
Functioning in a Dysfunctional World

Understanding Direction

Note: *All scripture in Italics*

James 1

1From James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. To all of God's people who are scattered everywhere in the world: Greetings.

Faith and Wisdom

2My brothers and sisters, when you have many kinds of troubles, you should be full of joy, 3because you know that these troubles test your faith, and this will give you patience. 4Let your patience show itself perfectly in what you do. Then you will be perfect and complete and will have everything you need. 5 But if any of you needs wisdom, you should ask God for it. He is generous and enjoys giving to all people, so He will give you wisdom. 6But when you ask God, you must believe and not doubt. Anyone who doubts is like a wave in the sea, blown up and down by the wind. 7-8Such doubters are thinking two different things at the same time, and they cannot decide about anything they do. They should not think they will receive anything from the Lord.

In verse 3, we clearly see that your *troubles test your faith*. Not only do they test it, but also exercise it, helping it to grow. We know how exercise works with the physical body. As we exercise, the *resistance* of the weight causes the muscles to stretch to their limits. They get torn down, and in the process of their recovery, their size and strength increases. The next time, they are able to easily withstand that same resistance, and even more, as the process is practiced over and over again. That is how muscle size (muscle mass) and physical strength are increased. If the body is receiving a proper diet, with exercise, it will grow stronger.

Spiritually speaking, if you have a healthy spiritual diet, the exercise this world sends your way will be exactly what is necessary to increase your faith. These *real-life* trials, and *real-life* tribulations, have the potential to cause significant trauma in our lives. This trauma is what kept most of us, especially as active alcoholics and addicts *without a solution*, from facing life on life's terms. Before recovery, we were not properly equipped to deal with them. Finding our way into the rooms of recovery was just the beginning. Once here, we must exercise in order to grow stronger, using the things that are suggested by those that have successfully pioneered before us. We must learn the true meaning of *application*.



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The program says that we must learn to “practice these principles in all our affairs.” Application and practice, two key words on the solution side of recovery. Without doing so, we will remain spiritual runts, weaklings that continue to be tossed and turned in every situation we are faced with. But, if we practice (apply) what is suggested, each struggle becomes an opportunity for growth. In vs. 4 above, we have His promise that we will have everything we need to become a complete person. If we refuse to believe that God can (and will) do exactly what His Word says, then why should He? Why should He do something for us if we doubt His ability to do it, and/or His love for us? Remember, He sent His only begotten Son to die *for us* so we may have eternal life with Him. Shouldn't that be enough? Jesus shed His blood for the forgiveness of our sins. What an awesome and powerful statement He made through His actions. He paid a debt He did not owe, He paid a price we could not pay.

Our words are nothing but mere words until we put them to action. It is easy to say we love someone, and just as easy to say we would die for them, but would we really? Would you die to save a friend? How about to save an enemy? That is exactly what Jesus did. He died to save the very same people that killed Him.

Luke 11:29

As the crowd pressed in on Jesus, he said, “These are evil times, and this evil generation keeps asking me to show them a miraculous sign. But the only sign I will give them is the sign of the prophet Jonah. 30What happened to him was a sign to the people of Nineveh that God had sent him. What happens to me will be a sign that God has sent me, the Son of Man, to these people.

According to God's Word, He is not going to provide any additional proof for us. The world says; show me first, and then I will believe. God says: believe in me first and then I will show you many things. Take a look around and see the many, many signs and wonders He has already provide for us. No *Big Bang* could have blown such as intricate world together with such perfection. Only by the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present, Creator and Sustainer, could this be possible. The facts are as plain as day.

God does not have to, and will not attempt to prove anything to us. We need to open our eyes and look at His many “signs” and “wonders.” His creation says it all for Him.

Along with the obvious, He has placed a measure of faith in each of us, enough to enable us to reach out to Him in response to His call. We really have no excuse. He has given us what we need to get right with Him. If we utilize the measure of faith He has placed within, it will be like a seed that begins to grow. And as we feed it with His truth, and exercise it with life's trials, it will grow.

The Word of God, the Bible tells us that faith comes by the hearing of His Word. As we read, and share His Word with each other, He teaches us everything we need to know about Him, and about how to live life here in this world. His mission has already been accomplished. Now, it is up to us, as lost and hurting people, to reach out to Him in faith. Each time we do so, and experience His faithfulness, our trust in Him increases. That's why He said for us to count it “all joy” when we are faced with trials and tribulations. It's through them that our faith becomes real. and as we continue to exercise our faith. our



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trust in God continues to grow. First, we must remember that, as His obedient children, we are entitled to all His promises. But in order to receive them, we must believe Him.

