with conviction, be more genuine, because we are not trying to manipulate people into liking us, trying to gain their favor as if our identity came from their approval. In challenging situations, you would go first. You wouldn't wait for others to go and do hard things, but you would not fear, and you would step out in faith and do the hard things God is calling you to do: living your best life-growing to be more like Jesus Christ.

So my prayer for all of us, is that we would live by God's wisdom more and more, and that we would not fear trials of various kinds, but have joy, because we know that God will strengthen us. Every one of us is on a journey learning how to do these things more - and more nobody is perfect. Nobody is there, and completely Christ-like, perfect and complete - we're not there yet. But that's where we're headed. Jesus is our goal. God gives us the steps on how we need to get there. And these are just two things: a change of perspective on trials, and asking God for wisdom (and then actually doing it!). Graduates and church when you think about your future and all that God might have for you, may you be bold and steadfast under trial and suffering, trusting God and loving him and pursuing him with everything that you are – no matter what. If you embrace suffering in your life, then by God's power, you will be unstoppable as the church.