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James 1:9-18

The Passing and the Permanent

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, you're still here. That's an encouraging sign.

We are continuing our series in James this week. This week we will round out James' teaching on the theoretical foundations of godly wisdom. I've argued the last two weeks that James is primarily addressed to help Christians grow in godly wisdom, I defined that last week as the skill or art of living well. Obviously, people in all times and all places are concerned about living well, but the message of James seems to be particularly relevant to our present culture. I would argue that our present culture is marked by a pronounced sense of both despair and directionlessness. Godly wisdom answers this by offering hope and meaning in the face of despair. And by offering direction, prudence in the fear of God, in the face of directionlessness.

I've argued the last couple weeks that godly wisdom is both theoretical and practical. There's a head knowledge component, and also a practical, how-to component. Today we will round out the theoretical side of godly wisdom, then the next two weeks we will look at the practical side.

In these first 18 verses James gives us five principles of godly wisdom. You could probably add a few more, but these are the big ones that you need to see. We've seen four of them already, and we will add the fifth today.

The first two were the principles we saw in week one. Godly wisdom, first, trusts God's providence. God is in control, wisdom believes that in your very bones, whatever happens, God is in control, and wisdom trusts God in that. God is not reacting to events in your life, he is working out a plan for the world and for you. Second, godly wisdom understands the role of trials in sanctification. Not in that wisdom understands exactly what God is doing in each trial, but that wisdom recognizes that trials themselves are a tool in God's toolbelt for sanctification, for the progress of godly maturity, in his children.

The third principle of Godly wisdom is that wisdom trusts in God's goodness. I stressed this last week looking at God's happiness, his blessedness. It's good to know that there is someone at the wheel, someone is driving this thing, but it's even better to know that the driver is good.

Fourth, godly wisdom relies on God and asks him for help. God isn't just a principle, but a person. A father who delights to help his children, to supply them with what they need. Godly wisdom knows that your own resources often won't be enough, and asks God for help – for more wisdom, for more strength, for more direction, for more grace and help.

Then fifth, what we'll see in today's text, Godly wisdom knows how to rightly relate the passing and the permanent. Godly wisdom knows how to rightly relate earthly goods, spiritual goods, and eternal goods. Godly wisdom knows how to properly order and value the temporary goods of this life and the eternal goods of this life and the next.

Now, the world, people operating out of worldly wisdom, not godly wisdom, err in two directions here, and both are worldly. The obvious way is by ignoring the spiritual and eternal and only focusing on the passing. Only focusing on worldly, earthly goods, with no consideration of spiritual goods or eternal goods. This person is only living for money, or pleasure, or fame, or even more noble things like family, and career, and legacy.

But the opposite error is just as fleshly and worldly. There's a kind of super-spiritualism that turns out to be earthly and fleshly. A kind of worldly wisdom that only cares about the spiritual and the eternal at the expense of the passing, the temporary, the earthly. There is a so-called spirituality that either explicitly or functionally acts like passing things are not only temporary, but valueless, distractions, or even evil.

This is Gnosticism in the ancient world. This is Buddhism and significant streams of Hinduism in the East that teaches that the world is an illusion. And this is large segments of Christian monasticism that sees earthly things like food, work, society, and family as inherently distracting for true spirituality.

Paul condemns all of this in Colossians 2:23, saying **“these [practices] have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.”**

Some, only value the passing, the earthly. And some, only value the permanent. Both of these are worldly, unspiritual wisdom.

Here’s how I summarize the principle from today’s passage, *Godly wisdom understands how to rightly relate the passing and the permanent by properly valuing the passing and clearly prioritizing the permanent.*

In this passage James is going to clearly stress the priority of the permanent things while at the same time not devaluing the passing. There are two basic errors that we as Christians need to be careful to avoid. On the one hand we need to properly value passing goods. I’m talking about things like health and security, work, family, friendships, good food, creaturely beauty, things like that. Everything from flowers blooming in the Spring to your children being healthy and happy. Basically, the good things of the earth that God lavishly gives to all kinds of people.

We need to value these properly, first off, by not undervaluing them, not denying their goodness. In Genesis 1, God repeatedly calls his creation *good*. To *undervalue* these passing goods is to argue with God about their value. He calls them good, so should we.