True wisdom is; having knowledge that is clearly understood, along with the ability to apply it. It sounds like something we can all use a measure of. Vs. 5 above says that God gives it generously. Well then, how come we don't all have it? What's the catch? Believing Him! Most of us will sit here, read this, and then go about our merry way without asking God for a share of it. God can't and won't lie. He clearly states that He will give wisdom to any believer that asks, believes, and does not doubt. So, why do we lack wisdom?

True Riches

9Believers who are poor should be proud, because God has made them spiritually rich. 10Those who are rich should be proud, because God has shown them that they are spiritually poor. The rich will die like a wild flower in the grass. 11The sun rises with burning heat and dries up the plants. The flower falls off, and its beauty is gone. In the same way the rich will die while they are still taking care of business.

Temptation Is Not from God

12When people are tempted and still continue strong, they should be happy. After they have proved their faith, God will reward them with life forever. God promised this to all those who love him. 13When people are tempted, they should not say, "God is tempting me." Evil cannot tempt God, and God himself does not tempt anyone. 14But people are tempted when their own evil desire leads them away and traps them. 15This desire leads to sin, and then the sin grows and brings death.

A desire (initiated by a thought), if entertained long enough, will become an action, and once repeated, has the potential of leading us right back into bondage, making us, once again, a slave to sin. We need to consider the consequences before we act on a thought. If the thought is not from God (a good & righteous thought), chances are, it is either coming from our old sinful nature, or from demonic influences around us. We need to hold our thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ. Meaning, we must filter them through the Word of God, and the only way we are able to do it is by having read it. How can we recognize a lie if we don't know what the truth is to begin with?

16My dear brothers and sisters, do not be fooled about this. 17Every good action and every perfect gift is from God. These good gifts come down from the Creator of the sun, moon, and stars, who does not change like their shifting shadows. 18God decided to give us life through the Word of Truth so we might be the most important of all the things he made.

Listening and Obeying

19My dear brothers and sisters, always be willing to listen and slow to speak. Do not become angry easily, 20because anger will not help you live the right kind of life God wants. 21So put out of your life every evil thing and every kind of wrong. Then in gentleness accept God's teaching that is planted in your hearts, which can save you.

22 Do what God's teaching says; when you only listen and do nothing, you are fooling yourselves. 23Those who hear God's teaching and do nothing are like people who look at themselves in a mirror. 24They see their faces and then go away and quickly forget what



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they looked like. 25But the truly happy people are those who carefully study God's perfect law that makes people free, and they continue to study it. They do not forget what they heard, but they obey what God's teaching says. Those who do this will be made happy.

We can clearly see that obedience to God brings happiness. Jesus said, as He prepared to depart from this world, He must leave in order to send us a Comforter. He said the Comforter is His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, and would teach us and remind us of all things. Only His Spirit can teach about spiritual things. Only His Spirit can give spiritual wisdom and discernment. *Obedience to God is learning* what His will is for us, and then, *doing it*. His Word, along with His Spirit, will teach us these things.

We must not only be good listeners, but also doers. We need to apply what we learn. In doing so, we become walking, living, testimonies (examples), expressions, of what His love can do in an individual's life. As we study His Word, His transforming power begins to change us into His likeness. "Progress, not perfection," is a "12-step program" term used to describe the process of continuous growth towards perfection, as one actively participates in his own recovery. As long as there are signs of progress, we are moving towards His perfection. This is actually similar to what we experience as we spend time with Our Lord, only the "transformation" is something He does *with-in* us. As we spend time with Him, He changes us, one day at a time, into exactly who He wants us to be. Healing, to some degree, can be experienced in the 12-step programs without Jesus, but the true healing process requires the type of forgiveness and cleansing that only comes through the blood of Jesus. Only God can forgive, cleanse, and transform us into His new creation. We no longer have to sin. We have a choice today.

Your progress will ultimately reflect those that you surround yourself with. If you spend 15 minutes a day with God and live in the world for the remaining 23 - 3/4 hours, it is pretty obvious what the results will be. As Christians, we are called to "live a life of prayer." What does it mean to "live a life of prayer?" Well, since we know that "prayer" is communication with God, it is safe to say that God wants us to stay in direct communication with Him throughout our day. He wants to be included in everything we do. We need to stay conscious of His presence. In doing so, we allow Him to guide and direct our path. By staying in fellowship with Him, we are doing exactly what He created us for, which is for "His pleasure."

The True Way to Worship God

26People who think they are religious but say things they should not say are just fooling themselves. Their "religion" is worth nothing. 27Religion that God accepts as pure and without fault is this: caring for orphans or widows who need help, and keeping yourself free from the world's evil influence.

