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Four Barriers to Becoming a Wise Leader



In the first chapter of the New Testament (NT) book of James, the half-brother of Jesus addresses the issue of how God inculcates wisdom to a believer: it explains the means by which God grows people up!

It's easy to overlook how God goes about this if you don't pay it particular attention. More specifically, the chapter addresses how personal wealth can be used by an individual to disconnect from God's economy or means of maturing a person. You need to understand this, my friend.

This week I would like to investigate what this NT book has to say about this matter. Read on.


Ralph Drollinger

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- Former Cabinet Members / White House Senior Staff: Wednesdays 7am, Zoom.*
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Ben Baker

Missouri State Representative
District 160



“As a Christian legislator, it is vital to prepare your own heart, mind and soul spiritually to be able to successfully navigate the minefield of politics. Capitol Ministries serves a vital purpose in helping to provide legislators and their staff another opportunity to be intentional about spiritual nourishment that is necessary for us to fulfill our role and responsibility to serve the great state of Missouri.”

— BEN BAKER

Rep. Baker is a member of the CapMin weekly Bible study that Pastor Matt Goodsell leads to members of the Missouri Legislature.

I. INTRODUCTION

Good, biblically based theology shouts out that God not only saves you, but that after being saved He sanctifies you, or grows you up spiritually by His doing, by His actions, by His grace. This is in contrast to thinking that we have to save ourselves and grow ourselves by our own doing, or effort, as if being saved and growing spiritually were all dependent on our good works (contra. Ephesians 2:8–9).

Specifically regarding sanctification, we all know things from the Word of God that we have not yet completely applied in and to our lives; I have not yet applied everything I have learned in and from God’s Word. How many followers of Christ do you know who are knowledgeable like myself or yourself, but who are not yet wise about certain issues that matter? Wisdom is best understood as the skill of living life for God’s glory, it is having put the knowledge of God into action.

James presents the means by which God accomplishes the believer’s growth in and toward wisdom: the epistle imparts how God sanctifies us, or grows us in Christlikeness. With that in mind, this is a very important passage of Scripture to understand. Accordingly, let’s take a close look this week at James, chapter 1 with this objective.

James was the half-brother of Jesus Christ and therefore, the brother of the NT author Jude who were among other sons of Mary and Joseph (cf. Mark 6:3; Matthew 12:46). (They had daughters as well.) Although not an apostle, he was an associate of the apostles, (Galatians 1:19). James was a very prominent early leader in the Church at Jerusalem, and he wrote this epistle with the authority of having personally seen the resurrected

Christ (1 Corinthians 15:7).

II. THE FIRST BARRIER TO BECOMING WISE: IGNORANCE

Don’t be ignorant as to God’s way of maturing you and me. When you are attuned to His ways of growing you up in Christlikeness, it becomes easier and more effective for His end results to occur.

A. GOD’S PEOPLE ARE IN NEED OF WISDOM

“James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings” (James 1:1).

James is writing to fellow followers of Christ who had been *dispersed abroad* due to persecution under Herod Agrippa (cf. Acts 12; ca. A.D. 44). This implies (and is supported by the context that follows), that the purpose of James’ writing is to instruct them in how to properly view this matter, how to be wise and circumspect about all that is happening to them as followers of Christ. In support of James addressing a Christian audience—a key factor in the proper interpretation of the epistle—he states *my brethren* in verses 2 and 9.

B. GOD’S MEANS OF IMPARTING WISDOM

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:2–4).

James is quick to inform his readers that they should have a positive attitude about the dire circumstances they find



themselves in. In fact, they should *consider it all joy*. Why? Because the means that God uses to grow His children, i.e., *perfect* them, *complete* them, to make sure they are not *lacking*, is via the economy of *various* kinds of *trials*. *Trials* (*peripepto*) in the Greek means to “fall into the midst of” which speaks of God’s sovereign orchestration.

Now let’s take a close look at the progression in this portion of James 1: *Trials* and *the testing of your faith* bring about the need for perseverance, or *endurance*, which is the means to the end result of spiritual maturation, or, becoming *perfect and complete, lacking in nothing*. Herein James is stating the idealistic goal of the maturation process.

