



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

## On Course for Victory

James 1:5-12

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### Introduction

1. In our study of 1:2-4, we saw that James called for steadfast faith in the interest of having all we need to be perfect and complete. But, what does steadfast faith look like?
  - a. Can we have it from the beginning of our Christian walk or does it evolve over time?
  - b. Will it include any failures? Any questions?
  - c. Is it present if we at times wonder what God is doing and why?
  - d. Is it present when, despite our fierce determination, we keep battling the same sins?
2. It would help to have a model for such faith. If you were choosing, who would it be? The New Testament often pointed to Abraham. In addition to a general emphasis:
  - a. Writers quote Genesis 15:6 three times (Rom 4:3, [22]; Gal 3:6; Jas 2:23).
  - b. James recalls that he was called “friend of God” (Jas 2:23; 2 Chr 20:7; Isa 41:8).
3. What do we see when we look at Abraham’s life of faith?
  - a. His fear led him to lie about his wife’s identity – twice (Gen 12:11-13; 20:1-2, 11).
  - b. His impatience led him to ask God to let his servant become his heir (Gen 15:2-3).
  - c. Told that his wife would have a son at age 90, he fell on his face in laughter, incredulous at the very idea (Gen 17:17).
  - d. Warned of Sodom’s impending destruction, he expressed his puzzlement over the nature of the God he served (Gen 18:25).
  - e. Even when offering Isaac — the specific case James has in mind when he cites Genesis 15:6 — Abraham was “reasoning” (λογίζομαι, *logizomai*) about God’s plan (Heb 11:19).<sup>1</sup>
4. Abraham looks a lot like us. Evidently, having a steadfast faith does not exclude failures, struggles, surrender to temptation, or questions. What is it then? Our text shows us.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> λογίζομαι (*logizomai*): reckon, calculate, count, take into account; evaluate, estimate, look upon as, consider. Or think (about), consider, let one’s mind dwell on; Reason, make plans; think, believe, be of the opinion (as defined by F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd Edition, rev. Frederick W. Danker, 119).

<sup>2</sup> James does not mention Abraham until chapter 2, but when he refers to him, it is to extol his exemplary faith. Since James focuses on that aspect of his life, and since his growth compares with what all of us experience, I use his life as the personal illustration to introduce this lesson. Also, as we will see below, Paul used him as an example of someone who did not waver in his faith, using the same word that James uses in our text.

*Body*

## I. The Basis for Steadfastness (1:5).

A. James says its possible to “lack nothing” (1:4), but what if we lack (λείπεται, *leipetai*) the wisdom to meet trials?

1. “Wisdom, generally speaking, is skill at life, particularly the ability to make sound judgments and speak the right words. *The wisdom of James is not just skill at life, however, but the divinely given ability to live in a godly way.*”<sup>3</sup>
2. James’s answer is expressed with another imperative verb: we “must ask” (αἰτείτω, *aiteitō*) God, the only source of the wisdom we need.

B. Confidence in this asking process is found in the fact that we are asking God, “who gives to *all* without reservation<sup>4</sup> or any rebuke for asking” (literal).

## II. The Manner of Steadfastness (1:6-8).

A. We are to ask “in faith, with no doubting” (v 6a), a phrase explained in vv 6b-8.

1. James says the person who “must not suppose<sup>5</sup> that he will receive anything [i.e., the needed wisdom] from the Lord” is like a wave that is “passive, susceptible to change, . . . always shifting, never solid or sure of what it is. . . .” (McCartney, 90).
2. It’s similar to the figure Paul uses with regard to doctrine (Eph 4:14).
3. This kind of person “is a double-minded<sup>6</sup> man, unstable<sup>7</sup> in all<sup>8</sup> his ways” (v 8).

B. This context shows that James uses “doubt” in the sense of wavering.

1. The word (διακρίνω, *diakrinō*) literally means “to judge through” and more intensely declares the judgment idea.
  - a) In different texts, it means “doubt,” or more literally, being divided within oneself (see Matt 21:21; Acts 10:20; Rom 4:20).<sup>9</sup>
  - b) “The special meaning of the word in the NT probably developed because ‘doubt’ is a form of passing judgment on God’s word and is therefore the opposite of faith” (McCartney, 91).

<sup>3</sup> Dan G. McCartney, *James*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 88, emphasis mine. Additional background on the Jewish understanding of wisdom that formed the background for James’s emphasis on it will be presented in lessons on chapter 3.

<sup>4</sup> The word is ἀπλῶς, *haplōs*, the best meaning of which, especially in light of the expectation in vv 6-8, is “without reservation.” See the various commentators and lexical studies.

<sup>5</sup> Another imperative verb, οἰέσθω (*oiesthō*).