But then, there’s always the danger of *overvaluing* them. Which is the other ditch: failing to clearly prioritize the spiritual and the eternal. Earthly goods really are good, and yet, we’re emphatically called to “seek the things that are above.”¹

The two ditches. On the one hand, we need to avoid the ditch of *undervaluing* passing goods. And on the other we need to avoid the ditch of *overvaluing* the passing by failing to prioritize the permanent.

And this is really the secret – James hints at this in verse 17 here – the best way to rightly value the passing is *by* prioritizing the permanent. The passing things get their value in relation to the permanent.

You will rightly value the beauty of Spring flowers only when you see them as a fleeting reflection of God’s beauty. You will rightly value the rich flavors of good food only when you see it as a gift of God’s kindness, and a participation in his own delight. You will rightly value your family, your husband or wife, and your children, when you see that love as an echo of uncreated Trinitarian love, and you see them as God’s gift to you.

Those who rightly prioritize the permanent are those who are most able to deeply delight in the passing. You can enjoy fleeting beauty because you know the source of unfading beauty.

Pray with me, then let’s get into the text.

Intro to the Text

In this text James is continuing to unpack the instruction from verse 2, **“count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.”** In these verses James will look at bad circumstances, good circumstances, and temptations to sin, and in all of it he is teaching us what it means to count trials as joy, to not set our affections ultimately on the passing things – the good or the bad – but in all of it to look beyond the passing to the permanent. Not to ignore the passing, or to somehow look through the passing, but always to see the passing in the light of the permanent. To always see the permanent looming in the background of the passing.

In this passage he will give us three permanent things to fix our attention on. First, in verses 9-11 he says, in the middle of life’s circumstances, boast in your *present* spiritual blessings. Second, in verse 12, in the face of

¹ Colossians 3:1.

your trials, look forward to the *future* crown of eternal life. And third, in the face of temptation, remember the *unchanging* God who has given you all your blessings – especially spiritual life through the Word.

Present spiritual blessings, future eternal blessings, and the unchanging source of all blessings, God himself.

Look at verses 9 and 10. **“⁹Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, ¹⁰and the rich in his humiliation.”**

We need to do a little bit of translation work here, because it could be easy to miss what is going on. The Greek words that are translated here as ‘lowly’ and ‘humiliation’ are both from the same root word. I’m not entirely sure why they translated this word as humiliation, I think that sends a very different signal. I think the King James shows what’s going on in the Greek a little better here. That version says, **“let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: but the rich, in that he is made low.”**

What he’s saying is that there are some brothers who are poor, and instead of getting sunk by their poverty they should boast in the fact that through Christ, they have been exalted by God. And there are some brothers who are rich, and instead of getting carried away by their wealth, they should boast in the fact that they have been given spiritual humility to see their creatureliness and their need of a savior.

For both, he’s saying, “don’t fix all your focus and your attention on your material circumstances. For some that will be tempting, because your circumstances are not great, and for some that will be tempting because your circumstances are great. But instead, look beneath the passing to the present spiritual blessings that you have received.”

The poor, the low in this world, need to rejoice, to boast, in the fact that even though you are low in this world, God has exalted you, right now, in Christ. Through the preaching of the gospel, God has forgiven your sins, justified you, adopted you, and seated you at the right hand of the Father in Christ. Your present spiritual blessings far outweigh your present material poverty.

Christian, that might be you today. You might be the lowly brother, or the lowly sister. You might have a hard deal in this life. Financial difficulties, physical difficulties. Whatever it may be. But Christian, don’t set your heart on these things. Christian, rejoice in your exaltation. Look to the permanent things. Christ has received you as his own. He has set his name on you. You have been raised up in him and with him. This is an incredible privilege, and incredible glory. Remember who you are.

And this is important. He’s not talking about *future* spiritual blessings. He’s talking about present spiritual blessings. He’ll get to the future in verse 12, but here he’s talking about the present. He’s not talking about your future exaltation, or your future lowliness, but a very present spiritual reality *now*.

Ok, then for the rich brothers and sisters, what is James saying to them? While wealth is in itself a blessing, is in itself a good thing, James is noting that wealth comes with a unique set of spiritual temptations. He’s saying that these brothers should rejoice in the fact that God has given them the spiritual humility to not be swept away by their wealth, that God has given them the spiritual lowliness to not be puffed up before God by their wealth.