This Greek word for *testing* (*dokimion*) is the same Greek word used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew language Old Testament) relative to Proverbs 27:21 which states, *“The crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold, and each is tested (dokimion) by the praise accorded him.”* The point being that the meaning of the word *testing* as evidenced by early translators, is a linguistic reference to the process by which God refines our faith. One’s life is heated in the crucible of *testing* and suffering (cf. Philippians 3:10) so that the dross and impurities of the old sin-laden man, pre-Christ, might be burned away by our LORD.

Testing is the means by which God orchestrates change in our lives.

As a result, we become increasingly pure and valuable as we more and more reflect Christ’s image in every part of our lives. James here, is revealing to the saints that have been *dispersed*, displaced from their home country, God’s way of purifying His chosen ones! Seen through this

lens is the theological reason for being able to *count it all joy*. The author of the NT book of Hebrews in a parallel passage (12:5–7) also explicates God’s earnest desire to mature His saints:

“MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.’ It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?”

This adds dimension to the subject at hand: How God achieves maturation in the life of His followers. If God uses *trials* and *discipline* as His means of character inculcation, then it should come as no surprise that those who are saved by God’s grace should *consider various trials as all joy*. Why? They indicate God’s ultimate intentions, His indefatigable love for you and His Fatherly desire to grow you up into spiritual adulthood.

In Genesis 50:20 Joseph evidences his deep abiding understanding of this heavenly economy for growth when he said in relation to those who brought all kinds of pain into his life (his biological brothers!), *“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result.”* Therein displayed is the attitudinal lens for our viewing of *trials*—a proper attitude toward *trials* and *discipline* which God expects all of His children to possess. Notice in James 1:12, further motivation for responding in a godly fashion to *trials* and *discipline*. *“Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”* James is coaxing us in many dif-

♥ VERSE OF THE WEEK

James 1:2–4

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”



Testing is the means by which God orchestrates change in our lives.





James Madison



“Conscience is the most sacred of all property.”

— James Madison, signer of the constitution, author of *The Federalist Papers*, framer of the Bill of Rights, Secretary of State, fourth president of the United States.

James Madison, *Essay on Property*, March 29, 1792.



ferent ways to succeed in *trials*! To fail to learn and apply what God intends to teach us in a *trial* or when He is *disciplining* us is tantamount to asking for the same thing all over again! We must understand God’s means of imparting wisdom to us! God will orchestrate similar situations in His relentless attempts to grow you in the particular area where you are failing to grow.

Don’t be ignorant to His ways of doing things!

I know older men in my life who just keep facing the same things over and over again because of their mule-like recalcitrance. They’ve gone nowhere in life relative to growth in character and Christlikeness—to say nothing of their lack of *joy* through all of life’s seeming setbacks.

C. GOD’S DESIRE TO IMPART WISDOM

“*But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him*” (James 1:5).

James now reveals *wisdom* to be synonymous with the results he has previously stated: to be *perfect and complete, lacking in nothing*. In further support of this idea of synonymous understanding, the Greek word used here for *wisdom* (*sophias*) means “applied knowledge.” The promise of this great passage is that God will show you specifically how to apply His Word if you ask Him. He will impress upon your conscience precisely what it is He wants you to learn from the circumstances you face. When you are unsure He will show you! *And it will be given to you* is an unconditional promise! States Proverbs 2:6 in parallel fashion, “*For the LORD gives wisdom.*” Further, Jesus said, “*Ask and it will be given*

to you ...” (Matthew 7:7). Lest one think these passages underscore some kind of a mystical encounter with God through some kind of modern-day dreams or visions, it is most likely (in keeping with the whole counsel of God on the matter including the closing of the canon in the books of Jude and Revelation) His illumination of His Word to your heart via your personal study, or through a biblically-based sermon, or perhaps the counsel of a godly friend who points you to pertinent biblical principles in your time of *trial* or *discipline*.

As such, this passage is tied in with the wonderful biblical doctrine of illumination (cf. Psalm 119:33–34; Luke 24:45; Ephesians 1:17–18; Colossians 1:9–11; 1 John 2:20, 27; James 1:21). Illumination is directly connected to the great doctrines of revelation and inspiration. Having said that as a foundational basis as to how God imparts or gives His *wisdom* to you, additionally keep in mind that one of the ministries of God Himself, via the third member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, is to lead you into all truth (cf. Psalm 43:3). God does not want you to be ignorant or blind as to what He is trying to teach you: He wants you to get it in no unmistakable way.