Getting involved in "serving others," and staying away from "slippery people" and "slippery places," are mandatory ingredients for success in recovery. God given *discernment* is to be used to protect and assist. God gives us the ability to sense dangerous situations and conditions around us. He also brings to our attention, the needs of others. If He points out to you, the faults in others, you have a responsibility to God to use that information properly. We can use the insight to protect ourselves as well as helping others. We can help by doing something as simple (but very powerful) as praying for them. We must never gossip about the things God reveals to us. Our fleshly nature is to pass on the



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information to those around us, possibly destroying someone's character. We must refrain from that type of behavior, and refraining requires a conscious effort. We need to remind ourselves to stay conscious of doing what is right in God's eyes, not ours. We must use spiritual wisdom with what God reveals to us. Use the insight to help you pray, encourage, and edify others in every given opportunity.

James 2

1My dear brothers and sisters, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, never think some people are more important than others. 2Suppose someone comes into your church meeting wearing nice clothes and a gold ring. At the same time a poor person comes in wearing old, dirty clothes. 3You show special attention to the one wearing nice clothes and say, "Please, sit here in this good seat." But you say to the poor person, "Stand over there," or, "Sit on the floor by my feet." 4What are you doing? You are making some people more important than others, and with evil thoughts you are deciding that one person is better.

5Listen, my dear brothers and sisters! God chose the poor in the world to be rich with faith and to receive the kingdom God promised to those who love him. 6But you show no respect to the poor. The rich are always trying to control your lives. They are the ones who take you to court. 7And they are the ones who speak against Jesus, who owns you.

8This royal law is found in the Scriptures: "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." If you obey this law, you are doing right. 9But if you treat one person as being more important than another, you are sinning. You are guilty of breaking God's law. 10A person who follows all of God's law but fails to obey even one command is guilty of breaking all the commands in that law. 11The same God who said, "You must not be guilty of adultery," also said, "You must not murder anyone." So if you do not take part in adultery but you murder someone, you are guilty of breaking all of God's law. 12In everything you say and do, remember that you will be judged by the law that makes people free. 13So you must show mercy to others, or God will not show mercy to you when he judges you. But the person who shows mercy can stand without fear at the judgment.

Have you ever said; I know what I'm doing is wrong, but at least I'm not doing what .. "he" ..or ... "she" is doing. According to God, "sin is sin" no matter how you label it. So often we experience the "frying pan calling the kettle black" syndrome. We are so busy pointing fingers, we fail to see our own faults. More often than not, the exact behavior we are pointing out in others, is the very same thing we are doing our self. Gossiping about people that gossip, is a classic example.

Love One Another

We have been given a command to love one another. This is not an option, but a requirement that Jesus made. It is mandatory! It is not easy to love everyone, especially someone that has hurt you. We are not required to like them or their behavior, but we are commanded to love them. We don't have to love or accept their behavior, but we must love and accept them. When you have no other choice but to be around people with behaviors that are unacceptable, it is always helpful to try and focus on their *good qualities*. We must remember that these are God's projects, not ours, and ask God how we can be good Godly examples in each situation. God uses each of us to reach out and help others, especially those that consciously chose to serve Him on a daily basis.



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Faith and Good Works

14My brothers and sisters, if people say they have faith, but do nothing, their faith is worth nothing. Can faith like that save them? 15A brother or sister in Christ might need clothes or food. 16If you say to that person, "God be with you! I hope you stay warm and get plenty to eat," but you do not give what that person needs, your words are worth nothing. 17In the same way, faith that is alone—that does nothing—is dead.

18Someone might say, "You have faith, but I have deeds." Show me your faith without doing anything, and I will show you my faith by what I do. 19You believe there is one God. Good! But the demons believe that, too, and they tremble with fear.

20You foolish person! Must you be shown that faith that does nothing is worth nothing? 21Abraham, our ancestor, was made right with God by what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar. 22So you see that Abraham's faith and the things he did worked together. His faith was made perfect by what he did. 23This shows the full meaning of the Scripture that says: "Abraham believed God, and God accepted Abraham's faith, and that faith made him right with God." And Abraham was called God's friend. 24So you see that people are made right with God by what they do, not by faith only.

25Another example is Rahab, a prostitute, who was made right with God by something she did. She welcomed the spies into her home and helped them escape by a different road.

26Just as a person's body that does not have a spirit is dead, so faith that does nothing is dead!

Faith, put to action, is an expression of trust that, in turn, brings forth results. Faith is merely a word until trust is added, and exercised. The Bible says that "faith without works is dead." God's Word tells us that He has placed a "measure" of faith in all of us, but until exercised, it lies dormant. Sad but true, it is very hard for most of us to *act on faith* without having absolute trust in what or who we are putting our faith in. For some reason, we find it, at first, especially hard to trust God. Many in the world today, particularly those in recovery, find it hard to put their trust in a father that can't be seen, when the father they could see had abandoned them at some point in their life. This is why it typically takes a desperate situation (taking us to our knees) to get us to reach out to Him.

What or who are you putting your trust in today? Money? Man? Who are you depending on to meet your needs? God, The Infallible One, the source of all things, is the Only One truly trust worthy.

Are you trusting Him?

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