The Bible consistently teaches that wealth is both a blessing, and that it comes with unique spiritual temptations. Psalm 112:1-3, **“Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments!... Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever.”** Proverbs 10:22, **“The blessing of the LORD makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it.”**

And yet, Proverbs 30:8-9 says, **“Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, “Who is the LORD?” or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.”** So, there’s a temptation there, “lest I be full and deny you.” The temptation from wealth is the temptation towards spiritual pride. ‘I don’t need God, I have all that I need, I am all that I need.’ Note also that poverty also comes with its own unique spiritual temptations.

So James is saying to the rich brothers and sisters, when you look at your wealth, yes, enjoy it as the blessing and the good gift that it is, but beyond that, rejoice in the fact that God has also given you the spiritual

humility that you need to not be swept away by spiritual pride. Jesus says, **“it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God... with man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”**²

Again, when God gives you the blessing of wealth, see it, enjoy it, be thankful for it, but look beyond it to the greater and permanent blessing of spiritual humility, that God has given you grace to pass through the eye of the needle. This is not very different from what the Apostle Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:17, **“As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.”**

Back to James. Look at the rest of verse 10 and verse 11. Here he illustrates this idea a bit. **“because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. ¹¹For 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.”**

Again, he’s not saying wealth is bad, just like he’s not saying flowers are bad. Enjoy the Spring flowers, but enjoy them for what they are, not pretending they are something else. The flower will fall. So, invest in what you will keep, rejoice in what you will keep, not what you are guaranteed to lose.

Then, in verse 12, James turns from the present spiritual blessings to future eternal blessings. Verse 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.”**

He’s adding another layer. Don’t focus on the passing trials, but instead focus on the permanent crown of life. Again, whether we’re talking about hard circumstances, or the temptations that come with good circumstances, he’s saying, don’t lose sight of the eternal reward. Don’t let temporary, passing things rob you of eternal, permanent blessings. Keep things in perspective.

A couple of notes. This is somewhat common New Testament language for endurance. The crown he’s talking about could also be translated as ‘wreath.’ He’s talking about the olive or laurel crowns that were used as trophies in Greek athletics. So, he’s saying, finish the race. Even though your lungs are burning and your legs are cramping up, finish the race, endure, cross the finish line, run for the reward. Paul says something similar in 1 Corinthians 10:25, **“Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.”** You could say, permanent.

Keep your eye on the prize.

In the last 6 verses, 13 through 18, he’s really making one point, *in the face of passing temptations, keep your eyes fixed on the Lord, who is the source of all good, and is himself the supreme good.* He’s saying, that in the course of your life, you are going to face a lot of temptations, and they will come in all kinds of shapes and sizes.

In hard circumstances you will be tempted to grumble against God, or to do sinful things to get out of the hard circumstances – remember the other side of Proverbs 30, “don’t give me poverty lest I steal and profane your name.”

Or you will simply be tempted to satisfy some fleshly urge in an unlawful way, you’ll be tempted towards anger, or towards greed, or towards gluttony, towards laziness, or towards lust and porn and that whole basket of death.

Or in good circumstances, you will be tempted to elevate your blessings to a position they don’t deserve, or to get puffed up yourself in pride.

In other words, there will come times when either, you will be tempted to get a good thing that God has not given you in an unlawful way. Or you will be tempted to set your affections in an inappropriate way on some good thing that God has given you. To take a good thing and make it a god thing.

² Matthew 19:24-26.

It's important to note, here when James brings in temptations, he's still not shifting gears to a totally new topic. It's not, "ok let's talk about your circumstances," then "ok, now let's talk about temptations."

No, James is continuing the same theme. There is a whole suite of temptations that comes with *not* having the passing good things. Those who are lowly, who aren't rich, or who don't have the good things of the world, or who have extra burdens, extra trials, extra hardships, they will face a unique set of temptations in life.

But then there is also a whole suite of temptations that will face those who do have the world's goods, who are rich, or who have a relatively smooth life.

James is saying, whether you're the lowly brother or the rich brother, watch out for temptations.

James has basically three points to make about these temptations. First, here in verses 13-15 he just says, don't play the blame game. This goes back to something I was saying a couple weeks ago. The better part of godly wisdom is learning to tell yourself the truth. And that includes learning to tell yourself the truth about where your sin comes from.

Sin doesn't come from God, our sin comes from our own hearts.