Note further the word *sophias* as used by James. It is in contrast to other words common in NT use. For example, *sunesis* which means theoretical knowledge, or *gnosis* which means acquired knowledge, or *oida* which translated means intuitive knowledge. In using the word *sophias*, James is communicating that God is very personable and *generous* with His children and will *give to all* the correct and practical application of biblical knowledge to their life’s situation i.e., in their *trial*, *testing*, or *discipline*, assuming that individual wants such an understanding *be given to him* versus willfully being ignorant to becoming *wise*.



III. THE SECOND BARRIER TO BECOMING WISE: LACK OF DESIRE

“But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1:6–8).

One sure way to avoid spiritual growth is simply to not desire it. Many are the American Christians who pursue their satisfaction in life apart from the pursuit of God’s righteousness. In their idolatry of other selfish concerns (idolatry is anything elevated above the pursuit of the cross in one’s heart) they hunger after such things (if not all!) of personal pleasure, luxury, fame and power, money, and personal glory. But Jesus states in the Sermon on the Mount, the frivolity of such when He said, *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied”* (Matthew 5:6). True, deep-down satisfaction is only attainable through one’s growth in *righteousness* and *wisdom*. The specific point being, *double-minded* Christians aren’t ever sure what their highest priorities are, like *waves*, they come and go in their life’s pursuits, regularly changing their appetites and direction. They have one foot in and one foot out. As a result, they tend to view God’s onslaught of *trials* negatively or with a wrong perspective. As a result, they seldom learn from them, and subsequently they remain unwise, spiritual infants in the faith throughout their whole life. Theirs is not an upward projection. Don’t be like such individuals; conversely *ask* God *in faith* when you *encounter various trials*: God, what this is all about? I don’t want to miss the lesson You have for me in this *trial*. Therein is the desire it takes to becoming wise.

IV. THE THIRD BARRIER TO BECOMING WISE: SIDESTEPPING TRIALS

“But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away” (James 1:9–11).¹

By the time we arrive at this poignant, insightful passage, we have established well the context of what James is communicating to his colleagues in the faith. What is said here must be interpreted with that in view. So then what more is James communicating here pertaining to this subject of wising up in life? This is so powerful and insightful – and particularly applicable to resourceful believers. How does this particular portion of the passage relate to the overall thesis of gaining *wisdom*, the application of biblical knowledge into one’s life?

In Hebraic writing fashion, James segues into a further elaboration on the primary truth of verses 2 and 3 by relating it to a *humble* man, who possesses very little if any self-means, in contrast to the *rich man* with resources. Why? A *humble* man is by definition and contextual mention, without the personal ability to sidestep a *trial*, which is therefore a *high position* in terms of his capability to learn from the *trial*: he can’t wiggle out of the *trial* in ways that a resourceful individual could. Accordingly, given God’s stated economy for growing us in Christlikeness or wisdom, the believer with humble means should in a proper sense *glory* in that he is in the best *position* to learn from the *trial*!

John Adams



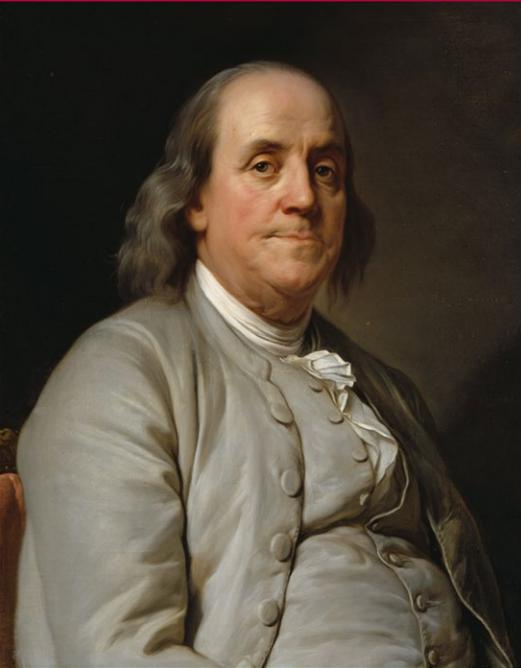
“I Pray Heaven to Bestow The Best of Blessing on THIS HOUSE, and on ALL that shall hereafter Inhabit it. May none but Honest and Wise Men ever rule under This Roof!”