<sup>6</sup> δίψυχος, *dipsychos*, “irresolute, doubting, hesitating lit. double-minded” (Jas 1:8; 4:8). (Gingrich, 50).

<sup>7</sup> ἀκατάστατος, *akatastatos*, a word implying “unsettledness or fickleness” (McCartney, 92).

<sup>8</sup> “All” indicates that the “lack of a faith commitment affects every area of life” (McCartney, 92).

<sup>9</sup> McCartney, 91, calls attention to the use of the word with this meaning when it is used in the middle or passive voice. This observation should serve as a reminder that word meanings are not completely understood based on consultation of a concordance and/or a lexicon. The form and voice of the word affect the meaning, as does the context in which it is used.

2. Like the English word “doubt,” διακρίνω can refer to both questions of uncertainty or wondering and to wavering and distrust.<sup>10</sup>
  3. It is noteworthy that Paul uses διακρίνω with “unbelief” in Romans 4:20 (NASB; ἀπιστία, *apistia*) to refer to Abraham not wavering regarding the promise about the birth of Isaac, the same promise about which he laughed in Gen 17:17.
  4. It is also worth noting that, as he will show in 2:19, James is not contemplating the kind of doubting that characterizes the modern agnostic or atheist; he is writing to people who have professed faith.
- C. James chastens the “fence-sitter unwilling to commit wholeheartedly to faith in Christ” (McCartney, 91; compare the stark choice he sets forth in 4:4).

### III. The Attitude of Steadfastness (1:9-11).

- A. As we expect in light of vv 6-8, vv 9-11 are concerned mainly with humility (seen in the repetition of ταπεινός, *tapeinos* / / ταπεινώσις, *tapeinōsis* in vv 9, 10).
- B. The reference to “brother” (v 9) gives us an important clue.
1. James’s point is not that there is anything virtuous *per se* in being poor; we know the poor can lust for riches and therefore sin as surely as the rich.
  2. But, as is often expressed in Scripture, riches pose a particular threat to steadfast faith because they offer more opportunities for this-worldly goods to distract us (see Luke 12:13-21; 18:18-30; 1 Tim 6:17; 1 John 2:15-17).<sup>11</sup>
- C. If humility is present, we will not waver or be double-minded; if it is not, like our things, we will perish as surely as the flower fades when the sun grows hot (see Isa 40:6-8).

### IV. The Goal of Steadfastness (1:12).

- A. His warnings given, James brings closure to his general treatment of trials.
1. When we remain steadfast, we will be “blessed” (μακάριος, *makarios*), a state of relationship with God wherein is wholeness (see McCartney, 100).
  2. Proven to be those who love God, we receive “the crown of life,” (“crown” [στέφανος, *stephanos*] was the victory wreath awarded in the games).
- B. What matters is whether we stayed on course, completely trusting God, not vacillating or being drawn aside by the many false choices that seek to allure us.

### Conclusion

1. In the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, Swiss marathoner Gabriele Andersen-Scheiss entered the stadium fifteen minutes after the winner, suffering from heat exhaustion. “The crowd gasped in horror as [she] staggered onto the track, her torso twisted, her right arm straight and her left arm limp, her right knee strangely stiff. She waved away medical personnel who rushed to help her knowing that, if they touched her, she . . . would be disqualified. For

<sup>10</sup> The English verb “doubt” means: (1) “to be uncertain about; consider questionable or unlikely; hesitate to believe.” (2) “to distrust.” Synonyms include hesitation, wavering and vacillation. (doubt. Dictionary.com. Dictionary.com Unabridged. Random House, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/doubt> [accessed: March 18, 2011]).

<sup>11</sup> Some find an echo of Jeremiah 9:23-24 here in the word “boast” (καυχῶμαι, *kauchaomai*) in v 9. See McCartney, 98.

nearly six minutes Andersen-Scheiss hobbled around the track, occasionally stopping and holding her head. Doctors watched her carefully and determined she was in no immediate danger. She collapsed over the finish line in thirty-seventh place into the arms of waiting medics. Fortunately, Andersen-Scheiss recovered quickly. Her time of 2:48:45 would have won the gold medal in the first five Olympic marathons.”<sup>12</sup>

2. Andersen-Scheiss was not the best runner that day. She struggled, and did not display the classic style of the greatest runners. But she never wavered from her purpose, remaining focused on the finish line and continuing steadfastly through the end.
3. Are you showing such steadfastness in your walk of faith, not wavering as you let God make you perfect and complete, lacking in nothing? If not, now is the time to get back on course. We'll talk with you, pray with you, encourage you. Please come while we sing.

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<sup>12</sup> Charlie Lovett, *Olympic Marathon: A Centennial History of the Games' Most Storied Race*, excerpted at <http://www.marathonguide.com/history/olympicmarathons/chapter26.cfm>. Accessed March 21, 2011.