This blame game is a pervasive human problem. We seem to always want to make our sin just a little bit worse by not taking responsibility for it. This was Adam, in the Garden after he ate the fruit. God says, "Adam, what did you do? Did you eat the fruit?" and what does Adam say? Does he say, "I ate the fruit, it's my fault, I knew better"? Does he say, "Blame me, but go easy on her, I'm responsible here"? Is that what he said? No, Genesis 3:12, Adam says, "**The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.**" It's her fault, and it's your fault, God, that I ate the fruit.

James is saying, don't do that. Tell yourself the truth. Own where your temptation and sin comes from. Enough with this, "well the reason I'm not obeying is because God hasn't changed my heart yet." Enough of that. God has given you everything you need for life and godliness. Our sin is not his fault.

And this is really important to emphasize, especially given what I've been saying about God's providence. God is absolutely sovereign over every detail of your circumstances. And yet, that temptation to sin, that temptation to grumble, and dishonor God, or to try to make your circumstances better in some sinful way, or to just take something that isn't yours, that temptation isn't from God, that temptation, verse 14, comes from within, from your own desire.

Or on the other side, that temptation to pride because of your good circumstances, or that temptation to elevate your passing goods out of proportion, to give them a kind of love that doesn't belong to them, that temptation isn't from God, that's from your heart.

So, that's the point. When temptations come in the middle of passing circumstances, good or bad, don't play the blame game, tell yourself the truth.

And there's an important gospel principle here. The Christian can uniquely own his sin, can own her sin without being owned by it.

The non-Christian has to either avoid responsibility, or be crushed by it. The non-Christian either has to evade responsibility for his sin, or pay the penalty for it himself – take the guilt on himself, take the shame on himself, atone for it himself.

But the Christian can say both, "yes, this is mine, this came from me, I make no excuses, and yet, this is what Jesus died for." This is the whole point of the cross. It's this sin, precisely this sin here that Jesus died for.

I am responsible for this, and yet he has freed me from this. This comes from me, and yet it lands on him. I created this death, and yet he took this death. Death comes from me, but life comes from him. I own this sin, but it does not own me.

This is the unique privilege of the Christian – we can actually be honest about our own sin.

First, don't play the blame game, but then second, in the next two verses, 16 and 17, James says, remember that every good thing comes from God, there is nowhere else to find good.³

Note what's happening here. He's still addressing the idea of temptation. In verse 16 he says, "don't be deceived." This is important to recognize. What temptation is doing, what your own desire is doing, is lying to you. It is trying to deceive you. And really, it's just you trying to deceive you. Temptation is an act of self-deception.

Then verse 17, **"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."**

This is what I mean by deep theology but not necessarily complex or academic. James is deep, but he's not complex. And James is simple, but he's not simplistic.

Every good gift is from above. There is no good to be found going around God, and every good thing you have is from him.

God is the source of all light and life, all brightness and vibrancy, all goodness, and truth, and beauty. All that is bright and luminous and lovely in the world is from God.

God does not change, there's not even a hint of change in God.

What's the payoff, why does James say this here?

He's giving you the antidote to your self-deception. He's giving you what you need to defeat temptation. Again, temptation is saying one of two things to you. Either it's saying to you, "go around God to get some good that he is withholding from you." Or its saying, "elevate some good in your heart out of all proportion, elevate some good above God himself."

To the first James says, there is no good to be found around or outside of God. If you have to go against the law of God to get it, it will be a poisoned good, a hollow good. By all means, use all lawful means to get what's good. To get good health, to get a good job and career, to get a good and thriving family, to get respect in the world. There's nothing wrong with pursuing good things, but only within lawful bounds. If you have to sin against God to get it, it will be a poisoned and hollow good. Every good thing comes from God.

Then to the second, he says that God is the source of all goods, he is the Father of lights. Whatever light you see in your health, whatever splendor and beauty you see in the world, whatever joy, and peace, and delight you see in your work, or your family, or whatever, whatever light and beauty you see in the world, is the offspring of God. All light in the world, all beauty in the world, all truth in the world is a dim reflection of God's own light, God's own beauty. All passing and fading light and beauty in the world is a pointer to the Father of lights, who does not change, who does not fade.

Why would you ever value the derivative, the dim, and the dying over the principle, the pure, and the permanent?

Know where these good things come from. All passing light is meant to point us to the permanent unchanging light.