— John Adams, second President of the United States, signer of the Declaration of Independence, judge, diplomat, one of two signers of the Bill of Rights.

John Adams, letter to Abigail Adams, November 2, 1800.



Benjamin Franklin



Conversely, it is much easier for a *rich man* (whom I might add, most in the capital community are) to use his vast resources to avoid going through a sovereignly-ordained *trial* or *disciplining*. But in doing that, he will also miss all the lessons that he would have learned had he successfully *asked of God* what He wanted him to learn and *endured* that *trial* or *discipline*. At the end of the day, the *rich man* misses the purpose(s) desired by God and he doesn't grow from it.

Herein lies the explanation as to why so many wealthy and affluent believers remain spiritually immature: They have the wherewithal to circumvent God's growth mechanisms!

James is implying that no matter what one's socio-economic status may be, he or she needs to *ask of God*, "What application of biblical knowledge do you want me to make, given the present circumstances which You have allowed to come into my life?" Therein is the beginning point for all spiritual growth! In trying times, turn first to God for direction and application of biblical precepts—versus trying to jimmy yourself out of the matter with your own resources and with no reflection or regard for God's purposes. Again, devising a way out of a matter in one's own power is to miss out on the personal growth opportunity! Note Jeremiah 9:23–24 in regards to harboring thoughts of self-sufficiency:

"Thus says the LORD, 'Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises loving-

kindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,' declares the LORD."

To complete the understanding of all that James 1:9–11 is stating (given the time in which it was written) the *rich* believer (in terms of worldly standards) is to *glory* in his *humiliation* for being named and known publicly as a Christian—his identification with believers at the time this was written when Rome persecuted believers meant that in so doing he would decrease his worldly standing. The *rich* first-century believer then should *glory* in this *humiliation* because in sobriety he knows that human wealth and status are transitory, while becoming more Christlike through a *trial* has eternal ramifications! Psalm 49:16–17 further provides the attitudinal basis for James' instruction to *rich* believers:

"Do not be afraid when a man becomes rich, when the glory of his house is increased; for when he dies he will carry nothing away."

Back to our passage, and further understanding all of what James 1:9–11 means in the overall context of this passage (and other passages that state one cannot lose his salvation) the Greek word for *pass away* does not connote eternal judgment, as in the sense of one losing his salvation. Rather, the idea is that of ceasing to exist in terms of their present, high socio-economic status. This is an important distinction and serves to strengthen the point already being made: When a resourceful individual accepts his *trials*, learns and is *humbled* by them, his otherwise polished socio-economic status may become tarnished. It may *pass away* in the sense of ceasing to exist like it once did. Similarly, *flowers* are short lived. *Trials* to a *rich* person can be like the *rising sun* and a *scorching wind* that serve to change one's pub-

"Strive to be the greatest man in your country, and you may be disappointed. Strive to be the best and you may succeed: he may well win the race that runs by himself."

— Benjamin Franklin, signer of the Declaration of Independence, diplomat, printer, scientist, signer of the Constitution, governor of Pennsylvania.

Benjamin Franklin, *Poor Richard's Almanack*, 1747.





lic *appearance*.

In summary of this portion of our study, what James is saying is that one's spiritual growth is much more important than one's socio-economic identity. That being the case, the *rich man* has more to lose through this economy of maturation than the *humble man*. That is what this passage is teaching.

As a public servant, you are of high standing in our culture. Regarding God orchestrating *trials* in order to grow you, your temptation is more like that of a *rich man* who is more likely to try to escape *trials* rather than the humble man who has less resources and must go through them. Having said that, remember at least three passages in this regard:

A. DANIEL 2:21

“It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men and knowledge to men of understanding.”

B. PSALM 75:7

“But God is the Judge; He puts down one and exalts another.”

C. PROVERBS 21:1

“The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.”