Psalm 36:9, **"with [God] is the fountain of life, and in [his] light do we see light."**

John 1:4, **"In him was life, and the life was the light of men."**

You're not supposed to eat the picture of the steak on the coupon, that's just there to make you want the real thing.

In the face of temptation, don't play the blame game, don't try to go around God to get good, and don't elevate the fading light over the unchanging light.

³ James is here picking up what he mentioned in verse 13, that God "cannot be tempted with evil." James says that God does not tempt, because he cannot be tempted. In other words, because he is all good, pure good, good with no evil, good with no *lack*, he neither can be tempted – because temptation speaks to us precisely in our lack – nor does he tempt. This touches on what I mentioned in the previous week about God's blessedness. God has full and perfect happiness because he is full and perfect goodness. There is no good that he lacks because there is no good that does not first come from him.

Ok, but then he drives this home a little bit, and this is where he lands this whole section. The whole chapter has been leading up to this so far. This is kind of like the big double underline to close out what he has been saying, and to transition into what he'll say next. This is the payoff for everything he's been saying up until now.

Count it joy when you meet trials. Ask for wisdom when you need it. Rejoice in your exaltation and rejoice in your lowliness. Endure for the prize. Don't be deceived by temptations. Because, verse 18, **"Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures."**

All of this. All of this because by his sovereign good pleasure, his own will, he brought us forth, he called us out, he drew us to himself by the word of truth, his revelation in the Bible, his revelation in Jesus Christ, by the preaching of the gospel he saved you, that you should belong to him in a special way, that you should be set apart for him, that you should be his, that you should be his holy nation, his royal priesthood.

Count it all joy, rejoice, endure, because he reached into the mud of sin and death and put his hand on you, his mortal enemy, and pulled you out by his word, and cleaned you, redeemed you, ransomed you, and made you his daughter, and made you his son. Rejoice in your exaltation.

One note here on the text, when we read "firstfruits" there, don't read that as a when, but a what. In the Old Testament, the firstfruits are not just the fruits that are harvested first, but they are the portion of the harvest that is set aside as an offering for God.⁴ The first fruits are the part of the harvest that belong to God in a special way. So, "the firstfruits of his creatures" just means that the church, the people called out by the word are the portion of the creation that belongs to God in a special way.

The whole creation, and everything and everyone in it belong to God as his creatures, but the church belongs to God in a special way by redemption and adoption. **"Of his will, he brought us forth by the word of truth."** By his word he called us out. By his word he met us, came to us, spoke life into us, and made us his. By his Word, he called us out of darkness, and into light, out of death and into life.

Doctrine: The Power of the Word

I want to zoom in on this a little bit, the power of the Word of God, and this will be our doctrine for the week.

For the Christian, wisdom is not just about learning some things and applying some things. For the Christian, wisdom is about being transformed by the Word of God.

The Word of God is our bridge from the passing to the permanent. The Word of God is how we are confronted by the eternal God. The first verse of the Bible explains that the passing comes from the permanent. **"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."** When all this passing stuff started passing, there just was the permanent. And he said, let there be light.

The Word of God is how the eternal law of God confronts us in our passing circumstances, and convicts us.

The Word of God is how the unchanging gospel meets us in our sin and offers us life in Christ.

The Word of God teaches us to look beyond the passing to the permanent. It is the great ambassador of the permanent, just sitting there on our desks.

The Word of God is the power of the permanent meeting us and transforming us in the middle of our passing lives. This is important for us to grasp. The Word of God, preached, read, memorized, studied, taught, is how God works in us, day by day, to turn our hearts from the passing to the permanent. Wisdom, true, godly wisdom is not found merely in learning true things and learning how to apply them. Godly wisdom is a gift that comes down from above, by being transformed by the Word of God.

⁴ Exodus 23:19, Leviticus 23:10-11, Numbers 18:12, Deuteronomy 26:1-11.

Jeremiah 23:29, **“Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?”**

1 Corinthians 15:1-2, **“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you.”**

Acts 20:32, **“And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”**

Romans 10:17, **“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”**

It’s through the Word that we’re exalted. It’s through the Word that we’re humbled and made low. It’s through the Word that we’re given strength to endure, to hold on for the crown. It’s through the Word that we behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It’s the Word that teaches us how to order rightly our passing goods. If you would live well in the passing, looking always to the permanent, you need to be transformed and informed by the Word of God.

Application

This is our application for this week too. If you want to grow in godly wisdom. If you want to rightly relate the passing and the permanent, you need to make diligent use of the Word.

What does that mean? God has given us his Word, his Bible to shape us. To call us out by the gospel, and to save us through faith in Christ. But it won’t do that if our Bible just sits there on our shelf, or if we’re not really actively engaged during sermons.

There are a lot of things you could do to make diligent use of the Word, but let me put two very concrete things in front of you.

The first is just being more diligent in how you use sermons. Don’t think of sermons as a passive thing that you kind of just experience. Sermons are a key part of how God designed to build up his church. Come to church expecting to learn from the sermon, expecting to be encountered by God’s Word. To be taught, to be convicted, to be comforted, to be instructed.

Every week, this is what pastor Michael and I are trying to do. What does the text say, what does the text mean, what does the text require of you? You don’t have to bring a notebook and take notes to do that, but for some of you, you should.

Listen, learn, be transformed. The Word of God will do you no good if you aren’t learning from it. You don’t have to take complex and exhaustive notes, there’s no quiz coming. And frankly there is a way to be too concerned about taking exhaustive notes. This isn’t a lecture, you’re not preparing for the exam. You’re just trying to open yourself up to be encountered by God in his Word.

Take notes. What’s the big idea? What’s one cross reference that stood out? What’s one doctrine or one principle that stood out? What’s one thing you need to do in response to the text? Don’t be passive in sermons, be as active in listening as I am in teaching. We should both be active here. We should both be engaged.

Then second, read the Bible on your own. For some of you, you’ve read the Bible a few times over, and you read the Bible pretty regularly on your own time. That’s great, keep it up, get back into the habit if you’ve fallen out. Praise God, keep pressing on, take the next step.

But for some of you, you’ve never really gotten into Bible reading on your own. I want to give you an encouragement.

It can be really hard to get started, it will take a while for it to start clicking, there are no shortcuts, but it’s worth it. This is the most important book in the world. If it takes you the next five years for the Bible to just start to make sense, there is nothing more important you could do with that time. God wrote a book for all people in all times. Why would you expect it to be easy?

Bible reading isn’t a sprint. Just start reading. Start in either Genesis or Matthew, that’s the beginning of the Old Testament and the New Testament. If you get bogged down in the Old Testament, skip ahead to the New. If

you've never read much of the Bible at all, I recommend starting in the New Testament, and reading through to the end three times before jumping into the Old.

The keys are patience and persistence. If you read one or two chapters a day for the next five years, you will be amazed at how much will start to click. If a passage doesn't make any sense to you, don't get discouraged, just keep going. It will make more sense the next time around.

Make diligent use of the Word. Actively engage in the sermons and read the Bible.

Conclusion

Ok, this more or less closes out James' take on the theoretical side of wisdom. We'll get more practical in the next couple weeks.

Here's a summary of what we've seen so far. **"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom."** Trust God, he is in control, he is using your trials for your good, lean on him for wisdom, ask him, and learn to see things rightly. Learn to see passing things for what they are. Good things in life really are good, but passing. Hard things in life really are hard, but passing.

In it all, learn to see the permanent. The exaltation you have in Christ by faith, the spiritual grace of humility to not be swamped by your good things, by the grace of God, through the Word of God. Look to the prize, look to the goal, run the race, finish the fight, win the crown.

Delight yourself in the Lord. All good things come from him. There is no good to be found by going around him. All good things point to him. There is nothing above him, nothing better than him, he is the Light of all light, the Good of all good, the Beauty of all beauty.

Lord's Supper

Today we will take the supper. The Supper is basically the gospel made visible and visceral. This Supper is one of the best ways to keep our eyes and our hearts fixed on the permanent in the middle of the passing.

The Supper reminds us of what Christ has done. His body broken for you, his blood shed for you. Here is how you rejoice in your exaltation. Christ did this for you, to raise you up. And here is how you rejoice in your lowliness.

This Supper is how we feast on Christ by faith, how he strengthens us to run the race, to finish the fight. He is the bread that came down from heaven, the manna in the wilderness.

And this Supper reminds us to look to the reward. This table is a foreshadowing of the great and future table when we will feast with Christ and all the redeemed at the marriage Supper of the Lamb.

So come, take, and eat.

Pray with me.