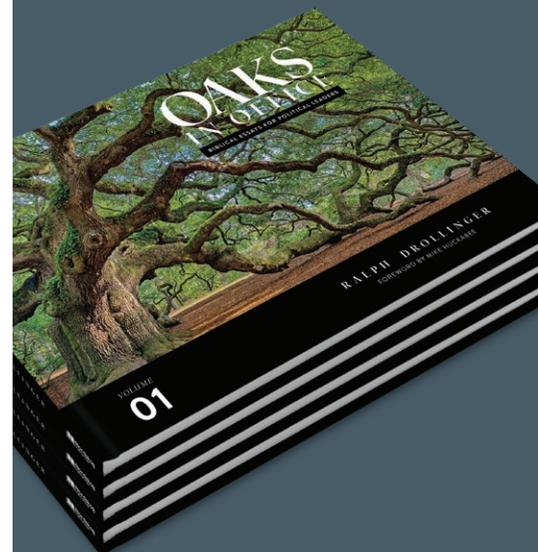
These three Old Testament passages serve to illustrate that since it is God who controls the destiny of political leaders, it is better to obey Him than ignore Him—especially when it comes to going through or attempting to circumnavigate *trials* and *disciplining*. Don't sidestep the *trials* God has for you, lest He *put you down and exalt another*.

V. THE FOURTH BARRIER TO BECOMING WISE: OUTWARD REJECTION

“This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:19–21).

Let us now proceed to the end of chapter one where James lists yet another barrier to wisdom's advancement in the life of the believer. Keep in mind verses 19–21 are still in the context of *trials* in the believer's life. The meaning of these verses must be exegeted with that context in mind.

To react in *anger* to a *trial* is common. But so doing is antithetical to *considering* a *trial* as *joyful* in one's attitudinal response (vs. 1). When one interprets the oft quoted passage, *be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger* in the context of a response to *trials*, it takes on a heightened meaning. Likened to Joseph, we need to learn to first be contemplative relative to the onslaught of *various trials* in our lives. Listen with the attitude of, “God, what are you trying to teach me through this?” (*be quick to hear*) versus speaking out about perpetrators with others who are uninvolved, or reacting in some form of outward *anger*. How spiritually childish declares James! *Put* such responses *aside* and receive the *word* which God wants *implanted* in your life—after all, James exclaims, it is the same *word* you as a believer are trusting in for your salvation. Now trust in it for your sanctification! To *receive the word implanted* is akin to one's growth in *wisdom*. Don't allow your immediate fleshly response to in-



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hibit, or become a barrier to the growth of *wisdom* as a leader in government.

The apostle Paul provides much by way of additional insight into the internal thought processes and disciplines that the believer must cultivate in order to become spiritually mature. He states in Philippians 4:6–9:

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

These mental disciplines are those of wise individuals who are contemplative of God’s orchestrated *trials*. Here above are the fruits of one who has been trained by *trials* and responded in ways pleasing to God. They have not ignored, been apathetic to, sidestepped, or rejected *trials*. Instead, they have grown from them in ways that only God could achieve in the heart of fallen individuals who have no righteousness of their own. Be counted among them.

VI. CONCLUSION

Much could be said about the Pauline passage of Philippians 4, but notice how it contrasts with the Jamesian passage of James 1: being quite naturally slow to *hear, quick to speak* and *quick to anger*. That is our natural immature response to *trials*. Conversely, Paul’s inner thoughts were to put off *anxiety*, knowing God is in sovereign control over the affairs of His called-out ones. He had learned through many *trials* to turn first to God in *prayers* that give *thanks*, to look for God’s protection in the heart and mind and then to *dwell on* what is *true, honorable, right, pure, lovely* and of *good repute*. He modeled this for us. We, too, need to discipline our minds to respond maturely increasingly so in all of life’s *trials*.

1. There are four reasons I believe this passage is referring to wealthy believers versus unbelievers. (1). In verses 2 and 9 Paul is addressing his letter to believers. (2). He resumes his thesis of trials in verse 12 right after this section concludes. (3). The syntactical conjunctions throughout chapter one connects the thoughts. (4). Theologically, Scripture does not condone asceticism, as if wealth versus poverty were the determining factor in one’s spirituality, rather one’s spirituality is indexed via faith alone in Christ versus unbelief.

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